



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the General Manager’s Desk”

23 November 2023

North Bourke Bridge

The restoration of the iconic North Bourke Bridge has been a focus of Council for many years. Significant progress has essentially been delayed however, due to the unavailability of adequate funding. In more recent times, Council has engaged with NSW Public Works and their expert bridge engineer, to develop a brief of works that would be required such that Council is able to seek quantified funding to undertake the restoration of the bridge and when funding is available, be able to invite tenders for the actual works.

With a brief of work with NSW Public Works now in place, Council has been able to secure \$400,000 of funding from the Transport for NSW - Get Active Program to undertake the design and documentation phase in respect of ultimately undertaking work to restore the bridge. At this point it is important that the community is aware that it won't be financially feasible to restore the bridge and approaches to the same extent as to what it originally comprised. To this end, Council has adopted a series of desired outcomes to lead the restoration as follows:

- a) To make the bridge an attraction of choice to visitors, tourists, the local and surrounding communities, in conjunction with the historic Jandra Paddle Steamer tourist attraction.
- b) To restore the bridge to allow pedestrian and cyclist access and to provide for weddings and other similar community functions.
- c) To restore the wrought iron lift bridge span to a safe and accessible condition, with the lift span to remain fixed in position.
- d) To restore the iron structure as deemed necessary.
- e) To make safe the bridge decking, by removing the existing timber decking and replacing with new alternative decking material, that allows visibility to the iron trusses below and reduces future deck maintenance costs.
- f) To demolish and replace the timber approach structures with other suitable access such as concrete or steel approaches (approx. 3-4m wide), and possibly accommodating a maximum loaded truck of 15 tonnes.

In developing the project brief with NSW Public Works, what quickly became evident from discussions, inspections, and reports, were concerns regarding the significant deterioration of the timber approaches to the bridge itself. The level of decay to the timber approaches to the bridge has been an issue for some time. Public access to the bridge has been barricaded off since 2015 (northern end) and then 2016 (southern end) with the bridge being now fully barricaded. As a result of the latest inspection, the level of deterioration of the timber approaches were of such significant concern to PWD and the Bridge Engineer that PWD advised Council that “due to the hazards to the public and the heavily deteriorated condition of the timber approach spans, our view is that the approach spans should be demolished as early as practicable”.

Accordingly, the initial phase of the bridge project will comprise the development of documentation and a recommendation regarding the engagement of a contractor to undertake the deconstruction of the timber approaches to the bridge. To achieve this deconstruction, the project will need to obtain heritage, environmental and other statutory approvals and undertake community and stakeholder engagement. Project procurement, project management, demolition and bat management plans will need to be developed, a cost estimate prepared, and a risk assessment undertaken, All this is before a contractor is engaged to de-construct the timber approach spans.

The good news is that the wrought iron component of the bridge appears to be generally in a good condition. Work will need to be undertaken to make the centre span of the bridge safe noting that the weights that once enabled the centre section of the bridge to be raised, such that paddle steamers could pass under the bridge, are still in place and are placing some structural forces on the bridge. This phase of the project would see studies undertaken such that the design and documentation would be prepared to make the bridge safe and ultimately allow the installation of new decking and the construction of new bridge approaches. Once all this documentation is in place Council can, with confidence, seek Government funding to undertake the actual physical works.

Community engagement is most important on projects such as this. In the goodness of time Council will be inviting interested community members to participate in the engagement process for the bridge and in this regard, such meetings will be advertised in the Western Herald and on Councils Facebook site and website.

Fuel Prices

If we thought that fuel prices in Bourke and across the western region were expensive, we should spare a thought for people in New Zealand. A friend of mine recently spent time in Auckland and sent me a photo of the price of fuel in the north island city of some 1.5 million people. Premium 98 Unleaded Fuel in Auckland was close enough to NZ \$3.28 per litre. Converted to Australian dollars, that's \$3.02 a litre. When I received the photo of the fuel prices, I happened to be driving through Dubbo, where the price of 98 fuel that day was \$2.16 per litre. 91 Octane fuel in Auckland was NZ \$2.94 (AUS \$2.71) whilst in Dubbo on the day I was there, it was \$1.93 litre. That's a big variance between the two (2) countries. The interesting fuel type was in respect of the price of diesel. In Auckland, diesel was NZ \$2.38 (AUS \$2.19). Diesel in Dubbo was recently \$2.24. Go figure!

National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program

Across Australia, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission undertakes quarterly wastewater sampling at 55 waste treatment plants to measure drug use across Australia. Whilst the actual name of the localities is not identified, 55 locations across the Nation are party to their wastewater being analysed. 20 sites are in capital cities with a further 35 in regional localities. In NSW, the split is 3 cities and 6 regional locations. Coincidentally these 55 treatment plants cover 55% of the Australia population, which is about 14 million people. The Commission recently released its report for the quarter ending June 2023. The data obtained is simply amazing whilst the results are a concern in terms of the level of illegal drug use across the Nation. Such usage levels obviously raise the question, "where are these drugs coming from?" with the report underlining "the pervasive and ongoing threat posed by serious and organised crime groups through their exploitation of Australians to derive large illicit profits" from drug trafficking and production.

From the sampling, the Commission reported that for the quarterly period alcohol, nicotine, methylenedioxyamphetamine (also known as MDA and sass), oxycodone, fentanyl and cannabis consumption in regional locations sampled across the nation exceeded the consumption of such drugs in capital cities. The usage of ketamine across the nation is at an all-time high and whilst an anaesthetic,

it is used illegally for its hallucinogenic effects. Between December 2022 and April 2023, the population weighted average regional consumption of MDMA, heroin, fentanyl and cannabis all fell. On the other side however, the average regional consumption of alcohol, nicotine, methylamphetamine, cocaine, MDA, oxycodone and ketamine, all increased. As you would expect, alcohol and nicotine have the highest level of consumption across all locations given that they are legal drugs. Cocaine consumption was much higher in the capital cities compared to regional parts of the country with population weighted heroin consumption in the capital cities being more than triple that in regional Australia. Oxycodone use in the regions was more than double that of city-based use. Methylamphetamine consumption was marginally higher in the capital cities than in regional Australia with NSW having the highest consumption on a state basis.

I found the report to be compelling. If you are interested, further information is available from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission website by accessing the publications tile at, <https://www.acic.gov.au>

November Council Meeting

Councils next Ordinary Meeting will be held on Monday, 27 November 2023, at 9.15am in the Council Chamber. A Public Forum is scheduled at each Council Meeting at 9.00 am. If you wish to address the Public Forum, please contact Councils Executive Assistant, Margo Anderson on 68308000 or by email at ea@bourke.nsw.gov.au, by 4.00pm, Friday 24 November 2023, so that your item can be placed on the agenda.

Quote: “Across Australia, the death rate from melanoma is dropping. The incidence not as much”
Professor Georgina Long after receiving her award as NSW’s 2024 Australian of the Year along with Professor Richard Scolyer.