



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk –
27 June 2024”

Return from Leave

After taking annual leave which saw some fantastic friends and my husband and I travel to Cape York, the northernmost point of the Australian continent, I am now back at work. The scenery in far north Queensland is simply spectacular. Whilst some of the roads leave a bit to be desired, places like Myall Beach at Cape Tribulation, some 380 km north of Cairns, take your breath away.

Thank you to Ross Earl for undertaking the General Manager’s role during my absence and for his stewardship of the organisation whilst I was away.

Free Telstra Phone

Back in May 2024, I wrote that Telstra will be extending the closure of its 3G network by two months until 31 August 2024 following customer feedback that they need more time to make the relevant changes. I noted that closure of the nation’s 3G network and moving people to what is described as better connectivity, was an industry wide change and for those that still use a 3G device for either data, voice or emergency calls, they needed to prepare to stay connected when 3G is no longer available. This would include replacing phone devices which are 3G only, devices that do not support Voice over 4G (VoLTE), or devices that are 4G enabled but hardwired to use 3G for emergency calls.

Further to this, Telstra has advised that it will be giving away 12,000 free mobile phones to help make the decommissioning of its 3G network smoother for vulnerable customers. The free phones are available from 18 June 2024 to elderly, rural or vulnerable customers who might face service disruptions once the 3G network shuts down. As I understand it, in coming weeks, Telstra will contact customers eligible for a free phone to let them know that a device is on its way. Each device package will include instructions on how to set up the new phone on Telstra’s 4G network.

Telstra announced that it would be closing the old technology 3G network some five years ago and in that time, traffic on the 3G network has declined, such that it now accounts for less than one per cent of total network traffic.

REDI.E

Whilst I was on leave, I was very disappointed to learn that the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) had announced that it was cutting funding to Indigenous service provider Regional Enterprise Development Institute (REDI.E).

REDI.E has been most active in Bourke and Council has been privileged to work with the organisation as it made a positive difference to the Bourke community through projects, including works on both the main street and surrounding streets, works at Percy Hobson Park, works at the Back O Bourke Exhibition Centre and at the cenotaph area of Central Park. REDI.E has also been responsible for the erection of much of the new Bourke signage developed over the past four (4) years.

In addition to these works, Councillors at Monday's Council Meeting noted a report that detailed the proposed development of main street improvements to Oxley Street (east between Richard Street and Glen Street) and in Glen Street on the eastern side of Central Park. The plans for the next phase of works are consistent with the approach taken to the street improvements in Mitchell Street over the past 18 months. The following works are planned:

- Garden beds in Oxley Street will be limited to enhancements to be made to the beds in the middle of the street. This will maintain the ability of caravans to park adjacent to the park.
- Pedestrian access across Oxley Street at each end of the park will be improved. Pram ramps will be improved if works are required.
- Seven garden beds are to be added to Glen Street on both sides of the street. These are planned to avoid entrances the lane way and Essential Energy. The garden beds are of a similar size to the Mitchell Street beds.
- A loss of approximately seven car parks is expected although formalising parking with line marking will improve the present ad hoc style of parking.

REDI.E were to be an integral part of these additional works and I find it difficult to understand how and why such a decision was made. As our Federal Member, the Hon Mark Coulton, MP stated, "why would they cut the funding of an organisation that is actually helping to close the gap?"

New Businesses

It is pleasing to hear of new businesses that have either now opened, or will be shortly opening, in Bourke. These businesses include the recently opened Nunkeri Café in the old Elysian Café in Oxley Street, operating on Sundays from 8am – 2pm, and Monday – Thursday, from 8am - 4pm; The River Dreams Store, previously SETCH Clothing, is opening soon with fashion, accessories, gifts, homewares, linen,

footwear, work gear and more; the Bourke Art Gallery is also re-opening soon with the Bourke Community Platform Project close to bringing the Yellowbelly Barbershop and the Yellowbelly Music Studio to fruition in early July. Council extends its best wishes to these operations.

Electoral Boundary Changes

I am sure readers would be aware that the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has announced its draft 2024 electoral boundaries redistribution proposals for NSW. Such proposals will see the seat of Parkes, which includes Bourke Shire, grow to include the Bland, Forbes and Parkes shire council areas, while losing the remainder of the Gwydir Shire to the electoral seat of New England.

While I generally agree with the redistribution, I question the size of the Parkes electorate. Assuming the redistribution is enacted, the new Seat of Parkes will have an area of some 406,755 square kilometres, represented by one Federal Member. To put this in perspective, Tasmania has an area of 68,401 square kilometres and is represented by five electorates. I know that there are formulas for the seats based on population, but the size of the seat of Parkes makes it extremely difficult for the seat to be effectively represented, especially across such a diverse area.

In addition to Mark Coulton being a regular visitor to Bourke Shire Council, whenever we made telephone contact, most of the time when we spoke, he was either in Canberra or on a road, travelling the electorate. The boundary redistribution makes it harder for Mr Coulton's successor to travel the electorate on a regular basis.

Interestingly, the draft redistribution proposal sees the number of members in the House of Representatives decrease from 47 to 46 in NSW. This means that if enacted, the Seat of North Sydney would be abolished, and this component of the proposal has taken up the most media space since the announcement.

Information about the NSW redistribution, including maps for each seat, is available at www.aec.gov.au/redistributions/2023/nsw/proposed-redistribution/index.html

Princess Catherine

It was pleasing to see Catherine, the Princess of Wales, on television recently, as she attended the Trooping the Colour ceremony with her family in England. Her appearance followed the announcement in March that she had been diagnosed with cancer, an announcement that shocked millions of people worldwide. The media scrutiny that members of the Royal Family must endure is extreme. Princess Catherine said that her treatment was ongoing and stated that "as anyone going through chemotherapy will know, there are good days and bad days". Cancer is certainly not selective, and in this regard, work continues to improve the outcomes for cancer patients in the Bourke Shire in terms of the administration of chemotherapy.

On other matters Royal, it is understood that Australia is preparing for a possible royal tour by King Charles III and Queen Camilla in the second half of 2024. The federal government confirmed recently that it will be liaising with states and territories around a possible tour route. I couldn't imagine any long-term Bourke resident would forget that day back on 22 March 2000 when her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Bourke.

Quote: "Coming back since 2018 I've probably.....been the only one that's ever copped a lot of flak." – Cricketer David Warner on his impending retirement from international cricket speaking on the ball tampering scandal of 2018.