

From the Mayor

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

I am pleased to be again reporting to you following the September 2008 Local Government Elections and the subsequent Mayoral Election. It is a honour to be the Mayor of this wonderful Shire and I, along with the new Council, am looking forward to a rewarding and exciting four years.

Budget 2010

The budget for the upcoming year is extremely tight due to the severe drop in interest rates and the superannuation additional levy imposed on Council. Where in previous years there has been the capacity to undertake significant infrastructure improvements, the coming year will see the elimination of continuation of these vital works. Despite the slashing of expenses, Council has been able to maintain its workforce which will ensure the economic integrity of the community. The global crisis has reached Coonamble Shire but due to the sound financial position, we should be able to sustain the downturn.

The proposed capital works for the coming year include:

- Depot improvements – including wash bay that will ensure compliance with environmental provisions.
- Flood mitigation works in the form of levee repairs.
- Expansion of Council's Buckley Drive industrial estate.
- Continuation of the water and sewerage mains replacements in all urban areas.
- Development of the water treatment plant to remove excess iron from the water.
- Rewiring of the Gulargambone War Memorial and Mechanics Institute Hall.

Council has been able to balance its budget within the rate-pegging limit set by the Minister for Local Government, however the proposal to force Council into an Alliance for water and sewerage functions has resulted in higher increases.

Community Involvement

Council is very pleased with the high level of both infrastructure and community projects achieved over the last year and will again continue in 2010. These include:

- Finalisation of timber bridge replacement program – Council has now replaced all timber bridges and is proud of this achievement.
- Coonamble Showground Pavilion was replaced and became operational in time for the Annual Show and the Vibe Alive event.
- Skate Park became operational and is warmly received by the youth of Coonamble and the envy of youth in many other centres.

- Restoration of flood damage caused to Council's road network by the December 2007 floods has been completed.
- The staged development of Macdonald and Smith Parks was progressed and Council continues to receive positive feedback.
- Ongoing support provided to Vibe Alive, Moorambilla Festival, NSW Women's Gathering, Rodeo & Campdraft, Marthaguy Picnic Races, Waste2Art Exhibition, International Women's Day, Heritage Open Day, etc.
- Council's efforts in the area of expanding existing businesses, seeking new business proponents and generally supporting the business community are proving essential in the progressing of economic development within the Shire.

Sister City Relationship – Coonamble & Campbelltown

The ongoing sister city relationship with Campbelltown City Council continues to expand with positive results flowing from staff exchanges, professional data interaction, training cooperation being added to the reciprocal visits by senior management and councillors and the financial support of events by both Councils.

Air Services

The loss of commercial flights to Coonamble is proving inconvenient for the community, businesses and medical services. Whilst the Coonamble leg of the service was sparingly utilised, Council continues to seek a replacement provider, but may have its work cut out without the return of the Federal Government subsidy which was deleted by the Rudd Government.

Staffing

The loss of Council's Director of Engineering was a massive blow to the continuity of service levels and project development. Council is very fortunate to have gained the services of Mr Don Gamage who returns to Coonamble after developing his professional expertise across Australia. Mr Matthew Cock has now attained full status as a health and building surveyor and assumes the role of Manager – Environmental Services with Council. Matt is to be congratulated on undertaking hundreds of hours' study to achieve a significant milestone.

Federal Government Funding

My attendance in Canberra in November 2008 was underscored by Council being granted \$100,000. Allocation was made to the Quambone Hall, Gulargambone Park fencing, shade covering at Macdonald Park, seating for the river walk and kiosk and storeroom at the netball courts in Smith Park. In June 2009 a further \$30,000 was granted under the same program. Council has been unsuccessful with its applications for funding under the Strategic Component of the grant program which is determined on an Australia-wide competitive basis.

Wandering Dogs

Numerous dog attacks have occurred over the past twelve months in both Coonamble and Gulargambone which necessitate mandatory reporting to the Department of Local Government. Increased patrols and a firmer attitude to the dog regulations have been necessary to reduce the number of dogs wandering unattended in public places without the level of success Council hoped to achieve. Identification of changes to procedures will continue to be sought to find a positive solution.

Land Use Planning

The ongoing development of a Land Use Strategy reached its conclusion in June 2009 with the draft strategy being the subject of many submissions from the community. Once those submissions have been addressed, Council will move to the development of a new Local Environmental Plan for the Shire.

Conclusion

The new Council is starting to settle in to its role and the community should see some positive outcomes from the hard work carried out by its representatives as they become conversant with the significant restrictions placed on Council operations. Hopefully the world-wide negative impacts will start to mitigate in the near future and we can return to being able to achieve the improvements of which the community is worthy.

TIM HORAN

Mayor