



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the General Manager’s Desk”

1 February 2024

Welcome to 2024

Christmas and New Year celebrations seem but a distant memory as we push into February of the New Year. I trust everyone had a break of some form over the last 4-5 weeks and I wish all residents of Bourke a safe and happy 2024. In one of my Columns from the latter parts of last year, I made comment about the variability of the weather patterns at that time and that we were now in an El Nino weather pattern that “typically leads to reduced spring and early summer rainfall for eastern Australia, and warmer days for the southern two-thirds of the country.” As it has turned out, whilst there has been the odd very hot day, the weather temperatures have been nowhere near as high as expected. In addition, the rainfall of 7 and 8 January 2024, when some 5 inches of rain was received, has seen the Shire transformed into a green oasis with substantial vegetation growth. Despite this recent rain meteorologists are assuring people that the El Nino weather pattern is still active with much of Australia expected to return to drier than usual weather for the month of February, “although near-normal rainfall could materialise near our populated eastern seaboard.” Who would be a weather forecaster?

Australia Day Winners

Last Friday, 26 January 2024, the Bourke community come together at Darling Park, Bourke to celebrate Australia Day. As Mayor Barry stated in his Mayoral Address on the day, “On Australia Day we celebrate all the things we love about Australia: the land, our sense of fair go, lifestyle, democracy, the freedoms we enjoy but particularly our people. It is a day we celebrate the diversity of our nation's people with our various cultures, traditions, and belief systems.”

Bourke’s Australia Day Ambassador this year was Andrew Lock OAM. Andrew is Australia’s most accomplished high-altitude mountaineer. He is the only Australian, and the first person in the British Commonwealth, and just the 18th man in the world, to climb all fourteen of the world’s 8000 metre mountains. His achievements encompass eighteen summits of those 8000 metre peaks, including Mt Everest (twice), more than three times that of any other Australian, placing him in a select group of the world's best alpinists. Additionally, Andrew accomplished the first ever Australian ascent of six of those mountains, a record that can never be broken. Outside of climbing the highest points on earth, Andrew is the Ambassador for Scouts Australia, Ambassador for the Sir David Martin Foundation (helping young people in crisis) and Ambassador for the Australian Himalayan Foundation (supporting the people of the Himalaya).

I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with Andrew whilst in was in Bourke, and like those Ambassadors who have previously attended Bourke for Australia Day, he had a most compelling story. I thank Andrew for his time in attending Bourke for Australia Day.

Congratulations to Bourke's Citizens of the Year, Alan and Patricia Amos; Young Citizen of the Year, Lucy Tiffen; Sportsperson of the Year, Frank Kerr; Emergency Services Person of the Year, Demond O'Mally; Bourke Shire Village Service Award, Deborah Neilson and the Peter Simmonds Memorial Back O' Bourke Stampede Pro-Rodeo which was awarded the Community Event of the Year. All these recipients were announced at the Australia Day event and are most worthy winners.

I also extend my congratulations to Councillor Victor Bartley who was awarded an OAM for Service to Local Government and the community of Bourke, under the Australian Honours List as announced on Australia Day by the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia . Well-done Councillor Bartley.

Thomas Foods

I was interested to read late last year that the owners and operators of the Bourke Abattoir, Thomas Foods International, had signed a deal worth up to \$60 million per year with a major Chinese food distributor. The Memorandum of Understanding, as signed, commits to a target of annual red meat exports of \$AU30 million by the end of 2024. The agreement also sets out to actively seek and identify new and additional business opportunities beyond this target. In addition, should TFI's brand new state-of-the-art beef processing facility in Murray Bridge achieve a China market listing, the MoU states the chilled and frozen red meat export target will increase to \$AU60 million annually, highlighting the potential for increased trade because of its commitment to meeting China's exacting market demands.

This is excellent news for the company, and for Australia, in terms of exporting Australian produce. Whilst the red meat being exported to China will come from the company's beef processing facility at Murray Bridge, SA, such exports augur well for other meats processed by the company, including those processed at the Bourke facility.

Youthful Endeavours

I heard of some youthful endeavours by some mature friends of mine who, at an average age of 67, decided to take the family ski boat out for a day at Burrendong Dam at Wellington, over the Christmas New Year period.

What started as a "luncheon cruise" around the 4 x times the size of Sydney Harbour dam, ended up with three (3) of the six (6) seeking to turn back the clock and in doing so, deciding to have a water ski. Tom (71), Dick (67) and Harriett (68) apparently each took their turns. Quickly recognising that water skiing was a young person's activity, just from getting the wet suit on, Tom was up on one ski before falling off and then pulling a hamstring in his next attempt to get going. Dick, the junior skier on the day, was apparently going splendidly, crossing the wake like a pro, until he too fell off and, in the process, cracked a rib. Harriet on the other hand, after a layoff of some 4 years', couldn't muster the strength to get on top of the water and after 6 or so attempts, threw in the towel, recognising that her water-skiing days were officially behind her.

Obviously, Tom, Dick and Harriett are not the real names of my friends however I will keep their real names to myself to avoid embarrassing them. I know that 70 is apparently the new 50, but seriously, what were they thinking. As for the family ski boat, I think that's being passed onto the owners much younger son as I write this!!

Cruise Ships

When the RMS Titanic, being the largest ship afloat at the time in 1912, struck an iceberg and sunk on its maiden voyage, its passengers and crew totalled 2,224 people. For the time, it was a very large vessel. Fast forward 112 years, and the cruise ship company, Royal Caribbean International, has just launched its largest vessel, the Icon of the Seas. This behemoth of a ship has a maximum capacity of 7,600 passengers and a further 2,350 crew, a total of 9,950 people on board. At 365 metres long, a gross tonnage of 250,000 tonnes, and twenty decks high, I would suggest that this vessel is not everyone's "cup of tea" for a quiet holiday given its sheer bulk and size. It's certainly too big for me!

Interestingly, on a per capita basis, Australians are among the world's biggest cruisers with up to five (5) per cent of the population cruising each year. After the dramas of cruising during the pandemic, passengers are returning in droves with the industry responding to near record passenger numbers during the current Australian summer.

Once known as the holiday for retirees, the average age of a cruise passenger across the globe is now 46.5 years and falling. In Australia, almost one third of cruise passengers are aged under 40, and almost a quarter are aged under 30, with those aged in their 20s currently making up about eight (8) per cent of cruise guests. The times are a changing.

As part of the expansion of cruising, I recently read an article where Royal Caribbean was marketing a cruise which travels to more than 60 countries during the 274 day or 9-month cruise. Whilst some people will not do the entire 9 months, some 600 people have signed up for the full journey with the company describing it as a "once-in-a-lifetime experience where guests can traverse the globe in one incredible journey". Definitely a case of each to their own!

Quote: "In the annals of Australian policing and crime he will be remembered as the man who epitomised corruption and all that was wrong in the NSW Police." – Journalist Neil Mercer commenting on the passing of former detective Roger Rogerson.