



**BOURKE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL**

“From the  
General Manager’s Desk –  
21 November 2024”

**Minutes with the Mayor**

Bourke Shire Mayor, Councillor Lachlan Ford has commenced utilising the Bourke Shire Council Facebook Page to inform on matters relating to Council and the community. Following the Mayors initial posting on Tuesday 12 November 2024, I noted that 24 hours later, the video had been shared 8 times, had received 46 likes and been played some 1,400 times. I thought that these were good numbers.

In his 12 November video, the Mayor spoke about the need for the deconstruction of the crumbling timber approaches to the North Bourke Bridge; thanked Victor Bartley OAM and Kelly Lienesch for their organisation of last week’s Remembrance Day Ceremony in Bourke; promoted that nominations for the Bourke Australia Day Awards are now open (see below) and thanked Josh Toole and his team for organising the staging of the recent Bourke Hot Nine’s Football Carnival.

**Louth Weir**

Back in late May this year, the state government took a decision to call off a ‘consultation’ meeting that was to be held in Louth where representatives from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), were due to talk to Louth locals about changes to the Louth Weir. In postponing the meeting, DCCEEW advised that they had “heard clearly from the community that the next time we meet they would like to see other design options for the weirs at Louth, Banarway and Calmundi’.

Part of its ‘Reconnecting the Northern Basin’ project, DCCEEW are investigating design options for the installation of fishways at three priority weir sites: Banarway Weir and Calmundi Weir in the Walgett Shire, as well as the Louth Downstream Weir in Bourke Shire. In undertaking the project, DCCEEW are seeking to “reinstate waterways that allow native fish to flourish while continuing to support local water security for all water users.” The project seeks to reinstate more than 370km of fish passage along the Barwon-Darling River system and more than 80 km of fish passage along Macintyre River.

Recently, DCCEEW provided an update on the project stating again that “in response to community feedback, we have been thoroughly investigating a range of design options to ensure the best outcomes for our local communities. We have heard clearly from the community that the next time we meet to discuss the proposed installation of fishways on the weirs at Louth, Banarway and Calmundi they would like to see the proposed design option.”

Whilst not a lot has changed from the May 2024 announcement, DCCEEW advised that they appreciated the community’s patience as they continue their investigations, noting that work was “progressing as quickly as possible. DCCEEW were keen to reassure the community that they will be in touch about opportunities for future community information sessions.

Whilst I am confident that any future consultation undertaken with the Louth community will be well publicised, I would encourage community members to keep an eye out for upcoming engagement opportunities as highlighted on the DCCEEW project webpage. This can be accessed at: <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au> and once on the 'Water page', search Fish passage: Reconnecting the Northern Basin project.

## **Drug Driving**

I have written previously on the prevalence of drug-driving incidents across the State, however a recent report issued by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) identifies some very concerning trends. In 2008, an average of 102 people faced charges for drug-driving each quarter. By 2023 this figure had increased to 3296 people charged each quarter of the year. It got me thinking as to whether more people are driving under the influence of drugs or is it a case of NSW Police undertaking more random drug testing of drivers.

It was 2007 when mobile drug testing started in NSW, with some 20,000 drivers a year tested for cannabis, MDMA or methamphetamine. By March 2015, the state government had set a revised target of 97,000 tests a year come 2017. By 2018, this target had increased to 200,000 tests by 2020, with cocaine added to the substances tested. Test numbers climbed to 156,000 a year by 2023, having slowed during the COVID pandemic. At the start of the mobile drug-testing program in NSW, positive detections were around 2 per cent, increasing to nearly 18 per cent in 2021. Last year, positive detections were back to some 11 per cent. With amphetamines and cannabis being the most detected illegal substances. it would be fair to say that increased testing numbers have resulted in increased charges being laid.

However, Dr Milad Haghani, a senior lecturer in public safety and urban mobility at the University of NSW raised the proposition that "if the rise in charges were purely due to more targeted police operations, with no actual increase in the prevalence of drug-driving, then we wouldn't expect drug-impaired driving to be a growing factor in road fatalities." Research by Dr Haghani has revealed that between 2013 and 2022, "the percentage of road deaths involving drugs has climbed – from 9 per cent to 18 per cent for drivers and from 7 to 24 per cent for motorcyclists. Meanwhile, the proportion of road fatalities involving an illegal blood-alcohol concentration has remained relatively stable for motorcyclists (about 20 per cent) and has even slightly declined for drivers, now roughly equating to the motorcyclist rate." Coupled with this, the percentage of the NSW population reporting illicit drug use, according to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, climbed from about 13 per cent in 2007 to about 18 per cent in 2023.

From all this, it is considered fair to say that increased drug-driving charges in NSW stems from both increased mobile testing and higher drug use in the community, with Dr Haghani pointing out from his research, "A real increase in drug-driving cannot be ruled out."

What drivers need to be aware of is that all states and territories in Australia have implemented zero-tolerance roadside drug-testing. Drivers face penalties for any detectable level of specific illicit drugs. Roadside tests start with a saliva sample, followed by a confirmatory test where previously mentioned illegal drugs are detected. A positive result leads to immediate penalties such as license suspension and fines. As recently seen in Sydney with an NRL footballer, a positive test can lead to the loss of employment.

## Australia Day Awards

As per 'Minutes with the Mayor' nominations for the Bourke Shire Council's Australia Day Awards for 2025 are now open. With awards for Citizen of the Year; Junior Citizen of the Year; Sportsperson of the Year; Junior Sportsperson of the Year; Village Service Award; Emergency Services Volunteer of the Year, and the Community Event of the Year Award, nominations close with Council at 4.30 pm in some two (2) weeks on Friday 6 December 2024. The nomination process allows residents to input into recognising those in our community that have made outstanding contributions to the local community during 2024 and/or contributions to the local community over a number of years. Nomination forms can be downloaded from Council's website ([www.bourke.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bourke.nsw.gov.au)) or by accessing a copy from Council at 29 Mitchell St, Bourke. Award winners will be announced at the Australia Day ceremony to be held at the Bourke Wharf precinct on Sunday 26 January 2025.

## Wallabies

I was happy to see the Australian Rugby Union side, the Wallabies, clinch an injury time win over England at Twickenham recently. By the time this column is published, they will have also played Wales, who I understand have lost ten tests in a row, and hopefully after they play the Wallabies have chalked up 11 straight losses! Time will tell. After Wales its Test matches against Scotland and then Ireland.

If you follow the Wallabies, you will well know that they have been in the doldrums for some time and experienced a diabolical time at last year's Rugby World Cup, bowing out in the group stages. After the win against England, you could easily think from some media reports that they had just won the World Cup, such was the euphoric writings of the win and their performance. Good luck to them, but "one win doesn't make a season." I think the Wallabies coach, Joe Schmidt put it in perspective during an after-match interview, where he spoke of enjoying the win, banking the belief from it and then leaving it behind. Wise words.

**Quote: "The most difficult thing is the decision to act; the rest is merely tenacity." —Amelia Earhart**