



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the General Manager’s Desk”

7 March 2024

Basin Roundtable

Along with the Mayor, I attended a Local Government Basin Water Roundtable in Sydney on Friday, 23 February 2024. The meeting was convened by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). The purpose of the Roundtable was to understand what the local government sector saw as current issues and what they would like to see from a two-day summit proposed to be held in April 2024 to assist in shaping the future of the Basin Plan 2026. The 2026 Plan was touted at the Roundtable as an important document for the management of water and communities that want to prosper into the future.

Representatives from the MBDA included its Chief Executive, Andrew McConville; Director Engagement, Anrea Lucas; and Stephen Petris, Principal of the Nous Group. The Nous Group is a consultancy firm, who from their website, “work with leaders in the private, public and community sectors on issues that have a substantial positive influence on people’s lives.”

A small group of representatives were selected to attend the Roundtable with a larger group to come involved at the April summit. Councils that attended the meeting from NSW were Albury City, Gunnedah Shire, Narromine Shire and Bourke Shire. From Victoria, there were representatives from Campaspe Shire (based at Euchuca), Gannawarra Shire (based at Keerang), Mildura Rural City and Greater Shepperton councils, whilst from Queensland, representatives from Balonne Shire Council (based at St George) attended. Interestingly, the MDBA advised that consultation with farmers, irrigators, tourism and environmental groups had already been completed.

At the Roundtable, many issues were presented to the organisers from all Councils. Mayor Barry took the opportunity to speak about Bourke being unsupported in the water recovery space for some 18 years, having lost 70% of its capital wealth in 2006 with not one dollar being forthcoming to license holders and the Bourke community for industry adjustment. He noted that the Bourke community has declining social capital and that it was ill-prepared to respond and endure the recently legislated ‘Restoring Our Rivers Framework’ unless that framework acknowledges, understands, and responds to Bourke’s lived experience, as a local government area. The Mayor expressed to the MDBA representatives that the MBDA has to be armed with evidence-based data to move forward and that this can only come from the communities that live the knowledge.

In this regard, at Councils December 2023 meeting, Council requested that I take the necessary action that will result in the commissioning of, and preparation by, an appropriately qualified consultant, of documentation that articulates with data the socio-economic impacts on Bourke from previous water recovery actions emanating from the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Referred to as Bourke’s “Story Line Project”, the project would be driven from the ground up to retrospectively analyse past water policy impacts on our community and inform new water policy how to address and improve socio-economic outcomes at a local level.

Mayor Barry took the opportunity to pitch to the MDBA representatives a request for funding for the project only to be advised that the proposed project would not fit the scope for Socio-economic impact through the Restoring Our Rivers legislation and that funding would need to be sourced through other means. Back in March 2023, the MDBA Head of Water Recovery, Malcolm Southwell stated that the “MDBA monitor socio-economic conditions across the basin and will continue to do so through the Basin Conditioning Program, a \$7.5 million Australian Government investment in better monitoring in response to the Sefton Report 2020.” Just what the MDBA is actually monitoring is unknown as they do not hold the ‘lived’ evidence-based socio-economic data for Bourke that Council is seeking to achieve. From my perspective, Basin Plan issues are a very complex and frustrating road to navigate with many, many blockages along the way.

Work Requests To Council

Should community members have a request for Council assistance regarding issues that Council is responsible for, including but not limited to: blocked stormwater drains and water leaks (both external to their property boundary), grading of local roads, garbage pickups, animal control, etc, please bring the matter to Council’s attention by either ringing the Office on 6830 8000 or through an email to: (bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au). These avenues will ensure that your request is processed through Councils appropriate channels and the necessary action taken. If contact is made with staff that are working outside of the office, your report will not be recorded and there is no record kept of the request/incident. All requests/incidents are recorded to ensure they are followed up by relevant staff. If there is an *urgent* problem that needs to be dealt with outside of Council work hours, please contact Council’s Duty Officer by calling 0419 722 055.

Long Table Dinner

After a hiatus of some year's, the Easter Festival Long Table Dinner is back. To be held on Good Friday, 29 March 2024, in the grounds of the Back O’ Bourke Information and Exhibition Centre commencing at 6.30pm, the dinner is a not to be missed Bourke Easter Festival event. Attendees will undoubtedly experience an iconic Bourke sunset as they participate in a unique outdoors dining experience eating and drinking in the grounds of the Exhibition Centre. With limited tickets available (\$70 per person), dinner will comprise a tapas menu by Darling Cakes and Catering with entertainment and a courtesy bus all included in the ticket price. Drinks are Bring Your Own. Tickets are available at the Back O’ Bourke Centre with further information available from the Centre on 6872 1321.

On the issue of the Easter Festival, a comprehensive Program of Events Brochure is now available. A copy of the Program is available on the “Back O’ Bourke Easter Festival” Facebook Page with hardcopies available from the Back O’ Bourke Centre or the Council office. One of the most popular events on the Easter weekend, for the children at least, is the Giant Easter Egg Hunt commencing at 8.00am on Easter Sunday, 31 March 2024 in the gardens of the Back O’ Bourke Centre. A reminder that this event is for children 12 years and under only, and that it is necessary for children to be registered prior to the event. This can be done at the Back O’ Bourke Centre, preferably well in advance of the Hunt commencing.

Village Meetings

After the initial postponement of various Community Consultation Meetings at villages in the Shire during February due to inclement weather, and following the subsequent rescheduling of the meetings, it is advised that the 2024 round of meetings has now wrapped up. Held for at least the past ten (10) years, the community meetings held annually across the Shire provide an excellent opportunity for residents to have input into the development of Council’s Annual Operational Plan (budget). The meetings also provide residents with an overview and update of Council’s current operations and

proposed works schedule. In addition, the meetings enable community members to, importantly, build relationships with Councillor's and senior staff and discuss any issues and ideas for the future. Feedback from the engagement with communities ensure that services and facilities provided by Council are in accord with the wishes of the community and subject to financial constraints, are meeting the expectations of the community. I take this opportunity to again thank the members of the various communities who took the time out of their schedules to come along and provide their thoughts as to how Council could improve their respective locality. My thanks also go out to the Councillors and staff who attended.

Rugby League

It doesn't seem that long ago that the 2023 NRL season concluded. Already however, the 2024 season is upon us. Whilst I write this Column well in advance of knowing the outcome of the opening games in Las Vegas, I have to say that I thought it was a brave move to take four (4) teams to Las Vegas, described by many as "sin city". It has been reported that players from the teams on tour have been briefed on staying away from excessive alcohol, drugs and to "be wary of female attention, as prostitutes have been known to extort sporting stars." One must wonder why they must be briefed in the first place, after all, they are adults! What ever happened to "You know what's right and what's wrong." I'm hoping that come the conclusion of the tour, that any controversy relates simply to play on the field and not off it.

Quote: "One bad move can tarnish your reputation, your team's reputation, your country, everything." - Lieutenant Kendall Bell, Las Vegas Police Dept, talking to NRL players travelling to Las Vegas.