

MISSING FOR A DECADE

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INSIDE

CONSTRAINED

ANDREW PALOCZI

LOCAL municipal councils representing relatively small populations face extra challenges in generating sufficient revenue.

Both Loddon Shire Council and the neighbouring Gannawarra Shire Council are forced to rely heavily on financial grants from other levels of government in order to meet the service requirements of their residents and business operators.

Loddon Shire Council chief executive officer, Phil Pinyon explained how much of a challenge the region's small population presents in that municipality.

"Our own-sourced revenue is probably only about a third, roughly, of our overall income and that's in terms of rates.

"Rates generally consist of a larger proportion of a council's revenue than that, so we've got quite a small rate reliance by comparison which means we're reliant on other sources of income."

Mr Pinyon pointed out that Loddon was also unable to generate funds through charges such as parking fees, explaining such revenue streams can bring in millions of dollars for some suburban councils.

He spoke of the difficulties in being "able to maintain things to a sufficiently high standard," given the restrictions on income.

Mr Pinyon said councils generally have far less revenue-raising capacity than State and Federal governments, with Federal Government bringing in by far the most.

Rates reliance diminished

This leads to a situation where councils are unable to independently raise sufficient revenue to fund all the services and infrastructure requirements they are responsible for providing in their regions.

"So, there's that imbalance which then requires a transfer of funds from those parts of government that make the money to those parts that spend the money, that don't have enough revenue raising capacity."

He also discussed the ongoing importance of keeping an eye out for ways to increase efficiency.

Mr Pinyon highlighted the potential for council to provide more efficient services to the community through the introduction of improved information technology.

He said that Loddon Shire Council is involved in a project with a group of other councils, working on strategies for such improvements.

He stressed that the objective behind introducing more efficient computer systems is not to reduce staff, but to be able to provide better services with the resources council has.

"Only about 40 per cent of our income comes from rating revenue," Gannawarra Shire Council chief executive officer, Tom O'Reilly said.

"We are a grant-dependent council. If we didn't receive grants there'd be a major por-

tion of our capital works program we wouldn't be able to deliver.

"Half of our operating services we wouldn't be able to deliver.

"That's a fact of life with small rural councils across Victoria, with very large land areas and very small populations relative to them."

Mr O'Reilly gave the example of the proposed Quambatook sustainable recreational water project, referred to in the council's draft budget document for 2019-20.

He explained the \$610,000 project will only proceed if grant funding for half that sum can be obtained, matching the figure council is prepared to contribute.

For that proposed project, he said the council will seek funding through either The Regional Growth Fund, or Building Better Regions Fund, both of which are federal funding schemes.

Success in obtaining the required funding is far from certain, with the application process a highly competitive one.

Mr O'Reilly made a submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, to assist that body with its inquiry into the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils.

The resultant final report was submitted to the Victorian State Parliament in March

2018.

The bipartisan committee put forward 14 recommendations in the report.

"Adem Somyurek (Victorian Minister for Local Government) said 'We will be responding to each of those 14 recommendations.'

"One of the recommendations was for a rating review," Mr O'Reilly said.

"But the key one was that the State Government establish a new grants program designed to assist small rural councils."

However, as committee chair, Josh Bull outlined in his foreword to the report, increased funding for councils facing revenue-raising challenges is only part of the equation.

"There is a need to increase grants to certain councils, especially the rural councils with smaller populations.

"At the same time, councils' costs need to be brought down. There needs to be a reconsideration of which responsibilities councils should be required to undertake.

"There needs to be support for councils to identify and implement efficiencies."

Not all cost cutting measures result in improved efficiency as demonstrated by a comment made by Mr O'Reilly to the report committee, in his then capacity as director of corporate services for Gannawarra Shire Council.

"Over the last two years there has been a reduction in staff numbers, and I would contend that we are running on the bare minimum in terms of staffing resources and our capacity to deal with the administrative burden."

Your say on trespassing

DISTRICT residents are being encouraged to have their say to help fix farm trespass laws, with a parliamentary inquiry into the issue now taking public submissions.

The Member for Murray Plains, Peter Walsh said that the inquiry will help determine the best ways to strengthen laws to protect Victorian farmers against farm trespass, following the alarming action of brazen extreme activists who have been illegally entering farms and stealing livestock.

"Farmers deserve laws that protect them against activists illegally coming on to their farms and stealing livestock," Mr Walsh said.

"It's clear the laws need fixing when law-breaking activists get fines of just \$1 - it's just a slap on the wrist that only emboldens illegal activists, instead of deterring them."

Visit www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc/article/4187 for detail on how to have your say.

Written submissions will be accepted until August 2. The inquiry will deliver its final report by November 28.

Shooting incident charges

A MINCHA man has been released on bail after being arrested over an early-morning incident at his property last week. A woman, aged 21, was admitted to hospital with non life-threatening injuries.

See JENNY DENTON'S report on Page 2



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Circulating throughout the Shire of Loddon and surrounding areas.

Established 1995 -
Published every Tuesday

Editorial

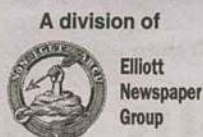
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Published by Ken Jenkins for Gannawarra Times (Kerang) Pty Ltd (ABN 81 097 210 654) at 24 Scoresby Street, Kerang, 3579, and printed at Sunraysia Publishing Company Pty Ltd (ABN 34 004 231 261) at 22 Deakin Avenue, Mildura, 3500. Responsibility for election comment is accepted by the editor.

Matching feed to livestock goals



AGRICULTURE Victoria is inviting livestock producers to a livestock feeding workshop on Thursday, June 27 at the Wedderburn Golf Club from 1.30pm to 4.30pm.

The workshop will be conducted by ruminant nutritionist, cattle veterinarian/consultant and beef producer, Dr Paul Cusack. He has conducted extensive research into yard weaning and lot feeding systems, including major studies into bovine respiratory disease, and is regarded as a leading expert in the field.

Workshop topics include: making the most out of green feed, are mixed crops the best option for grazing?, getting more from grazing cereals, when to feed what to get the most out of your livestock, and more.

Afternoon tea will be provided at the workshop, please RSVP for catering purposes by 25 June via Eventbrite at <https://bit.ly/2wJPMV1>

If you are unable to register online or would like more information, please contact Agriculture Victoria land management extension officer, Darryl Pearl on 0417 432 711, Darryl.Pearl@ecodev.vic.gov.au or mixed farming development officer, Rachel Coombes on 0436 001 258, Rachel.Coombes@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Works update

Works to replace the Murphy Creek bridge at Woodstock Road are currently under way. The replacement bridge will ensure that the road and bridge has adequate capacity to incorporate all classes

of heavy vehicles.

Please note that the bridge remains closed while replacement works continue. It is expected the bridge will be closed until mid-July.

The works have been made possible through funding of \$350,000 from the Commonwealth's Bridges Renewal Program - this funding has been matched by council.

In other works news, culvert and concrete works for the replacement of Connors Road bridge are complete, with roadworks on the project to be finished over the coming weeks. Works for the construction and installation of culverts and crossings on Mologa-Durham Ox Road and Hudson Lane are expected to be complete by the end of this week.

The stormwater drainage upgrade at Verdon Street in Inglewood is in its final stages, with paving expected to be finished (and the project completed) by the end of June.

Drainage works at Sugargum Drive in Bridgewater are currently under way and are anticipated to be completed by mid-July.

Footpath works are continuing with crews now moving on to Bridgewater and Wedderburn. The works involve the construction of concrete footpaths and other associated improvements, providing an all-weather footpath and improved connectivity and safety for pedestrians.

In total, 729 metres of footpath will be constructed, with works taking place in Wedderburn, Boort, Newbridge, Bridgewater and Mitiamo.

In terms of the grading program, from April 1 this year to the start of June, 262 kilometres of gravel roads have been inspected with 100 kilometres of them requiring grading.

Seek advice

Agriculture Victoria is reminding farm business owners to seek assistance from their accountant or professional adviser and/or speak with the Australian Tax Office about preparing their business for the end of the financial year.

Seek financial advice and assistance prior to June 30.

Each farmer will have their own individual and business circumstances and it is important to seek advice to discuss their best options especially in times of drought and dry seasonal conditions.

Service and support is also available from the Rural Financial Counselling Service. You can call Rural Financial Counselling Service - North West on 1300 769 489 or (03) 5022 0799.

Waste Info App

It has been quite a while since I have mentioned the Loddon Mallee Waste Info App, and given the focus in recent columns around waste and recycling, I thought it was worth a reminder.

This free app has been developed to help Loddon Shire residents make quick and simple waste and recycling decisions, while aiming to reduce contamination and increase recycling levels.

The app provides you with a personalised bin collection calendar (with optional reminders) and an A to Z list of materials and images showing which bin to put materials in. It also offers information, hints and tips to help with waste management, provides details about Council's waste and recycling services and facilities (including contact details, opening times and maps), and lets you report a problem directly to Council.

The app even has push notifications to let you know of changes to collection dates, events and programs.

The app is available through the App Store or Google Play. Just search for "Loddon Mallee Waste" and download on your device.

Did you know?

According to the Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group, recovering old electronics instead of throwing them in the bin means valuable materials can be reused to produce new items.

To help recover more of these materials, the Victorian Government is introducing a ban on e-waste in any bin or landfill site starting July 1, 2019. To find out more go to <http://ewaste.vic.gov.au>



Mr Elraoui's property.

Man arrested over shooting incident

JENNY DENTON

A MINCHA man feared for his life when he shot a woman in an early-morning incident, according to his son.

A 21-year-old woman from Epsom in Bendigo was taken to Bendigo Health with non-life threatening injuries after being shot in the back at around 3.30am on Tuesday, police said.

Bendigo Magistrates' Court was told on Wednesday that the man allegedly shot the woman with a .223 semi-automatic assault rifle because he believed that he was being robbed.

Abdul Elraoui, 69, was arrested by police at the scene and later charged with a number of offences, including reckless conduct endangering life, intentionally causing injury and being a prohibited person using a firearm.

He was released on bail on the condition that he reside with his son at Sunshine. He will appear again at Bendigo for a committal mention on October 2.

Mr Elraoui's son, Neza, said the victim of the shooting was among a group of people who had broken into his father's Mincha-Canary Island Road property, which had already been burgled three times in the last month.

His father is a collector or "hoarder", who had been targeted by thieves most recently just a week before, with the burglars on each occasion spending up to an hour going through his things, he said.

"There's a lot of stuff in there. They were

picking through and pinching everything they could - power tools, chainsaws, anything they could," said Neza.

In one of the break-ins Mr Elraoui's dog, a kelpie, had gone missing, presumed stolen.

Neza said his father called him at around 3.40am, after the shooting occurred.

"He's woken up to some noises because he's been on edge for the last month. He's looked out the window and seen two or three cars and a group of people on the property.

"The gate was padlocked and it had been cut open and there was a group of people at 3.30am inside his property. He's been in fear for his life. He's an elderly man. He's very old and fragile."

According to Neza, his father intended to scare the intruders not to shoot them.

After he fired three or four shots, the group took off in their cars, and one of them crashed into the fence of the property opposite, he said.

The woman who was injured and two male companions then took refuge in the neighbour's house, where they stayed until police instructed the neighbour to drive them to a nearby location, on Findlays Road, from where the woman was taken to an ambulance.

The two men who had been with her were at Findlays Road with police for several hours on Tuesday morning and were assisting them with their inquiries, but had not been charged, police said.

Two neighbours confirmed that Mr Elraoui had been experiencing break-ins.

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