



“FROM THE GM’s DESK”

24th November 2011



Mayor Andrew Lewis represented Bourke Shire Council at the National Roads Congress held in Mount Gambier, South Australia, last week. This annual conference provides an opportunity for Councils from across Australia, together with other Roads and Traffic Authority personnel to debate and discuss the big issues relating to our country’s major transport networks.

The value of the road assets and the strategies for funding their maintenance and depreciation is always a major issue for discussion. At this year’s congress, a significant agenda related to safety and impacts on roads associated with current usage. Within the conference there was a strong push for reduced speed limits being needed on all roads, with corresponding opposing views being expressed.

On Tuesday this week the Mayor and I represented Council at the Barwon Darling Zone Bushfire Management Committee meeting held at Brewarrina. Bourke and Brewarrina Councils are combined to form this zone. Key membership on the committee includes representatives from Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Farmers, Land and Property Management Authority, Livestock Health and Pest Authority as well as Councils.

In consideration of the significant build-up of vegetative fuel over the last couple of favourable years, a key agenda item related to the hazard reduction control program. \$55,000 per Council has been allocated this financial year for hazard reduction measures. The main aims are to protect towns and villages across the Zone by minimising the risk of fires entering these communities. State mitigation support services, including volunteers from other communities, have provided outstanding assistance with this work, particularly around North Bourke, Enngonia, Brewarrina and Weilmoringle. Volunteer crews will be returning to the Zone in early December to carry out further works around Byrock and Barwon 4 at Brewarrina.

\$59,000 has been committed to vegetation control along the Kamilaroi Highway and the Kidman Way, using both burning and herbicide spraying. Highways provide valuable control lines for major fires. They are also risk areas for fires to start, most commonly from indiscriminate disposal of cigarette butts.

As part of the overall preparedness for rural fire control, the Committee is about to review the Zone’s Risk Management Plan. Key strategies will continue to be focused on protection of urban communities, and on maintenance of strategic fire control lines along highways, roads and power lines. Community input to this plan will be greatly welcomed, preferably through electronic or written comments to the Rural Fire Service personnel.

No doubt one of the most valuable short term strategies for reducing the risk of fires is governed by significant rainfall events. The current seasonal patterns, particularly with the rainfall occurring and predicted for this week, will dampen the risk of rural fires for at least a short period. However, should this rainfall provide for germination and growth of additional vegetation, a delayed danger period may follow. The current rainfall certainly should enhance the rural conditions, except for those people involved with harvesting of winter crops.

The steady rain has hampered road works planned by Council, as well as requiring the need for all unsealed roads to be closed to avoid road damage and further cost to ratepayers. Whilst I appreciate the inconvenience these road closures create, I also appreciate that it is ratepayer and Government funds which must be spent repairing damage created by vehicles driving on wet roads. Such unplanned costs compete against all other programs Council is obliged to deliver.

Congratulations to the Year 6 students from Saint Ignatius Primary School, local artists and representatives from the Eternity Church who have combined to paint a mural which was unveiled at St Ignatius Primary School this week. This work, which captures local themes and values, is a tribute to all involved.

Please remember that an opportunity currently exists for you to nominate your champions for the Australia Day Awards in January. Several different categories are available, and Council is dependent on nominations being made by the end of this year to allow for the selections to be made. Nominations forms can be obtained from Council, although clearly explanatory detailed letters are quite acceptable.

On Friday last week, advice was received that the Minister for Primary Industries agreed to Council's request to extend the deadline for responses to the NSW draft Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources from 18th November until 18th December. Anyone who has not already provided comments and who still wishes to do so is encouraged to respond. Details of who to respond to can be obtained from any water licence holder, from Council or to email barwondarlingwsp@water.nsw.gov.au. If you have an opinion whether you believe it is appropriate for the final plan to prevent any ability for approval to ever be granted for a town water supply weir to be increased in size, it is warranted that you respond.

This week in history:

The keys of the new Public School in Green Street were handed over on 19th November 1975. Of interest, on 22nd November 1901, Bourke Public School was raised to the status of a Superior Public School, following the formation of two fifth classes comprising 35 pupils.

What was opened on 26th November 1941 at a cost of \$5,000?

In 1692, Roger L'Estrange wrote: *"It is with our passions as it is with fire and water; they are good servants but bad masters".*

Cheers for now,
Geoff.