



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

## “From the General Manager’s Desk”

18 April 2024

### Country Mayors Regional Meeting

I am preparing this Column whilst in Forbes attending the initial regional meeting for 2024 of the NSW Country Mayors Association. With a wide array of Federal and State Ministers and Departmental Officers in attendance, it was great to hear from speakers who are at the “coal face” of their respective portfolio of responsibility. I was able to meet with the NSW Minister for Water, the Hon Rose Jackson and give her a quick overview of Councils concerns regarding the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Waters (DCEEW) “Reconnecting the Northern Basin Project.” Such concerns were the subject of a Mayoral Minute submitted to the March 2024 Council meeting. In respect of such matter, Council resolved to write to Minister Jackson, “expressing its disappointment as to what it views as inadequate consultation in respect of the Louth Weir Fishway and Weir Project and further request a review of proposals for the removal of weirs along the Barwon Darling river system and the installation of fishways that result in reductions in the height of current weirs within the river system.” Time did not permit a comprehensive discussion on the matter, however the Minister advised that she was happy to meet with the Mayor and I at a time when we are in Sydney. Minister Jackson provided me with one of her business cards and on return to Bourke, I will be pursuing such a meeting.

As part of the regional meeting, a tour of Forbes and surrounds was provided. This included a visit to the Moxey Dairy Farm located southeast of Forbes. This 4,750-ha dairy farm is the largest single site dairy in Australia, milking 8,500 cows which produce 40 litres of milk per cow per day. These numbers equate to 340,000 litres of milk per day or an annual production of 121 million litres. It is a massive operation with feed requirements including 60,000 tonnes of corn silage, 30,000 tonnes of cereal silage and 20,000 tonnes of lucerne silage per annum. From an economic development perspective for the Forbes Shire, the dairy is a most important business which not only provides jobs for the community but also a business which invests heavily in capital improvements to progress its efficiencies. Agricultural related businesses are so important for regional localities. This is also exemplified in Bourke with the successful operation of the Thomas Foods International (TFI) Small Stock Abattoir. Like the Moxey operation, the TFI operation provides employment opportunities for local residents with TFI also investing heavily in the future of the plant.

### Road Safety

National Road Safety Week 2024 will be held from Sunday 5 May to Sunday 12 May 2024. The purpose of the week is to raise awareness about the importance of road safety in NSW and in turn seek to reduce the number of serious injuries and fatalities on our roads. The main theme of the week is *all road safety is local*. The release of recent figures from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) regarding drug driving show, that as a society, we obviously still have a long way to go in terms of road safety and reducing the death toll.

In this regard BOSCAR has reported that the number of drivers detected using drugs before jumping into a vehicle had doubled between 2018 and 2022 - from 8,700 detections in 2018 to 17,792 drug detentions in 2022 .

The statistics actually get worse. TfNSW figures show that some 24% of road deaths in NSW (equivalent to 79 deaths) involve a driver who has a presence of illegal drugs in their system. This compares to 17% of fatalities that involve drivers with alcohol. Roadside drug tests can detect the presence of cannabis (marijuana), cocaine, methamphetamine (ice) and MDMA with the presence of cannabis and methamphetamine being the most detected drugs. It has been reported that one (1) in every six (6) roadside drug tests conducted by Police has resulted in an illegal drug detection compared to the one (1) in 230 breath tests that result in a positive reading for alcohol. Men are the worst offenders in terms of drug driving offences, with drivers in regional locations being the worst offenders. Unfortunately, the data shows that the highest rate of drug driving is in the Far West/Orana, the Riverina, and the Southern Highlands regions.

I find these figures regarding drug driving simply staggering, especially when you consider the amount of money spent over the years to reduce incidents of drink driving. For us people in the Far West of the State who travel long distances on roads with speeds of up to 110 kilometre/hour, you really must wonder what state of awareness the driver coming at you, from the opposite direction, is actually in? I look forward to increased drug testing and increased penalties to push the message home.

### **Regional Crime Inquiry Submissions**

I have previously advised of the NSW Government's inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities. The Inquiry seeks to address the dangerous increase in crime in regional and rural areas across the state. With crime statistics showing that there is a disproportionate level of crime in regional and rural NSW, when compared to metropolitan areas, the opportunity now exists for community members to bring the full extent of the issue to the attention of the State Government by making a submission to the Inquiry.

Unfortunately, in Bourke there will be numerous community members with a lived experience in respect of crime. It is important that these residents have a say in respect of the crime issue and at the same time, provide any suggestions they have about how to stop the severity and instances of crime. Whether you have been impacted by crime, know someone who has, whether you work or have previously worked in related services, or come from another state or country that has implemented great working strategies, you are requested to make your voice heard.

The deadline for submissions to the "Community Safety in Regional and Regional Communities Inquiry" is 31 May 2024. Further details regarding the Inquiry and the submission process are available from the NSW Parliament web site as follows:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3042>

### **Bourke Shire Roads**

Council's road crews and contractors have been very busy preparing Toorale Road (RLR 10) for an additional 5 kilometre of seal on this road, from Louth towards Trilby. The actual sealing of this section of road is planned to take place mid-April, around the time of the release of this Column.

Emergency road works which were required following from the January 2024 storm event have now been completed on RLR 10 between Nulty and Toorale. Given the completion of these works, the Council Crews are proceeding to the Louth-Cobar Road (MR 407) to undertake repairs to this road.

Following the receipt of funding from the NSW Government under the Road Maintenance Council Contracts (RMCC) program, works on the Mitchell Highway (SH7) North Bourke to Enngonia, are also underway with sealing of these works expected in coming days.

### **No Fluoride in Water**

Following a directive from NSW Health to various rural and remote NSW councils, residents are notified that the Bourke filtered water supply is not currently fluoridated. Councils' fluoride plant failed back in 2016. At that time Council was in the throes of planning to build its new water treatment plant. The decision was taken at the time not to expend funds on repairing an old dosing system, so fluoride was no longer added. With the building of the new water treatment plant, a new fluoride dosing machine has been included as part of the new build and Council is now waiting for that component of the new plant to be commissioned in consultation with the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water.

This involves seeking all new approvals and following stringent protocols overseen by NSW Health when Council ultimately re-commences adding fluoride to the Bourke water supply. It's quite a complicated process, but hopefully it won't be too far off, and we'll have fluoride back in the Bourke filtered water supply.

**Quote: "It was relief and then it was just, 'yes she's ours' and she does stay here and if we're lucky enough she can be a racehorse it'll be in Australia, and she can start off in Australia."** – An elated Debbie Kepitis after staying off bidders and providing a winning bid of \$10m to purchase a thoroughbred filly out of the legendry racehorse, Winx.