

MURRAY Matters

OCTOBER 2023

Your council news & updates



Culture and Capability Project: Mathoura and Wakool

Last term Council engaged South West Arts to run NAIDOC workshops at the local primary schools in Wakool and Mathoura. Hosted by Wamba Wamba Artist, Deb Flower, the workshops showcased the ancient tradition of string making and weaving.

Students discovered how the techniques were used by the First Nations communities around the region and how the practice is used today. Deb also talked about the use of natural materials including animal pelts and bird feathers and their cultural importance to First Nations communities in everyday living and trade.

Students had hands-on experience with string making using natural grasses, feathers and seeds and produced their very own key-chains to take home.

The workshops were very well received by all involved and we look forward to bringing more of these to our local schools in the future.



Who will you be nominating for an Australia Day Award?

Nominations for Council's 2024 Australia Day Awards are now open.

Residents and community members are encouraged to nominate individuals or groups who have made an outstanding contribution to the local community.

The awards are a great opportunity to acknowledge those individuals who volunteer so much of their time to ensure community services, initiatives and other important activities continue to prosper across our council area.

Nominations are currently being accepted in the following award categories:

- Citizen of the Year
- Young Citizen of the Year
- Sports person of the Year
- Young Sports person of the Year
- Community Event of the Year
- Community Group of the Year
- Arts/Cultural Award (person or group)

Nominations can be completed via Council's Your Say platform:

www.yoursay.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au

From volunteers to innovators, our area is full of remarkable people. Help us honour them by nominating in the Australia Day awards!

Nominations close 12 November 2023.

TOP NEWS *inside*

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From the Mayor's desk...

I'm pleased to be writing this column as the newly elected Mayor of Murray River Council as we enter the final year of this current council term.

Although there are leadership changes in the chambers, we remain a positive and supportive team who are well equipped to deal with continuing challenges and new opportunities.

I'm pleased to be working with my fellow councillors, Deputy Mayor Neil Gorey and Council staff to support development and growth across the area whilst further working towards strengthening our ongoing financial viability.

Councils across the state are facing dramatic operational challenges to 'do more with less' and our Council is particularly affected because of the floods and the costs associated with our rapid growth. Furthermore, rate income is well below inflation, so the cost to maintain our large asset base is becoming increasingly unsustainable. So, this coming year we need to make some tough decisions to keep us on the right track. A big part of this will be streamlining what assets we are 'investing' in: this might mean selling-off some assets (like a pocket of unused land), reducing maintenance on others, or consolidating efforts in particular areas to invest in one good space or facility (rather than several). The community will be kept informed as this evolves.

One thing is for sure: the process to become financially sustainable won't be easy, it won't be quick either, as there is no silver bullet. But what these efforts will do is lower the overall risk to ratepayers, who fund the ongoing viability of the community.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to make special mention of Chris Bilkey for his invaluable guidance as Mayor over the last 6 years. He has put a lot of energy into his role and his passion and support for the local community is a credit to him.

He has the ability to think strategically across social, economic and environmental issues and has been widely recognised amongst our peers for his leadership and advocacy efforts; particularly with regard to the development of RAMJO's Water Position Paper and his leadership through the flood and pandemic events.

On behalf of my fellow councillors and the community: thank you Chris.

Cr Frank Crawley



Departing mayor Chris Bilkey congratulates our new mayor, Frank Crawley.

Pre-loved is planet friendly

As part of a commitment to reducing waste and creating a circular economy, we're supporting Australia's 'festival of pre-loved stuff' this Spring.

With tens of thousands of garage sales happening across Australia on 11-12 and 18-19 November, **Garage Sale Trail** is a great chance to turn your stash into cash or shop great finds at retro prices. You can register for free to host your own sale, or bag a bargain by attending a sale near you. With free registration, how-to guides and promotional resources, its garage sales made easy over two big weekends.

And....before the sale weekends there will be a series of online talks featuring an all-star cast of experts and familiar faces sharing their sustainable living tips that are kind on both planet and pocket. Featuring presenters Barry du Bois and Veronica Milsom—alongside experts in secondhand selling, styling and the circular economy—the Trail Tutorials are hosted online and are free to attend.



To register or find out more, head to:

www.garagesaletrail.com.au

Council meeting dates

Get your diaries out as these are the council meeting dates for the coming year. Most are in Moama at the Council Chambers, or you can livestream via our website. Meetings commence at 1pm. We'll also be taking a few meetings on the road again- with the first one next month in Moulamein.



28 November 2023 – Moulamein
12 December 2023
23 January 2024
27 February 2024 - Barham
26 March 2024
23 April 2024
28 May 2024 - Mathoura
25 June 2024
23 July 2024
27 August 2024

WORKING TOWARDS A *Sustainable* MRC



We recently started the conversation around the long-term sustainability of council and looking at ways to reduce expenditure. A major aspect of this commenced last year with our asset review project where we looked at buildings, facilities, recreational and open spaces as well as Council-owned land. Through this we discovered that there are a number of assets within Council's portfolio that may not be providing value to the community like they once did and that, in many cases, the cost to the ratepayer is outweighing the need.

Currently, we maintain one building for every 26.5 rate notices, or one building for every 38 residents. This is not financially sustainable and has the potential to worsen as Council seeks to provide new or upgraded assets to meet changes in regulation, standards and community need. Put simply: we own too much of just about everything, all of which is required to be maintained, insured, depreciated, and eventually replaced.

There are many hidden and ongoing costs associated with owning public assets and that cost is, in the most part, funded by ratepayers. Even if a local organisation receives a grant that fully covers the cost of a new building, there are ongoing maintenance, depreciation and insurance costs that council covers in the longer term. In fact, a large portion of our current rate income is funding asset depreciation and in some cases funding assets that aren't even used anymore.

So, in an effort to address this, we will be looking to streamline what assets we are 'investing' in through an ongoing rationalisation process over the next couple of years. We will also be investigating the option of a Special Rates Variation (SRV) in the coming months, which will require engagement with Community Focus Groups.

The asset rationalisation process is like tidying up your finances, but in this instance, it relates to council. It's the process of carefully reviewing all the properties, buildings, and equipment we own to make sure they're being used efficiently. Just like you'd declutter your home to save money and space, asset rationalisation is one action we can take to make better use of our resources by selling, repurposing, or consolidating assets (like buildings, open park space and/or land) that are no longer needed or provide very little use.

We've already got the background information to aid this process through our asset review. We had direct engagement with users, clubs and groups along with

survey-based feedback from users of our parks and open spaces. This is now being reviewed and a number of recommendations will be made in early 2024. Council wants to assure residents that the asset rationalisation process is focused on better utilising our community assets and investing in solutions that bring benefits to the whole community.

We'll continue to update the community when we have clearly defined rationalisation options for each asset. We will be starting with unused pockets of land.

In the meantime, you can take a look at our Your Say platform to get a more comprehensive history of the process to-date, and what to expect in the future. Or, here's some examples of the types of things we'll be looking at through the rationalisation process:



Building-related considerations:

- Old sheds that are in poor condition
- Toilet blocks that are non-compliant, not connected to a sewerage system and not servicing a community asset
- Tennis court shelters at a court that is no longer being used
- Areas where we can consolidate several services into one building or location rather than multiple locations.



Open Spaces/Land considerations:

- Open space/parcel of land that is not being frequently used will likely be seen as surplus to community need and will be considered for rationalisation.
- A beautified open space that is a stormwater basin: There are currently many of these spaces classified as 'community land' (park) which is incorrect, as they really only serve as a stormwater drainage area. So, in this instance the land categorisation may be changed to reflect its intended use (not a park), meaning service levels for those stormwater basins will be reduced. This might mean they are no longer maintained to their current level: ie no longer mown or have irrigated green areas.

There are other more complex examples that will fall under the process that will be detailed once more concrete scenarios are developed.

Keep connected at yoursay.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au

Moama Soundshell playspace - tick!



We've completed stage-one works at the new playground behind Moama's Skate Park. This space has replaced the outdated equipment that was formerly behind the soundshell.

The space has been designed to be completed in three stages with the first stage including an all-access luna carousel, swing set with seat swing and toddler swing, rocker, drinking fountain, accessible picnic table, shelter, art installations, native garden areas, bins, seating, concrete all access path, rubber ground cover near and around the play equipment and some log steppers.

New Arts and Culture Strategy

We're currently developing an Arts and Culture Strategy to help guide Council's involvement and investment in arts and cultural activities, festivals and events.

To help guide its development, we recently held a series of pop-up sessions across the council where community members shared their thoughts, perspectives and experiences. We are also liaising directly with agencies and groups in the creative sector to inform the development of the document.

The next step will be a draft Strategy which will come back to the community for review. Keep an eye out for this over the next few months, as your thoughts will help determine the direction of our arts and cultural activities over the coming years.

Automated Depot update

The construction of the Automated Depot at our Moama Waste Facility is just around the corner, with preliminary earthworks finalised and contractors ready to get on site!

Once complete, the Automated Depot will house machines that process large volumes of containers, sort them, count them and provide refunds to users. This will provide a more suitable option for people with large volumes of material and allow the reverse vending machine to be used for its intended purpose.

We know our community are enthusiastic recyclers... so we look forward to providing more updates as this project nears completion. We anticipate the depot will be open to the public early next year.

Works on the cards for Lake Moulamein Reserve

Lake Moulamein Reserve will soon receive a face-lift after Council secured \$270,063 under Round 5 of the NSW's Government's Stronger Country Communities Fund.

The funding will support the addition of accessible and inclusive infrastructure enhancements to the shared spaces within the lake surrounds.

Works will include the installation of new concrete paths that will better connect existing facilities and the lake, along with additional landscaping to provide shade and beautification.

The reserve will also be enhanced with a new BBQ area, drinking fountain, new seating around the lake, new fencing and new waste bin holders.

The installation of solar lighting will also activate the space at night and improve user safety. Project works are expected to be undertaken towards the end of the year following consultation with local user groups.



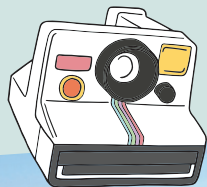
Barham water pressure project

Exciting times are ahead for the township of Barham with the installation of the new filtered water booster pump to be completed prior to Christmas this year.

The project has been ticking along over the last 12 months, where we initially completed some maintenance work and detailed modelling on flows to help provide a permanent solution to the pressure issues.

The first major step in the upgrade process then occurred in July this year, when Barham's filtered water network was shutdown for an afternoon to install some new valves at the water treatment plant. We're now well and truly in the construction phase, with the pump set on site and fittings being fabricated.

Once the project is complete, residents should see some significant improvements to their filtered water pressure!



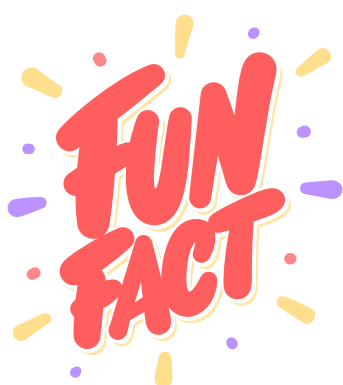
Works SNAPS



Drone imagery of completed Wakool Road reconstruction. Well done to our team who finished the works despite some uncontrollable delays with ground conditions and weather.



The team recently completed the all-access asphalt walking track in Murray Downs, offering better connection from Murray Downs Drive to the bridge.



Just over 3,500 potholes have been attended to since February this year under the Fixing Local Road Pothole Repair Round.

That totals an area of 18,000m²!

The works follow damage from the 2022 flood event and will increase as the weather warms up to meet the completion deadline of December 31 this year.

Our Biosecurity Team are visiting you to help with weed control

Our Biosecurity Team are out and about visiting properties, and they could be in your area soon.

As part of our on-going commitment and responsibility to reduce the impact of noxious weeds on our environment, Council is required to carry out property inspections across the Local Government Area.

Through these inspections, our Biosecurity Team can assist landholders with weed identification on their property and can also provide specialist advice on control techniques for priority weeds on private land.

This is particularly important this time of year as the weather warms up, and is also timely following the effects the flood event had on growing conditions.

To organise for a member of Council's Biosecurity Team to undertake an inspection of your property, or to assist in weed identification or give advice on control techniques, contact the Team on 1300 087 004.



Borrow the 'save power kit'!

A program to help people save power (and hopefully money!) is now available for loan at Mathoura and Barham Libraries as part of the NSW Government's Home Energy Action Program.

The 'Save Power Kit' contains a range of practical tools including a power monitor to work out how much power your appliances are using, an infrared thermometer to check for drafts and a thermometer to test heating and cooling as well as a stopwatch and compass.

With energy costs rising fast, having a sustainable home is more important than ever, and we've had some real examples of residents discovering some unexpected appliances that were drawing a lot of energy! Why not try it yourself? If you would like to borrow a kit please visit one of our libraries or call 1300 087 004.



Managing your water use just got easier! Discover MiWater....

Residents can now monitor their water consumption anytime, anywhere, and all for free!

MiWater is an online customer portal where you can access all the information about water use at your property.

Sign up to track your daily water usage and keep an eye on how much it's costing. You can also choose your own water consumption targets and set up alerts to warn you if these targets have been or are likely to be exceeded.

Customers can add any of their properties to their MiWater profile and give others, including tenants and real estate agents, access to view water usage information.

Interested? Find out more at www.murrayriver.nsw.gov.au/miwater



MiWater

Join the email list

Join our council email database and stay in the loop on the latest community, business and tourism initiatives straight from our Economic Development Team to your inbox!

Simply head to the home page of our website and click on the link to sign up. Easy!



Let's get clearing!

With summer just around the corner, Council Officers have been undertaking property inspections across the region with the aim of reducing fire fuel loads.

With the first round of inspections now complete, letters have been sent to property owners requesting removal of vegetation. Follow-up inspections are now also underway and it is great to see many properties have already been slashed and cleared before the weather really heats up.

This is an important activity that we need to do every summer to keep our properties- and our neighbours' properties - free from fire hazards. Failure to comply can result in penalties, so let's get mowing!



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