



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

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

LGNSW Annual Conference

Last week, along with Councils Mayor, Lachlan Ford, and Councillor Maxime Nina, I attended the annual conference of Local Government NSW (LGNSW) in Tamworth. LGNSW is the peak body representing New South Wales local councils and associate members, including county councils, joint organisations, and regional organisations of councils. Their role is to support, promote, advocate for, and represent the NSW local government sector so that “members are in the best possible position to serve their NSW communities.” LGNSW provide policy advice, management support and grants to members; they empower members to deliver quality services to meet the needs of their local community; they provide effective, responsive, and accountable leadership on policy issues; they seek to enhance community awareness and perception of local government; and shape the industrial environment in which the sector operates.

All 128 councils in NSW are members of LGNSW and this was reflected with some 1,000 people attending the 2024 Conference held at the Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Convention Centre. With the Conference being held but some eight (8) weeks after the September 2024 elections, and with the resulting high number of new Councillors across the state, (including five (5) new councillors at Bourke), the opportunity was taken by LGNSW to conduct a Professional Development Session for new Councillors. The purpose of the session was to provide new Councillors with insights into “a day in the life of a Councillor” through the eyes of experienced elected members who were happy to share their journeys. The session spanned the councillor’s initial days post-election until the end of term and discussed such matters as key relationships, community engagement, professional development, meetings, teamwork, collaboration and informed decision making. The feedback I received was that the session was most worthwhile.

On the Monday of the conference, the business sessions were conducted with some 110 motions on the agenda worked through and determined. Now that these various motions have been determined by conference, they have become policy positions which LGNSW takes forward and advocates for, on behalf of all NSW Councils.

One of the more contentious issues debated at the conference related to a recent announcement by the NSW Government regarding the creation of a new planning body to consider applications for large housing developments. Whilst not so much an issue for Bourke and other rural councils across the state, the issue saw our urban council cousins being rather agitated at the Government’s announcement. The result was that a motion was adopted which provides, in part, that LGNSW and councils across the state “condemn the NSW Government’s 15 November 2024 announcement that it will bypass councils and communities with a new spot-rezoning and state approval pathway, which will deliver windfall gains for developers while removing safeguards that protect communities from inappropriate overdevelopment.”

The Tuesday conference agenda was somewhat lighter and saw a series of presentations made by guest speakers on topics such as local government finances, cyber security, and land use planning. The Keynote Address to the conference was provided by former Australian Netball Team Captain, and sports commentator, Liz Ellis, who spoke on the need to plan for success and that “it doesn’t happen by accident” Liz’s talk was most compelling and informative.

Rate Peg

In NSW, the maximum amount that Councils can increase their annual rates by is determined by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). The Tribunal recently released its rate peg for each Council in NSW for the 2025/2026 financial year, with maximum increases ranging from 3.7% to 7.6%, based on a base cost change of 3.6%. For Bourke, the maximum rate peg for 2025/2026, as advised by IPART, is 5.0%.

To their credit, IPART has been actively engaging with NSW Councils in reviewing and refining new methodology to determine the rate peg. This has included the establishment of a Council Reference Group to identify cost increases for Councils. The determinations for 2025/2026 sees increases exceed the current inflation rate (CPI) and also exceed forward CPI estimates expected to be in the 2-3% range; includes an election factor to assist councils with the cost of the recent local government elections; recognises the additional cost pressures facing rural councils; and the continuation of an Emergency Services Levy factor to cover increases in the payments made by councils to the State Government for the provision of emergency services in NSW. This includes the Rural Fire Services, State Emergency Services and Fire and Rescue NSW. For information, in 2023/2024 the levy increase for the State’s 128 councils amounted to almost \$77 million, with the total cost imposed on the NSW local government sector increasing from \$143 million in 2022/2023 to \$219 million in 2023/2024. This represented a 53.1% increase, which provides some perspective to the IPART baseline rate peg of 3.7% back in 2023/24.

It is pleasing to see the Tribunal announce these rate peg levels well in advance of the upcoming financial year. It doesn’t seem that long ago when the rate peg would be announced in June annually, just weeks before the Council was required to adopt its Annual Operational Plan by 30 June. Council will consider the level of increase to its rating structure in the new year as part of the preparation of its 2025/2026 Operational Plan (Budget).

Annual Audit

Councils Financial Statements are prepared annually and then audited by the NSW Audit Office. With so many Councils to be audited in a very short space of time, essentially a 3 x month period comprising August, September and October, the Audit Office engages audit partners who undertake the various audits on their behalf as sub contactors. These outcomes are reported to the Audit Office who then sign off on the accounts of the various Councils across the State, with a summary report tabled in State Parliament.

At Mondays, 25 November 2024 Council meeting, Brett Hanger , Partner, Audit and Assurance with Nexia Australia provided Council with an unmodified opinion of Councils General Purpose Financial Statements for 2023/2024. This is most pleasing with the Statements showing that Councils:

- Rates and annual charges revenue (\$4.5 million) increased by \$0.1 million (2.3 per cent) in 2023/2024.

- Grants and contributions revenue (\$30.0 million) decreased by \$2.3 million (7.1 per cent) in 2023/2024 due to Council having received 85% of its Financial Assistance Grants for 2024/2025 from the Federal Government in advance.
- Council's operating result from continuing operations (\$8.8 million including the effect of depreciation and amortisation expense of \$9.4 million) was \$7 million lower than the 2022/2023 result. This was mainly due to increased expenditure relating to road maintenance and repairs.
- The net operating result before capital grants and contributions (\$1 million) was \$3.7 million lower than the 2022/2023 result, which was mainly also due to the increased expenditure relating to road maintenance and repairs.

The Statements also show that after repaying principal and interest and taking up additional borrowings of \$1 million during the financial year, Councils total debt as at 30 June 2024 was \$4.8 million which was down from \$5.2 million at the same time in 2023.

Mr Hanger also reported that Councils accounting records were maintained in a manner and form that facilitated the preparation, and the effective audit, of the Financial Statements and that Council's staff provided all accounting records and information relevant to the audit.

There is considerable work in preparing the Statements in readiness for audit and I take the opportunity to thank Councils Manager Corporate Services, Ang Pasang Rai and his team for their efforts in successfully completing the 2023/2024 Statements.

Australia Day Awards

A final reminder that nominations for the Bourke Shire Council's Australia Day Awards for 2025 will close with Council at 4.30 pm next Friday, 6 December 2024. 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, the Awards are a perfect opportunity for 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 Councils website (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.

Quote: "Very little is needed to make a happy life. It is all within yourself, in your way of thinking." - Marcus Aurelius.