



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

## “From the General Manager’s Desk”

### 8 February 2024

#### **Village Meetings**

By the time this Column is published, Councillors and staff will have attended the villages of Byrock, Louth and Wanaaring, and held a meeting in Bourke, as part of Councils 2024 Village Consultation Meetings Program. Council is thankful for those people who have taken the time out of their busy schedules and attended the meetings held to date, taking the opportunity to have their say on the direction they would like to see for the future of their village and the Shire of Bourke.

Next Tuesday, 13 February 2024, the final two (2) Village Meetings will be held at the CWA Rooms in Enngonia and then at the Warrego Hotel in Fords Bridge commencing at 9.00am and 12.30pm, respectively. Residents in these localities are encouraged to come along and have their say. On the day, there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, it’s about having your input.

#### **Australians of the Year**

I was delighted on the eve of Australia Day to watch the Prime Minister announce Professors Georgina Long AO and Richard Scolyer AO, co-medical directors of the Melanoma Institute Australia, as winners of the Australian of the Year award for their pioneering work in the treatment of melanoma. What remarkable and humble people and for me it became all so much more special when my Mother rang to tell me that we were related to Professor Long! My Mother was rather excited.

Even before learning of this family relationship, I found the story of their work in battling melanoma, Australia’s national cancer, and their application of this melanoma science to develop world-first treatments for Professor Richard’s brain cancer, to be simply compelling. Through their work they have turned a diagnosis of advanced melanoma from a death sentence into a curable disease for more than half of patients.

During their acceptance speech the Professors reminded us that prevention is always better than a cure, and in most cases, melanoma is preventable through sun safe behaviour. They spoke of Australia’s tanning culture and that it needed to change. Prof Georgina said that “Our bronzed Aussie culture is actually killing us.” From my perspective their further comments on tanning being “skin cells in trauma” certainly struck home.

One of the great things about being named Australian of the Year is that it provides the winner(s) with a platform to pursue their respective cause. Whether it be Rosie Batty raising awareness of domestic violence or last year’s winner, Taryn Brumfitt, promoting positive body image, winners take the opportunity to progress their desired cause. The Professors are certainly doing that with many a media interview. I recently heard them talking about being sun smart and the release in November 2023 of the Australian Institute of Sport Sun Safe Position Statement which aims to reduce the risks of skin cancer in sport. I googled the document and found that it is all about developing a positive sun protection culture

and recommends the following five levels of sun protective measures:

- Elimination: Can the person move indoors?
- Substitution: Can the person be outside earlier or later in the day to avoid periods of peak UV exposure?
- Engineering controls: Can shade be provided?
- Administrative controls: Is there a UV policy? Is there a training uniform policy? Are reminders regularly communicated? Have staff been trained and educated? Can events be scheduled better to reduce exposure?
- Personal Protection Equipment: Can uniforms provide more protection? What strategies can support regular use? Can it be mandated? Is there consultation? Can changes be piloted?

It's certainly worthwhile having regard to this sun protection culture, especially in our community where the sun can be most harsh.

### **Macquarie Home Stay**

After many years of community fundraising, the first stage of the Macquarie Home Stay facility was opened in January 2019. With more than 50 per cent of admissions to the Dubbo Hospital coming from outside of Dubbo, Macquarie Home Stay is a crucial facility to give patients and their loved ones a home away from home during their stay. The facility provides affordable accommodation for people in the region in a range of circumstances, from pregnant ladies through to extended cancer treatments and emergency situations and everywhere in between. For many Bourke Shire residents, Macquarie Home Stay has been an absolute godsend as a place to stay when they attend Dubbo for medical appointments or treatment.

One of the main fundraising activities that has contributed significantly to the construction of the Homestay has been the Tour de OROC cycling event. Since its inception in 2013, the Tour has raised over \$660,000 for Macquarie Home Stay, with events staged in 2013; 2015; 2017; 2019 and a COVID-19 delayed event in 2022. The 2024 version of the Tour will run from 18-24 March 2024 and will see dedicated riders and their support crew travel around the region in support of Macquarie Home Stay. Commencing from Dubbo, the ride will traverse through many of the region's towns before arriving in Bourke on Friday 22 March 2024. It was the warm hospitality that riders experienced in Bourke during the 2022 ride that will undoubtedly be repeated in 2024 to again leave an everlasting impression on participants. As more details come to hand, I will write further on this important initiative.

### **River Heights**

The recent rains at the head of the Paroo and Warrego Rivers have seen a welcome flow to those along its path and provided the opportunity to top up storages as well as providing various recreational activities. The water level at the Bourke Weir is steady at 4.11 m at the time of writing my column. There is a steady flow of water in the river system above Bourke and it is hoped that we will continue to see the water flowing over the weir for months to come.

In November 2023, I had several conversations with the Mayor in readiness for the potential implementation of water restrictions once the water ceased to flow over the weir. The welcomed rains that have come from both thunderstorms and recent cyclone systems, have provided water run-off in the catchment which has hopefully alleviated the situation for this summer, at least.

## **Ministerial Visit**

On Sunday, 7 January 2024, the NSW Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, the Hon Jenny Aitchison, and her husband Robert, visited Bourke with the Mayor and I taking the opportunity to spend much of the day with them. Whilst initially proposing travels that included visits to Hungerford and Wanaaring, the threat of rain saw a hasty change to our schedule such that we stayed on bitumen roads during our travels. With the resulting rain that afternoon and into the evening, I am very glad we changed our travelling route and stayed off the dirt roads. The impact of not being able to drive on these unsealed dirt roads was not lost on the Minister.

We ended up travelling to Enngonia on the Sunday afternoon and whilst on route, had to slow to a near crawl, such was the intensity of the rainfall. In Enngonia we were able to discuss and show the Minister first-hand the issue of speeding vehicles travelling through the small village on the Mitchell Highway. One of the major concerns raised was the issue of school students and the potential for them to come into conflict with a fast-travelling vehicle. To this end, Minister Aitchison in November 2023 had previously announced funding for a traffic control system in the village of Enngonia and the opportunity to show her how the funding will assist with safety in the village was important. The Minister also met with a small number of residents to hear other concerns in respect of all things transport. On the Monday, Council staff took the opportunity to meet with the Minister to brief her on the council road network. I certainly thank the Minister for coming to Bourke to listen and view issues in our remote locality.

## **Cricket**

I don't like seeing the Australian Cricket side loose, however, I certainly have plenty of admiration for the West Indies side that won their first test against Australia on Australian soil for the first time since February 1997. The eight-run defeat was Australia's first in a day -night Test match with Australia having won its previous 11 day-night matches. The scenes of jubilation by the West Indians on winning were memorable, as was the series performance of Shamar Joseph, who on the last day of the test was in doubt to even play.

**Quote: "Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results" - Willie Nelson**