



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk”

24 August 2023

Murray Darling Basin Plan Review

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has recently advised that it is now preparing to undertake its 2026 Basin Plan Review. The Authority is advising that the review “isn’t about starting again, instead it’s about being responsive to the impacts of climate change, seeing what’s working and what’s needed to best protect the Basin and its values for the future.” In this regard, the Authority considers that 10 yearly reviews of the Basin Plan are required to allow for improved management of more variable climate patterns, and for new information, and new ways of managing water resources to be considered.

With an anticipated warmer and drier climate future that includes more frequent droughts and extreme weather events, the review is considered as an opportunity to incorporate new knowledge and evidence that has evolved since the Plan was adopted. To this end, the Authority has developed a “Roadmap” to assist everybody understand the work planned and shows how the MDBA will approach the next 3 year's leading up to the completion of the review. Such Roadmap provides for the release in mid 2024 of an Early Insights Paper, an Evaluation of the Basin Plan in mid 2025 before the release of an Outlook for the Basin being released in late 2025. Formal consultation and the availability to make submissions will commence in early 2026 when a Discussion Paper will be released. The Authority is then anticipating a Final Report on the Review to be available in later 2026. For further information go to <https://www.mdba.gov.au> and search 2026 Basin Plan Review.

I recently made a submission, on behalf of Council, to the Productivity Commission in regard to its enquiry regarding the Murray-Darling Basin. The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Under the *Commonwealth Water Act of 2007*, the Commission is required to undertake an inquiry every five years into the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basin Plan and water resource plans. This is the second such inquiry conducted by the Commission, with the previous review having been conducted in 2018. Council's submission followed a visit to Bourke in July 2023 by members of the Commission and the Basin Authority. In making the submission, amongst other matters, I was quick to point out that as a community in the Murray Darling Basin, Bourke has been significantly impacted as a result of the implementation of the surface water diversions Cap (the Cap) and from the water buy back requirements of the Basin Plan. In this regard I advised that it had been estimated that up to 60% of the local economy had been impacted as a result of the implementation of the Cap process with a further 10% of the economy impacted through the water buyback process. Both these processes have resulted in both economic and social reduction to our town.

As part of their review documentation, the Commission stated that “concerns continue to be raised about water quality and security in some areas”. I noted in the submission that from Council's

perspective, the issue of Water Security for Bourke was at the top of Councils list of strategic priorities. As readers of this column for at least the past 10 years would be aware, the issue of the raising of the Bourke Weir is one that has been long pursued without success, to date, by the Bourke Community. We all know that a reliable and sustainable water supply is required for the proper functioning of the town. The need to ensure water security for Bourke is necessary for critical human needs, town water supplies and to provide related socio-economic, environmental and cultural benefits.

The previous NSW State Government committed \$4.21m to develop a Strategic Business Case for the Bourke Weir – this was as part of the Western Weirs Program. The Western Weirs Program was identified as Critical State Significant Infrastructure as part of the Water Supply (Critical Needs) Bill 2019. In 2020 it was identified that the Western Weirs Program had a broad timeframe of some four (4) years until construction commences. We are now in 2023 and are no further advanced with The Better Baaka Program having absorbed the previous Western Weirs Program. Council continues to lobby both the Commonwealth and State Government to support this important project. Without additional water security, the Bourke community is unfairly exposed and vulnerable to the forecasted extreme summer(s) ahead, noting that once water ceases to flow over the Bourke Weir, the community has but six (6) month's supply of water from the Bourke Weir Pool.

Grand Finals

Magpie Park, Goodooga was the scene of the Barwon Darling Cup Rugby League Grand finals played on Sunday, 13 August 2023. My local rugby league correspondent has informed me that a large and well-behaved crowd was on hand to watch and support their respective team in the five (5) grand finals played on the day. From under 15's men's and women's, under 18's, Ladies League Tag and ultimately the Men's First Grade game, my correspondent was most complimentary at the great spirit shown in all games played.

For the Bourke Warriors, it was a long trek home from Goodooga for both the under 18's and First Grade sides after going down to the Brewarrina Golden Googars and the Goodooga Magpies in their grand finals, respectively. Congratulations to the Bourke sides for getting to the Grand Final. At this time of the winter sports season, there has to be a winner and a loser. On that issue I have to say, there has to be a better way to decide soccer games rather than by penalty shoot-out! After playing for two (2) hours it comes down to a shoot-out. Whilst "winners are grinners", I certainly feel for the losers in the event of such shoot outs. I don't like "golden point" in rugby league games either.

I travelled to Wagga Wagga recently to watch one of my sons play for the Ken McMullen Cup in the Southern Inland Rugby Competition as part of his Hay Cutters Club team. It was worth the drive as the Cutters prevailed by 27 to 26 against Wagga City, in ordinary time, thank goodness. I mentioned to one of my friends the name Ken McMullen and he said that Ken McMullen played for the Wallabies in the early 1960's having represented Australia against the All Blacks and the South African Springboks. He also said that Ken McMullen changed codes and moved from Wagga Wagga to Sydney to play Rugby League for the Eastern Suburbs Rugby League Team (the Roosters). In the late 1960's he then moved to Dubbo to manage the Orana Mall Complex on Wellington Road. In Dubbo, he was Captain/Coach of the Dubbo CYMS side, transforming the club from perennial wooden spooners into a professional organisation and in doing so, winning various Group XI competitions. Mr McMullen unfortunately passed away at the early age of 46 from cancer. His brother presented the trophy to the Cutters on Saturday.

Fishing Competition

The Bourke “Aint Caught Nuffin” Fishing Club successfully held its annual Outback Fishing Challenge last weekend. As per previous events, the Challenge was again a “Catch-n-Release” competition for the longest Cod and Yellow Belly fish and to enter these species in the competition, apart from initially registering for the event, contestants had to present a clear photo of the fish taken on a brag mat or tape measure along with the registration ear tag at the “weigh-in”. The prize for longest Carp and the greatest number of Carp required competitors to physically present their fish at the “weigh-in”. Any initiative that removes these pests, that carp are, from our river system is a good one with scientists having found that Carp as introduced species have contributed significantly to the degradation of our natural aquatic ecosystems.

The Club organised substantial prizes and conducted a raffle with over 200 prizes valued in excess of \$8000. With demand high for Fishing Club merchandise and a successful “weigh in” on the Sunday at the Bourke Golf Clubhouse, well done to the organisers of this event. With all money raised from the Challenge going back into the river for the purchase of native Cod and Yellow belly fingerlings for future anglers and importantly, adding to the sustainability of native fish stocks in our river system, it is an important feature on many locals, and visitors, recreational calendar.

Quote: **“ Hey Dad, Elliot here. I’m alive. Safe now. Love you. Chat later.”** Elliot Foote to his Father after he and 3 mates were found safe after going missing off the coast of Indonesia.