



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

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

**Bourke High School**

I was disappointed to recently learn that Murray Cronin, Executive Principal at Bourke High School, will be finishing his time at the School at the end of Term 3, following a period of three (3) years and three (3) terms in the role. I certainly don’t envy the role of being a secondary school principal and I congratulate Murray on his considerable efforts whilst in the role at Bourke High. Whilst disappointed at his announcement, I was very pleased to learn that the Connected Communities Strategy, that has been in place at Bourke High since around 2013, has been extended for another 10 years by the NSW Department of Education.

For information, “the Connected Communities Strategy provides differentiated, holistic learning underpinned by local Aboriginal culture. By positioning schools as 'community hubs', the strategy supports the delivery of key services to students and families through government and non-government inter-agency collaboration, at various locations across NSW,” including Bourke. The Strategy has been a success, thus its extension.

In Murray’s advice of his departure, he was quick to acknowledge the contribution and support he received in the role, taking time to acknowledge the school’s students, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the P & C and the “many people across NSW, Australia, and overseas” who had assisted the school. I wish Murray all the very best for his future endeavours.

Chris Keenan, who is currently the Deputy Principal at Peel High School at Tamworth will commence as the Executive Principal in Term 4.

**Local Government Reform**

An important component of maintaining the integrity of councils is the Code of Conduct for councillors, staff and contractors. At the present time, the Model Code of Conduct, as developed by the NSW Office of Local Government in 2020, is an extensive 61-page document with a further 51-page document titled Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils, also relevant.

The NSW Minister for Local Government, Ron Hoenig MP, recently released a discussion paper titled the “Councillor Conduct and Meeting Practices Framework.” In releasing the paper, the Minister stated that the existing system was “fundamentally broken” with thousands of trivial complaints generated with the current system being “...too open to weaponisation, with tit-for-tat complaints diverting critical council resources and ratepayer money from the things that matter most to communities.” The Minister further stated that, “The sheer volume of vexatious complaints being made is preventing the Office of Local Government from focussing its attention on getting crooks out of the local government sector.”

Whilst Code of Conduct complaints have not been an issue for Bourke Shire Council, with no complaints lodged against councillors, staff or contractors during the term of the previous Council, the same cannot be said for other Councils throughout the state. In the 2022/2023 financial year, in excess of 420 code of conduct complaints were lodged across the state. Of these complaints when investigated and finalised, only 40 were found to be in breach of the Code. In addition, the cost of dealing with these complaints came at a very high financial cost. I noted that one (1) metropolitan Council has expended near \$150,000 on code of conduct matters, with a regional council expending close to \$100,000 during the financial year.

The proposal for a new code by the Minister would see the current code of conduct reduced down to 2-3 pages, being based on the State Parliamentary code, outlining clear expectations of behaviour by council officials. The new system would see minor complaints about councillor misbehaviour dealt with by a councillor's peers and leave serious matters relating to conflicts of interest to be examined by the Office of Local Government.

Some of the key reforms outlined in the discussion paper, some of which would require changes to the Local Government Act 1993, include:

- Establishing a local government privileges committee of experienced councillors with mayoral experience to assess complaints made against councillors for misbehaviour, consistent with practices in other tiers of government (where the conduct does not meet the threshold for police or referral to another investigative body or tribunal);
- Removing private investigators from the councillor conduct process, while strengthening the investigative capability of the Office of Local Government to investigate and prosecute legitimate complaints (such as issuing penalty infringement notices where conflict of interest declarations have not been made);
- Strengthening lobbying guidelines for local government;
- Giving mayors more power to expel councillors from meetings for acts of disorder and remove their entitlement to receive a fee in the month of their indiscretion.

The discussion paper is now open for community feedback and can be viewed at:

<https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/councils/misconduct-and-intervention/councillor-conduct-framework/>  
Submissions close on Friday, 15 November 2024.

## **Responsible Pet Ownership**

During recent discussions with officers from Bourke Police, the issue of the number of dogs that were roaming in town was raised. Whilst staff are considering various 'on the ground' strategies with a view to improving the situation, a large factor in the issue is the need for responsible pet ownership (RPO) by the community.

This is certainly not a Bourke centric issue, with a recent NSW Office of Local Government survey of councils revealing that RPO Education being the most common priority of councils.

For many years, RPO Education has focused on three (3) easy steps for responsible pet ownership – microchipping, desexing and registering of pets. RPO Education is now being broadened such that it seeks to reduce dog attacks, reduce the number of animals in pounds and shelters, and reduce the number of unwanted stray and semi-owned cats. Council encourages dog owners and non-owners' to actively supervise children around dogs and be aware of signs that a dog might bite. Such activity will undoubtedly help to reduce the number and frequency of dog attacks. Reducing dog attacks will also reduce the number of seized, menacing or dangerous dogs in animal shelters.

The desexing of cats has health benefits and is the most effective way to reduce the number of homeless, stray and unwanted cats in the community. Desexing reduces the potential for problems associated with cats in the community and will reduce the number of cats in the Council Animal Shelter and with rehoming organisations.

Councils' animal shelter, and the numerous rehoming organisations that it works with in respect of stray animals, are struggling to cope with the number of surrendered and seized animals. The NSW Government 'Adopt not shop' campaign encourages potential pet owners to adopt a pet from a pound, shelter or rehoming organisation.

In NSW, if you are a dog owner, under the *Companion Animals Act 1988*, you have a responsibility to make sure your dog is under effective control when in a public place, while you are also liable if it attacks a person or even another animal. This matter is dealt with in section 13 of the Act, where it is outlined that a dog that is in a public place must be under the effective control of a competent person by means of an adequate chain, cord or leash that is attached to the dog and that is being held by or secured by the person.

Where this is not adhered to, a maximum fine of \$11,000 is in place if the dog has been declared a menacing or dangerous or restricted dog. In the case where the dog has not been declared a menacing or dangerous or restricted dog, the maximum penalty is a fine of \$1,100.

Under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, authorised officers, including council officers and police officers, have a broad range of powers to be able to properly deal with owners of attacking dogs. This includes being permitted to enter part of a property that is not used solely for residential purposes and seize a dog.

### **Proposed Motel Development**

Council is currently in the marketplace seeking tenders from suitably qualified consultants to prepare the necessary documentation which examines the feasibility of a motel development in Bourke. If feasible, the successful consultant would be required to prepare a Business Case Report which includes a cost benefit analysis in accordance with NSW Treasury Guidelines TPG23-08 "Guide to Cost-Benefit Analysis". Further information is available at: [www.tenderlink.com/bourkeshire](http://www.tenderlink.com/bourkeshire)

**Quote: "Even looking at the replays and the angles of the pass, that's a big call in that moment and you can't get that wrong."** - Sydney Roosters Coach Trent Robinson calling out a forward pass call against his team in their semi-final loss to the Panthers.