

FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK

The first Council meeting for 2019 was held last Wednesday 13th - my colleagues and I are pleased to be back into our role following the Christmas / New Year break. Firstly, I wish our residents all the best for the year – hopefully we'll get some much needed rain and move into more comfortable climatic conditions shortly.

Speaking of which, I would like to inform residents that our area recently received much needed hay for stock in the Gulargambone, Quambone/Carinda and Coonamble areas all the way from Esperance in Western Australia. Council has written “thank you” letters on behalf of recipients. What a task to bring to fruition this delivery over such a huge distance – not to mention the time it took for those volunteers - Council commends and acknowledges everyone involved in this huge goodwill gesture. It's an extraordinary trait that's forever evident in Australia – help one another in times of crisis - absolutely amazing. I must say that various Lions Clubs through other States have also worked on stock feed deliveries through this terrible drought.

At an extraordinary meeting of Council held on 10 January, Mr Glenn Inglis from Tamworth was appointed Acting General Manager while the recruitment process for a permanent appointee to replace former GM Rick Warren, is undertaken. Council decided to engage Local Government NSW to carry out the recruitment task and the A/General Manager has already put the wheels in motion. We expect the process to take some time, but hopefully Council will be able to make a permanent appointment in late April – early May.

Although I had some time overseas visiting family, I have also been busy attending functions and representing Council at events since the last meeting. During December I had the pleasure of attending the Presentation of Awards functions at a couple of the local schools, unfortunately I was unable to attend them all due to prior obligations. I commend both students and teachers on their achievements last year and wish them well for another successful year – it is great that Council continues its commitment to support our five local schools and to acknowledge the hard work of students which is recognized with an award at the end of year events.

I must also congratulate the organizing committee on the success of the Christmas Carnivale which was held on 19 December – crowd numbers were up on previous years, which was wonderful to see. The weather, however, was not on side - a big dust storm rolled in, followed by rain which provided the kids with delightful puddles to jump in! The biggest downer was the widespread power outage which lasted until early hours of the next morning. That was very disappointing – local businesses always put in extra effort to make the Carnivale night a good one but, with the outage, owners were left with no choice but to close up early. The crowd stayed on and enjoyed the organized entertainment and kids' activities.

Good News on Projects – Drought Communities Program

Council has received exciting news that \$581,696 has been approved for community projects. This is wonderful news and staff is working hard to meet deadlines with other projects. I realise we have been talking about these projects for months, but there is a process that must be followed and it all takes time **but** who cares about time, when we get approval to go ahead – now the real physical work can begin.

Naturalisation Ceremony

On meeting day Council adjourned at 10.00 a.m. for a Naturalisation Ceremony. I had the pleasure of acting as Presiding Officer when two of our locals received their Certificates of Australian Citizenship – big congratulations to Ram and Kedar on becoming fully-fledged “Aussies”. It was nice to see our two new Australians supported by family and friends who joined us for morning tea following the Ceremony. These two men and their families have been part of our community for some time now and it’s wonderful they decided to take the final step in becoming true blue Aussies!

Now I’ll get on to some of the issues discussed at the meeting which I hope will be of interest to residents.

Local Government Grants Commission

Members of the Local Governments Grants Commission will visit Coonamble on Wednesday 27 February – they will arrive about 1.00 p.m. for a light lunch, then meet with Councillors. The purpose of the meeting is to explain the Commission’s operations and discuss the basis for its calculations of the Financial Assistance Grants. Of course, other issues will also be discussed and may include topics such as rate pegging, capital needs, efficiency, assessment of revenue raising capacity, etc. This meeting is open to members of the public who may wish to come along. The Grants Commission visits all Councils every five or so years – so my colleagues and I look forward to the latest ‘catch-up’.

2018-19 Delivery Program Bi-annual Review

The meeting was presented with the bi-annual review to 31 December 2018 – the purpose of which is to endorse the report and publish it to the community. It is very pleasing to see Council’s achievements over the reporting period, which included the following:

- Secured \$1.6m under the NSW Government Regional Growth Fund – Stronger Country Communities
- \$180,000 grant – expansion of Coonamble waste depot
- \$1.38m – levee bank upgrade
- \$43,000 support / donations to community groups / organisations
- Expansion of lawn cemetery
- Construction of new stables at the showground.

I would like to congratulate management and staff for their tremendous efforts in the reporting period to 31 December – well done!

Riverside Caravan Park Upgrade

The upgrade of the park continues with the perimeter fencing now complete – and how good does it look!! Other works in hand currently are the construction of the residence / office and 2 x 2 bedroom cabins – anticipated delivery June 2019 – entrance landscaping and signage concepts currently being developed. When these works are completed our Riverside Caravan Park will be an attractive ‘stop over’ and an enhancement to the approach of town.

Skate Bowl Project

We are all aware that this project seems to be going on forever – I agree it does seem that way too. However, Cr Walker presented a petition to the meeting, signed by over 40 people in west Coonamble, asking that the skate bowl be located on their side of town. After considerable debate Council resolved that it be constructed in Macdonald Park adjacent to the Bowling Club car park – this area is easily accessible, well lit and has CCTV cameras already covering the location – so I’m

happy that we can now get on with actually constructing the facility and having it operational for the west-side kids to enjoy.

Tooraweenah Road

Council was presented with a comprehensive report from Ken Wilson & Associates on the approximate cost to provide a sealed road carriageway for the full length of the Tooraweenah Road, a distance of 31.4kms. The report indicated that a major apportionment of the sealed length is in need of rehabilitation or heavy patching however some sections are in a serviceable condition and would be retained. The proposal ultimately is to provide a pavement of 9.9m wide with a 7.5m seal, provision of guideposts and centre-line and edge markings. The consultant estimates that to carry out the work expenditure to the tune of \$20,000,000 would be required – and, of course, Council doesn't have that amount! However, as this is an important link road, we decided to request advice from both Federal and State Local Members on grant funding strategies to complete the upgrade. I will keep residents informed of progress.

Drought Buster Dollars

We were informed at the meeting that \$68,850 has been given out in drought-buster cash with \$44,525 returned to Council for reimbursement. This is a great initiative and one that keeps our local economy ticking over. Residents should be aware that the drought-buster cash must be spent locally and I'm sure our business premises are very happy with the results to date.

Council Employees Cricket Team

Council provided \$360 sponsorship to enable a Coonamble Shire Council Employees over 30 years Cricket Team to purchase shirts to play in the Combara Sevens Competition in April. In the letter, requesting support from Council, we were advised that all members are training hard and looking forward to big things in the Comp – who knows – maybe with more time and some intense training – The Ashes could be a goal! Good luck to our team.

Should anyone wish to contact me to discuss issues or concerns, please phone **0427 887 666** – I look forward to representing all our residents and encourage your phone calls.

Ahmad Karanouh

Mayor