



“FROM THE GM’S DESK” 28TH JULY 2011



Bourke Councillors and Senior Managers used an opportunity on Monday evening to gain valuable briefings from and express views to the Shires Association of NSW President Ray Donald and their senior staff during their overnight visit to Bourke.

A key point of discussion was the proposed merger of the Shires Association with the Local Government Association. The strongly presented view from the Bourke participants is the fear that the voice of smaller rural Councils such as Bourke will be lost within the larger organisation, and the only option may be for western Councils to work separately from the larger urban based Councils to ensure our issues are effectively represented.

Key roads policy issues faced by Councils across NSW were also shared. There are 164,000 km of “local roads” across NSW, and for many Councils maintenance of these roads is their single largest expenditure. Federal and State road grants total about \$460 million per year, but this is \$600 million per annum short of required funding to maintain all roads. Road research across the State indicates that there is an infrastructure renewal backlog of \$6.3 billion, which has accumulated as the percentage of contributions to Local Governments by the Federal and State Governments has progressively decreased and is now almost impossible to make up.

The Shires Association of NSW has been lobbying to achieve greater certainty with ongoing commitments for many road funding arrangements. For instance, the Roads to Recovery program and the Timber Bridges replacement program are not secure beyond 2014.

The options for how the process for the 2012 Bourke Council elections will be run were raised at both Monday night’s meeting and at the Council meeting earlier during the day. Our Council has decided to seek information to allow a cost comparison to be undertaken between different options for administering the election. These costs are of particular concern to Council, as we have been advised that the costs may increase from the 2008 elections by about 24%.

At this week’s Council meeting Councillors were informed that the long awaited revised draft Local Environmental Plan, or LEP, is nearing finalization within the Department of Planning. Once finalised, this comprehensive document will be made available to the community for a period of public comment and consultation. The final version of this draft document will set key parameters for future land use and development within the Bourke Shire. For this reason everyone with any interest in the long term development across the Shire should anticipate the release of the draft and be prepared to make constructive comments. Further information can be obtained from the Environmental Section staff at Council.

Ratepayers across the Shire will have received their annual rate notices recently. Collection of rates is important to allow the ongoing operations of Council activities, allowing Council to maintain an effective cash flow. This is despite the fact that General Rates only contribute approximately 6.6% of the total Council income, water rates 7% and sewerage 3.3%, a combined total of 17% of the total income.

Ratepayers are reminded that the compulsory interest which Councils charge for overdue rates is 11%, which is higher than most alternate debt interests. Hence there is a financial advantage for ratepayers to pay Council rates as a priority.

Council has been cooperating with service providers and with other interest groups to improve the health services for our community. Ongoing communications have been held with Regional Hospital Management Staff to re-establish a maternity ward at Bourke Hospital. Whilst indications have been given that this may occur by November, Council is committed to have the service provided at the earliest possible time. On a separate issue, Council has been supportive of initiatives by the Royal Flying Doctor Service in attempting to establish a limited dental service to communities currently without any effective dental service. Further negotiations are required before this proposal develops into reality.

On Monday, Council adopted a priority works program for the expenditure of over \$1 million for road works through the Roads to Recovery Program for the current financial year. This includes \$190,000 for town streets reseals and rehabilitation, \$40,000 for gravelling Louth streets, and approximately \$800,000 for repairs, rehabilitation and re-formations to many local roads across the Shire. This is another example of Council's commitment to all interest groups across the Shire, implemented through effective planning, prioritization and decision making.

This week in history:

The Enngonia Picnic Race Club was formed in 1923.

Robert H Schuller once said:

"You didn't think when you got up this morning that this would be the day your life would change, did you? But it is going to happen because the only thing that stands between you and grand success in living are two things: Getting started and never quitting! You can solve your biggest problem by getting started, right here and now".

Cheers for now,
Geoff