



**BOURKE
SHIRE
COUNCIL**

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

Summer is here!

After some recent fairly warm weather, summer for 2024/2025 is officially upon us. With summer comes water-based activities, and given this, Surf Life Saving NSW has recently announced a new water safety campaign which follows the convening of a Water Safety Roundtable in March 2024 by the NSW Government, where the need for an easy to remember, consistent water safety message was identified for the summer period.

The roundtable developed the message: ‘Stop. Look. Stay Alive’, which is a simple message that is applicable to a range of water environments, whether people are swimming in a pool, the river or at a coastal beach. The new safety campaign is aimed at getting people to make water safety a priority this summer, in particular men, who account for almost 90% of drowning victims each year. As part of the campaign, Surf Life Saving has also teamed up with Qantas to release a virtual training platform for the community called ‘Beach Passport’ which is a mobile or online course that will provide the public with basic water safety knowledge. It is free and available to all Australians and visitors and is available at beachpassport.org.au.

As I note, the messaging is simple:

Stop.....Before you enter the water.

Look.....For the red and yellow flags, if they’re on the beach swim between them; For signs and warnings about the area; At the conditions and weather forecast; For rip currents and other dangers.

Stay Alive...Assess the conditions based on your own ability; If it’s unsafe, don’t swim; Don’t go alone; Complete the Online Beach Passport for basic training and education on water safety.

Supported by the NSW Government, TV and online advertising will be complemented by a full suite of digital and outdoor content that will be highly visible throughout summer. With an average of 94 people drowning across the nation each summer, any effort to reduce these fatalities is pleasing.

Darling River at Bourke and Louth

WaterNSW collects water samples from various riverine water sources, including samples from the Darling River at Bourke and Louth, to produce Far West Blue-Green Algal Reports. As part of the report, algal alerts are identified with three (3) alert levels utilised in warning the community, as follows:

- Red alert levels represent 'bloom' conditions. The water may appear green and may have strong, musty or organically polluted odours. Blue-green algae may be visible as clumps or as scums. The 'blooms' should be considered to be toxic to humans and animals, and the water should not be used for drinking (without prior treatment), stock watering, or for recreation. A precautionary approach should be applied to fishing during bloom events. Any fish caught should be cleaned

and washed thoroughly in uncontaminated water and any internal organs disposed of before consumption. Fish fillet meals from algal bloom affected areas should be limited to 1-2 servings per week. Avoiding fishing in a bloom location is the best way to minimise risk, particularly catching and eating fish from locations with severe blooms that last extended periods of time.

- At amber alert levels blue-green algae may be multiplying in numbers. The water may have a green tinge and musty or organic odour. The water should be considered as unsuitable for potable use and alternative supplies or prior treatment of raw water for domestic purposes should be considered. The water may also be unsuitable for stock watering. The water remains suitable for recreational use, however algal concentrations can change rapidly. Water users should use caution and avoid water where signs of blue-green algae present.
- At green alert levels, blue-green algae are present in the water at low densities, possibly signalling the early stages of the development of a bloom, or a period where a bloom is declining. At these densities, the blue-green algae do not pose a threat to recreational, stock or domestic use.

From the latest report released in late November, for instance, there is a Red Alert warning for high levels of potentially toxic blue-green algae for an area of the Darling River upstream of the Menindee Lakes, which includes the town of Wilcannia, as well as the sections of the river immediately upstream and downstream of Wilcannia. This Red Alert has been applied based on satellite imagery and visual on-ground observations. Algae sample collection is being conducted to assist with algae bloom identification.

For the Darling River at Bourke and at Louth, the current alert level is green, however with hot weather forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology for the Far West region and declining river flows in the Barwon-Darling River, the risk for high levels of algae growth will increase with the algae risk being high.

Wilba the Empowerbus

I was most disappointed to recently learn that Wilba the Empowerbus had ceased operations in Bourke. For those not familiar with the service, Wilba was a pre-booked 12-seater bus service that offered Bourke residents with the opportunity to easily get around Bourke to attend appointments, access health care, maintain employment and allowed transport to purchase essential products or services. The services also provided a vital link to other major regional and metropolitan service centres by giving residents easier access to Bourke Airport and NSW TrainLink coaches.

Apparently, the cessation of the service is due to many reasons including difficulty in finding drivers and also the recent vandalism of the bus. Why people would vandalise the bus is beyond me.

With the contract for the service having only been renewed for a further 12 months in February 2024, having undertaken more than 2,000 trips in its first 12 months of operation, Transport for NSW has advised that it understands the importance of providing the community with a reliable transport option. To this end, Transport is urgently working through options to provide an alternate service to the community as soon as possible.

Sealing of Toorale Road between Louth and Trilby Station

Over the last two (2) year's, Council has been constructing and sealing Toorale Road between Weelong Road, Louth, and Trilby Station, a distance of 20 km. During late November 2024, the last section of the Trilby road sealing project was completed.

Funding for the project was obtained under the State Government's 'Fixing Local Roads Program.' The first section from Louth to Dunlop Station was funded in Round 3 of the program but construction was delayed since works were unfortunately interrupted by the 2022 flooding. Funding for the second stage of the project was obtained under round 4 of the 'Fixing Local Roads program', such that the two (2) sections of the road could be worked on concurrently. This meant that both stages were completed in 2024.

Completion of this important project will mean that accessibility to the popular tourist destinations of Dunlop and Trilby stations, will be greatly improved, particularly during instances of wet weather.

Council's thanks are extended to the NSW Government for the provision of funding and also to Councils Manager of Roads, Paul Flannagan, and his road crews for their efforts in bringing the project to fruition.

Sick or Dead Birds

In early November 2024, tens of thousands of dead and dying birds washed up along the eastern seaboard after a "mass mortality" of migratory short-tailed shearwaters. This prompted the NSW Department of Environment and Heritage to issue information on the handling and disposal of sick and dead birds across the State. Whilst it is unlikely shearwaters will travel to Bourke; It is likely that at times the community will find sick or dead birds in public locations. NSW Department of Environment and Heritage are advising that the safe disposal of bird carcasses is critical, whilst noting that sick or dead birds do not currently pose any biosecurity threat.

In disposing of bird carcasses, dead birds are not currently classified as biosecurity waste and can be disposed of at waste facilities that can take general waste, such as the Bourke Waste Depot. If you encounter sick or dead birds, make sure you are wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves, a mask and long sleeves before you handle them. Please record the details of the sick or dead birds, including location, time, type of bird or a description, and the number of birds.

If there are less than five (5) birds, the bird carcasses can be double bagged and placed in the red-lidded garbage bin to then be taken to the waste facility. If there are five (5) or more dead birds, please report this to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline at 1800 675 888 and you will receive advice on next steps.

Quote: "A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken." – Anonymous.