

FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK

Before the start of business at Council's meeting on Wednesday 14 February 2018, Council stood in one minute's silence in remembrance of the late Councillor Tom Cullen, OAM who passed away last Friday after a long battle with illness. Tom was elected to Council in 1986 and served continuously until his death. Council conveys its deepest sympathy to Tom's wife, Anne and their family.

This meeting was Council's first for 2018 – my fellow Councillors and I are happy to be back on deck - we're looking forward to another productive year and the challenges that, no doubt, will be thrown our way. With strong opportunities of grant funding being available in the early part of the year we are very hopeful that our Shire will be successful in its applications for some special projects earmarked for our communities. I have detailed various planned works and projects in the pipeline later in this report.

During public question time two representatives from the Gulargambone Community Enterprises Co-operative Limited addressed the meeting. Mrs Alison Dent and Mrs Annie Haling discussed two projects which they are hoping to bring to fruition early this year. The first is the unveiling of the bullock wagon display and the second is *Pave the Way to Gular Art Festival*. Council officers are working with the Co-operative to identify the most appropriate location for the bullock wagon display – this should be known within the next week.

Regarding the Art Festival, the Director of Community Services will be meeting with the Committee within the next week to offer assistance with the project. This sounds like a very exciting event and, I understand, expressions of interest have been received from well-known and highly respected artists to be part of it. Sections of Gulargambone, e.g. buildings and footpaths, will be identified for the art work, which has to be approved by Council prior to the event in accordance with Council's Art on Public Buildings policy.

The next group to address the meeting was Coonamble Associated Agents, represented by Mr Peter O'Connor and Mr Dave Thompson. They discussed the future of the Coonamble saleyards, noting that Council has had concerns about the yards operating at a loss for a long period. Council informed the Agents that following the end of financial year wrap-up it would review the future of the saleyards. Mr O'Connor put forward the agents' position, saying that throughput will never be as it was 15 – 20 years ago, giving examples such as more cultivation takes place now on land that was once used for grazing; the hot dry periods we have experienced; change in enterprises with more emphasis on wool and sheep and competing against computer marketing which is popular with the younger generation.

Council put forward its concerns, saying the saleyards operation is classed as 'contestable business' and Council is measured and rated by the State Government and it must comply with the National Competition Policy. It is also audited by the Auditor-General who raised concerns about the loss on operations occurring at the saleyards. I will facilitate a meeting of the Saleyards Management Committee at the end of the financial year and endeavor to work out a way forward that is satisfactory to all parties.

The final address during public question time was from Mrs Anne Kennedy and Mr David Chadwick who provided an update on coal seam gas and the gas pipeline construction following the most recent public meeting in Coonamble.

Reduction of Councillor Numbers

The General Manager of the Castlereagh-Macquarie County Council (the Weeds Authority for our Shire) contacted me advising he has had discussions with the Office of Local Government regarding reducing councillor numbers from two per council to one per council. So this can be achieved, our Council resolved to agree to the proposal – so instead of two delegates, each of the constituent councils will have one representative each. The Castlereagh Macquarie County Council services the Shires of Coonamble, Gilgandra, Walgett, Warren and Warrumbungle.

Joint Organisations

Another issue still on the agenda is the proposal regarding Joint Organisations – I attended a meeting in Cobar recently, which was well attended by councils from Coonabarabran, Mudgee, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Warren, Cobar and Bourke. Mr Tim Hurst, the A/CEO of the Office of Local Government (OLG), was also present and discussed the proposal as expected by OLG, however no clear message was conveyed. There are still concerns with no defined path forward, so I think it wise that we wait and see what transpires before making any decision for our Council.

Alternate Energy Opportunities

In a bid to offset electricity usage charges, Council has been considering the use of alternative energy, being mindful that energy costs are expected to rise significantly in the future. Council has the potential to reduce its energy consumption costs by 80% by using solar panels on two of its buildings – the administration building and the library. These two areas have substantial demand for lighting and air conditioning requirements and the technology available today has a lifespan of 15 years, so Council would recoup its capital cost over three years and have substantial savings over the remaining 12 years. The decision to include \$80,000 in the budget to install solar panels on Council's two buildings was unanimous.

Grant Funding

Council was presented with a report on the status of works being carried out under grant funding. It is pleasing that we are able to have community projects completed under various funding opportunities. The Drought Communities Program has provided money to carry out fencing at the showground, sportsground and pool, relining of Quambone Hall and the amenities at Combara Hall have all been completed.

The extension of the lawn section of Coonamble cemetery is in progress, as well as footpaths and kerbing and guttering and the main street roundabout. Projects awaiting approval are fencing at Gulargambone cemetery and cricket nets at Gulargambone, sealing of the apron at the Aerodrome and sealing of the Coonamble Golf Club car park, as well as the grids and gates upgrade.

Three more projects have been identified as being eligible for the Drought Communities program – refurbishment of Gulargambone Youth Hall (\$75,000), refurbishment of Gulargambone Memorial Hall (\$103,000) and the erection of 1.5km of fencing around the extended waste depot area in Coonamble (\$101,000) - Council agreed that these projects be put forward for funding.

It was also resolved that applications be submitted for funds under the Regional Growth Fund - Stronger Country Communities for the following works – pool splash pad at Gulargambone and toilets within Coonamble CBD. Another project put forward was additional grandstands and concrete pad at the Coonamble

showground, however if this is not required by the Rodeo Committee, the allocation will be put towards the Visitor Information Centre project.

Visitor Information Centre at Coonamble

At the December meeting Council asked for a report on funding opportunities, potential sites and design concepts for the construction of a purpose-built Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Coonamble. This decision came about due to the relocation of the Service NSW agency office back to the precinct that currently houses the VIC. Since it has been operational at the site, it is evident that there has been an increase in vehicle and pedestrian traffic and this is impacting on visitor parking and accessibility to the VIC. The preferred location, if the new VIC proceeds, is Smith Park – an area that is highly visible to the travelling public and easily accessible, with plenty of space for parking. Council agreed to commit funding as a co-contribution if the grant application is successful.

Project for Construction of Public Toilets in CBD Area

Council has taken the first step in identifying a location in the main street as suitable for the construction of public toilets. Preliminary negotiations are being held with relevant stakeholders following which community consultation will take place. This will be done immediately Council is in a position to do so.

Caravan Park Redevelopment

Recently the Caravan Park Redevelopment Committee met and at the meeting Council adopted the Committee's recommendations to call for expressions of interest to operate the park, with the proposed redevelopment incorporated into the proposal. Council agreed to begin redevelopment from the front of the park with the erection of manager's residence and office, fencing and front gate additions, a new dump point will be developed at the location of the old amenities block, which will be demolished. A dump point will be located at the showground for the convenience of RV Friendly users. Further into the works, Council will purchase additional cabins and a camp kitchen will be created within the facility. This will all be part of the first stage of the redevelopment which will cost in the vicinity of \$500,000.

Should anyone wish to contact me to discuss issues or concerns, please phone 0427 905 626 - I'm always available and willing to discuss matters to bring forward on residents' behalf.

Michael Webb

Mayor