



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the Acting General Manager’s Desk – 23 May 2024”

Acting General Manager

With Councils General Manager, Leonie Brown, being on leave for a few weeks, I have been invited by Council to return for a short period as Acting General Manager. Whilst I have been in Bourke on various occasions since I handed in the General Managers role back in July 2021, what has struck me on each occasion I have returned to Bourke is how the landscape has improved after the debilitating droughts of last decade.

I was interested to learn from Leonie that Council is still seeking Government to approve and fund an increase in the height of the Bourke Weir, despite Councils best endeavours. In briefing me on recent activities, Leonie advised that Mayor Barry and she had recently met with NSW Minister for Water, the Hon Rose Jackson, at Parliament House in Sydney, to discuss both the Bourke Weir and proposals in respect of the Louth Weir. Increasing the height of the Bourke Wier has certainly been a strategic pursuit of Council for many years and it is pleasing to see that Council continues to seek improved water security for Bourke. It’s easy to forget with strong flows in the river, when the Sydney Morning Herald reported in October 2019 that “Bourke, with a population of about 2100, is at the highest risk (of running out of water) among large towns because of the shrinking weir pool on the Barwon-Darling River.” Leonie advised that the Minister noted that an application for funding for a comprehensive Business Case for raising the Bourke Weir had been submitted by the State Government to the Federal Government as part of Round 1 of the National Water Grid Program. It’s a slow process and with further droughts inevitable, Bourke is at least better placed for the next drought with three (3) new bores having been sunk and a new water treatment plant in place to source and treat the water, respectively.

Reconnecting the Northern Basin Project

I further noted from the Minutes of Councils March 2024 meeting, Councils concerns in respect of proposals for the Louth Wier and that this issue was also discussed at the recent meeting with Minister Jackson. The Water Group in the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water have advised that the Louth fish passage project “seeks to improve connectivity across the Northern Basin to support native fish migrating along river systems to complete key life stages and to avoid drying habitats during droughts. This phase of the project involves addressing barriers to fish passage by installing fishways at three weir sites, including Banarway Weir, Calmundi Weir and Louth Downstream Weir. This would reinstate 370 km of fish passage along the Barwon-Darling River system.”

Leonie filled me in as to the recent Community Consultation meeting in Louth, convened by the water Group, where those members of the community in attendance had no issue with proposals to construct a fishway at Louth to allow the passage of fish both up and down the river system, however all in attendance were against any reduction in the height of the existing weir at Louth or the removal of weirs 19A and 20A along the river system. As I understand it, during the discussions with the Minister, Mayor Barry and Leonie were assured that no work at Louth was imminent and at this stage the

Government was very much listening to the people with the current proposals being the start of the conversation.

Following the recent community information session in Louth, the Water Group will be holding another community information session in Louth next Wednesday 29 May 2024. The session will be held from 10am to 12pm at the Louth Tennis Club (30 Bloxham Street, Louth).

The Water Group is advising that the “session is an opportunity for the community to receive an update, to provide additional insights on wider community considerations as the project progresses, to ask questions and provide further feedback. The discussions will allow us (the Water Group) to better understand: local conditions (e.g., harvest or livestock transport peak periods, accommodation, available services); construction delivery options (e.g., heavy vehicle movements); potential water impacts during delivery of the infrastructure and community input to supporting outcomes (e.g., cultural signage).”

The Water Group has advised that it is still considering the community’s feedback from the 7 May meeting on design, so there won’t be any updates on design at this upcoming 29 May 2024 meeting.

Registration to attend the meeting is not required and I encourage the community to again come together and attend this meeting.

Car Parking

One of the first matters that came across my desk when I arrived as Acting General Manager, brought back a significant number of memories from my time as General Manager when Council made various decisions in respect of improving the layout and design of Oxley Street in the Bourke CBD. At the time, it was a contentious matter.

Notwithstanding, the correspondence that was recently received was a request from a Bourke main street trader to fellow main street traders requesting that staff of businesses or Government Departments who operate in the main street not park in Oxley St, between Richard and Sturt streets. The trader who raised the issue, advised that when they attended their premises at 8.00am recently, they found very limited parks in front of their respective workplace. The trader advised that the number of parking spots further decreased within 10mins and by 8:30am there was only disabled parking on the eastern side of the centrally located pedestrian crossing in Oxley Street. As the trader quite rightly pointed out, the use of the car parks by office workers and the staff of retailers, basically all day, means that essentially both shoppers and tourists don’t have access to main street parking. With so many people expecting a car spot in close proximity to the premises that they wish to attend, lack of parking spaces is a significant inconvenience to both those who have limited mobility and to visitors to Bourke, who, if they can’t park, move onto to their next location.

With the start of the tourist season imminent, from what I have seen, Oxley Street, being Bourke’s main street, is busier than ever. Obviously for all traders in the main street, it is very hard to earn tourist dollars if their potential customers can’t park! It is requested that all businesses, offices, and Government Departments located in the main street area request their staff to find alternative parking in surrounding streets such that parking is available for shoppers and visitors. As the trader advised in their correspondence, “if the public don’t have easy access to parking in the main street, there will be no shops in the main street.”

Domestic Violence

I noticed from a recent Column of Leonie's where she commented that April 2024 had been a terrible month in NSW in terms of knife crime and domestic violence (DV). I wouldn't imagine anyone would disagree. On the issue of DV, I was pleased to read of proposals from the NSW Government last week that, once legislated, would see those accused of serious domestic violence offences being either refused bail or required to wear an electronic monitoring bracelet.

I recently came across a publication issued by ANROWS, being Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety that undertook a review of 73 publications and plans from across Australia to review the link between alcohol consumption and domestic violence against women. The review found evidence of three relationship aspects: 1) the relationship between alcohol and perpetration of violence against women; 2) the relationship between alcohol and women's victimisation by violence; and 3) the relationship of alcohol with women's attempts to manage the impacts of violence. The review also found that whilst there was evidence of a relationship between alcohol use and an increased severity of violence against women, "alcohol alone cannot be claimed as a satisfactory casual explanation of violence against women." My reading of this is that it's not possible to point to one particular cause of domestic violence. There is a raft of like research, the issue is of course that the perpetration of DV continues.

Quote: "General practice (by Doctors) has been defunded and devalued by successive governments-it hasn't been seen as a career of choice."- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners President, Dr Nicole Higgins on where only 1 in 10 graduates want to become GP's.