

## **FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK**

Council's last meeting was held on Wednesday 13 May 2020, via Skype as we all become more used to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The good news is that the State Government is looking at lifting the imposed restrictions a step at a time.

The feeling in our community is that everyone is ready and rearing to go – it's amazing how many of our businesses have compromised to operate successfully throughout the close down. We have to give those innovative and creative people full marks. The impact of the pandemic has had a profound effect on the community and the economy, but we are resilient and we will overcome these setbacks.

At the meeting I put forward a Mayoral Minute, which my colleagues supported, that Council calls on the Federal and State Governments to urgently deliver comprehensive and multi-faceted financial support and stimulus packages to local government to enable them to continue to operate effectively and provide essential services to their communities. There are several ways that this support can be provided, so I'm hoping the campaign instigated by Local Government NSW will be likewise supported by all other shire councils in NSW.

It's interesting to note that Council has incurred additional costs of \$21,273 directly associated to the pandemic and in the 2020/2021 budget Council has allocated \$530,840 to cover COVID-19 leave provisions in accordance with the NSW Local Government "Splinter" Award. This is a huge amount, however the Director explained that should another round of the virus occur, Council will be in a position to cope with staff leave in accordance with the Award.

Since the April Council Meeting I had a surprise telephone call from the Governor of NSW, Margaret Beazley, AC, QC. She was checking on how we, as a Council and a community, were dealing with the current situation of COVID-19. We had a lengthy discussion and I invited the Governor to visit Coonamble – so here's hoping an opportunity will arise for her to take up the invitation. The phone call was unexpected, however Governor Beazley is obviously interested in hearing of ways smaller, rural communities are getting through this crisis.

Prior to getting on to outcomes from the meeting, I would like to convey my condolences to the family of Neville Owens, who passed away recently. Neville has been a valued member of our community for 70 plus years and contributed so much through his amazing photography. Because of Neville, we have photographic records and evidence of nearly every event, structure and construction that has occurred in our Shire. Council is also the custodian of some 300,000 negatives which are housed in the Archives to be shared and enjoyed by generations to come.

I want to say 'thank you' to the community members who made a submission to Council after viewing the Coonamble Shire Masterplan during its exhibition period, which has now concluded. Submissions will be collated and provided to the engaged consultants for review and consideration. The final Masterplan will be presented to Council at the Ordinary Meeting on 17 June 2020.

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### ***Showgrounds Stimulus Funding Program***

Council has been advised that the NSW Government has released funding to provide for upgrades and maintenance works, which includes the rebuilding of local showgrounds. Early last year Council and the user group representatives agreed there was a need to implement a 10 year Masterplan for the Coonamble showground and each organization using the facility was given the opportunity to present its list of capital works and major maintenance works expected to be required over the next ten years.

In order for all groups to have equal say, staff provided them with a complete list of works required and asked each group to prioritise projects. Council was presented with a report including this information and, in making a decision, agreed to submit a funding application under the NSW Government Showgrounds Stimulus Program to upgrade power and water infrastructure, incorporating the northern end (for camping/horses) and from the southern gate to the new stables on the riverbank.

Congratulations to the Coonamble Show Society on being allocated \$500,000 under the Regional Agricultural Show Development Grants Program for upgrades to the Coonamble showground. The Society has identified several components for expenditure of the funds and the planned works, in conjunction with Council's projects, will enhance the facility and make it a sought after venue for a myriad of uses.

### ***Local Strategic Planning Statement***

Council formally adopted its Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) after having the draft document on public exhibition earlier in the year and receiving two submissions which were considered at the March Council Meeting in conjunction with the process. The LSPS will now be submitted to the NSW Department of Planning. The development and adoption of this document is mandatory and will be used to update key components of other plans to present a consistent strategic direction for Council.

### ***Australia Post – Gulargambone Water Tower Stamp Issue***

Council has been advised by Australia Post that later this year a stamp issue featuring water tower art from around the country is planned. It's wonderful news that the Gulargambone water tower art by Jenny McCracken has been selected. The artist has given her permission for the art to be reproduced and Australia Post has sought permission from Council. Of course, Council provided approval and suggested also the inclusion of the Coonamble water tower by John Murray and Sooty Welsh in the same issue. I'll keep our residents 'posted' on this!

### ***Introduction to New Staff Members***

Prior to the Ordinary Meeting commencing, Council was introduced to three new staff members. They appeared via Skype and are Ms Annie Rindfleish – Payroll HR (7 months employment period); Mr Garry Kimbell – Water & Sewer Operator – Engineering Services (6 months temporary employment) and Ms Kate Storck – Customer Service – Service NSW (full time permanent employment). My colleagues and I welcomed the three new employees and hope they have a rewarding working experience with Council.

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### ***June Council Meeting***

I would like to draw attention in the change of date for the Ordinary Meeting of Council in June. The new date is Wednesday 17 June 2020. This was necessary to meet the exhibition period of Council's draft Operational Plan, Budget and Fees and Charges. It is a requirement that documents on public exhibition be displayed for 28 days and the new date fits that requirement.

### ***Funding***

I am pleased to be able to inform the community that during the last week Council has been notified of \$719,000 of funding to be spent in the community. The Federal Member for Parkes, Mark Coulton, informed us that the Federal Government has approved an amount of \$218,988 under its Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program. The money will be used to reseal the runway, reinstate line-marking and complete an animal exclusion fence.

The other good news came from Coonamble Show Society Inc which was successful in securing funding of \$500,000 for major upgrades and improvement works at Coonamble Showground. The funding is through the Regional Agricultural Show Development Grants Program and will be used to replace arena fencing; refurbishment and expansion of horse/cattle complex; rebuild of poultry pavilion; extension of main pavilion. A small portion of the grant funding will also be allocated to upgrades to water infrastructure at the horse/cattle complex. Congratulations to the Show Society for its successful funding application!

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

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