



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

“From the
General Manager’s Desk –
5 September 2024”

Spring has Sprung

Late August 2024 proved to be an unseasonably warm end to Winter. At 4.00pm on Sunday 25 August 2024, the Automatic Weather Station at the Bourke Airport recorded a top temperature of 29.5 degreesin winter. Bourke was not on its own in terms of warm weather that weekend. Down at Oodnadatta in South Australia, they recorded 38.5 degrees Celsius on Friday 23 August and then 39.4C on Saturday 24 August 2024. I understand these temperatures at Oodnadatta are some 16C above average with both days well above the state's previous winter temperature record. Andrew King, senior lecturer in climate science at The University of Melbourne has noted that Australia's winters are getting warmer with Australia's three warmest Augusts on record having all occurred since 2000.

Mr King is of the view that the outlook for spring points to continued above normal temperatures across the continent, “but as always we will likely see both warm and cold spells at times.” I don’t mind the warmer weather so it will be interesting to see how Spring and Summer pans out, weather wise. There is no doubting the countryside around Bourke currently looks magnificent with the winter crops around Nyngan, Trangie, Narromine and Dubbo looking superb. The stark yellow tops of the canola crops around Wellington are a sight to behold.

Aussie Bird Count

The Bourke Shire is home to some magnificent species of birds. On an annual basis, to coincide with Bird Week from 14-20 October 2024, the Aussie Bird Count is conducted. Back in 2024 for its 11th year, the Aussie Bird Count has proven to be a hugely popular activity undertaken by families, senior citizens, school children and the wider community each year, with around 100,000 people participating. It is an activity for all-ages that involves observing and counting the birds that live near you – whether that’s in your garden or back yard, in one of the Shire’s parks, along the riverbank or even the town centre. By telling BirdLife Australia about the birds you’ve seen within a 20-minute period, you will help BirdLife develop an understanding of local birds whilst getting to know the wildlife on our doorstep!

Data collected goes towards identifying good 'birding spots' for ecotourism; encouraging local interest in conservation and revegetation efforts and identifying trends in local bird populations year-on-year to indicate biodiversity management successes. Think of birds as a barometer for nature, as their health and wellbeing is one of nature’s best indicators. Participants of the count report feeling closer to nature, along with an improved sense of well-being and lowered stress levels.

If you’re interested in getting involved in the Count, it’s a case of simply spending 20 minutes standing or sitting in one spot and noting down the birds that you see. You will need to count the number of each species you spot within the 20-minute period. For example, you might see 4 Australian Magpies, 2 Rainbow Lorikeets and a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

You can download the Aussie Bird Count app for free which is available for iPhones and Android smartphones through either Google Play or the Apple App Store. Once you have completed your count, you can submit it either through the Bird Count app or via the website: <https://aussiebirdcount.org.au/>

Davidson Oval

Council at its August 2024 meeting held last week determined that it adopt a Masterplan to lead the future development of Davidson Oval, Bourke. The preparation of the Masterplan involved consultation with oval users and more recently the exhibition of the draft plan. One of the key elements of the plan is the demolition of the existing canteen, grandstand and toilet block and replacement with a new clubhouse building that integrates change rooms, a canteen, public amenities and spectator seating. Obviously, any demolition of these facilities is dependent on government funding to construct the proposed replacement facilities.

In his report to Council on the Masterplan proposal, Councils Manager Planning, Regulatory and Environmental Services, Dwayne Willoughby, advised that during the exhibition period, he received a phone call from a representative of the family of the Late Keith Martin, with the existing Grandstand at Davidson Oval, named the Keith Martin Grandstand. With one of the key elements of the Davidson Oval Master Plan being the proposed demolition of the existing canteen, grandstand, and toilet block, the family were understandably curious as to Councils longer term plans in continuing to recognise Mr Martin when the existing Grandstand is ultimately demolished and replaced. The late Keith Martin is remembered as one of Bourke's best rugby league representatives and as an excellent rugby league referee. Given this, Council had no hesitation in resolving that come the time of a new Grandstand being constructed at Davidson Oval, the name of Mr Martin continues as the name of a replacement facility.

Rural Fire Service

The issue concerning the recording, or not, of the asset value of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) red fleet in a council's annual financial statements is an issue that has been the subject of much discussion within the NSW local government industry for an extended period. This follows directives from both the NSW Audit Office and the Office of Local Government (OLG) that councils need to bring firefighting equipment assets, "vested" in councils under the provisions of the Rural Fires Act, 1997 to account in their balance sheets and consequently bear the cost of depreciating such items.

Bourke Shire Council, along with numerous other NSW Councils, has taken the stance that councils should not recognise the rural firefighting equipment in their year-end financial statements. This position is as a result of the fact that Bourke Shire Council does not control red fleet assets. Under Australian Accounting Standards, "Control of an asset refers to the ability to direct the use of, and obtain substantially all of the remaining benefits from, the asset. Control includes the ability to prevent other entities from directing the use of and obtaining the benefits from an asset." Bourke Shire Council does not have any say in the acquisition, deployment, or disposal of these red fleet assets, nor does Council insure, repair or know where these assets are, at a specific time. The Government's determination is inconsistent with the treatment of comparable assets of other emergency service agencies such as Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) and the State Emergency Service (SES). It makes sense that the entity that purchased the RFS assets, controls the asset, uses the asset and sells the asset should be the same one that accounts for them.

For the past two (2) financial year's Council has not included the red fleet assets in preparing its financial statements. For the 2021/2022 period, the Auditor-General issued a qualified audit opinion to 43 NSW Council's as a result of their red fleet assets having not being brought to account. For Bourke Shire Council, and whilst its Auditors have noted the non - inclusion of the red fleet assets in the Financial

Statements, they have accepted that given the estimated value of these assets in the Bourke Shire are at a relatively low level of value and are not material to Councils Financial Statements, an unqualified audit opinion has been issued by the Auditors. This is certainly pleasing.

On Friday, 9 August 2024 the Mayor represented Council at a discussion with the Public Accounts Committee at Parliament House, Sydney, in response to issues raised by Council in its submission into the Committee's current inquiry regarding assets, premises and funding of the RFS. The Mayor left the Committee in no doubt as to his views that Council does not control RFS assets, and that Council is not recognising them as assets in its financial statements.

Given the Mayors strong stance and that Councils 2023/2024 Financial Statements are currently being prepared, it was considered important that Council again consider its approach to the issue. In respect of this matter, Council at its August meeting resolved "that having regard to the risks involved in receiving a qualified Audit Report for 2023/2024, Council re-affirm its previous position that it will not record RFS assets in Bourke Shire Council's Financial Statements based on the fact that Council does not control, manage, or govern Rural Fire Service assets."

Quote: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new." - Greek philosopher Socrates.