



# GANNAWARRA Times

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## A LABOUR OF LOVE

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## LAST STAND

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# House destroyed

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INVESTIGATORS have not yet determined the cause of a fire which destroyed a house in Kerang in the early hours of Wednesday.

The Mourilyan Street property was gutted by the fire, which was reported just after 2am.

Kerang Police, Leading Senior Constable Dale Petri, said a neighbour who awoke to the sound of the flames contacted emergency services.

"He heard it, rang triple-0, ran across the road and yelled out to see if there was anyone in there," LSC Petri said.

"He then ran to the neighbour's house to get her out."

Neighbouring property owner Ronda Boulton said she was awoken by the bang on the door.

"I was asleep in bed and they came and woke me up and told me to get out," Ms Boulton said.

Peter Hall, who lives around the corner in Carbine Street, said he heard the town siren and then the crackling of the fire.

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The Mourilyan Street property was engulfed in flames shortly after 2am. Picture: JENNY DENTON

# Tensions surface at council meeting

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TENSIONS that have been simmering for more than a year between councillors at the Gannawarra Shire Council exploded publicly at its monthly meeting on Wednesday night.

They arose as Patchell ward councillor and former mayor Brian Gibson moved a motion in urgent business alleging bullying behaviour by councillors Mark Arians and Sonia Wright.

The motion calls for an independent arbiter to be appointed to investigate alleged breaches of

the councillor code of conduct, including failure to act with integrity and disrespectful treatment of council staff.

It also requires the mayor to "provide guidance to Cr Arians and Cr Wright to immediately cease their bullying behaviour" and for a specially constituted panel to make a finding of serious misconduct against them if their response to that direction isn't satisfactory.

Cr Wright, who had no warning of the motion, voted for it, and said she welcomed the development.

"I'm actually really grateful to finally be given a chance to have an

independent arbiter to come in and speak to us," Cr Wright told the council.

"This is something that has been requested from Cr Arians and myself on certain issues and it's been denied."

The meeting heard that a WorkSafe investigation had been underway, which councillors received a report about on Wednesday.

The call by Peter Walsh, the Member for Murray Plains, in state parliament for an inquiry into the council was also referred to.

Proceedings erupted in a series of points of order, with Cr Arians describing Cr Gibson's motion as

"bullying by ambush" and leaving the chamber.

"This continual bullying has done me harm, you are harming me now," Cr Arians said.

"I will not tolerate it, I will leave," Cr Arians said.

Voting in favour of Cr Gibson's motion were councillors Basile, Gibson, Tasker, Learmonth, and Wright, with Cr Gillingham abstaining and Cr Arians absent.

Cr Arians later returned to the chamber.

Speaking after the meeting, Cr Gibson was tight-lipped about the conflict and the action he had initiated.

"All I can say is, it's a process I initiated, and it will come back to council once the process has been followed," Cr Gibson said.

Cr Wright said that the problems between councillors, which involved CEO Tom O'Reilly, dated back about two years to the time of the initial Cohuna airport expansion proposal.

Mr O'Reilly told the Gannawarra Times that a WorkSafe investigation which had been initiated by a councillor, commenced in August and was completed in October.

Mr O'Reilly said WorkSafe made no adverse findings against the council.

## Weather

TODAY

Sunny, 11-29



TOMORROW

Mostly sunny, 11-27



SUNDAY

Sunny, 10-30



MONDAY

Partly cloudy, 11-34



TUESDAY

Partly cloudy, 13-25



# GUNBOWER PACING CUP

Sunday, December 8, 2019 at Gunbower Racecourse Reserve

GREAT FAMILY FUN!

Free kids activities on course

• BOOKMAKER • PONY TROTS

• WATER SLIDE • MONSTER CROCODILE & MORE

VIP Umbrella Package \$60 or bookings of 10 \$500

FREE BUS SERVICES — BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

Leaving Cohuna (Gateway) at 12pm

On course prizes



Peter 0402 802 170, Adam 0438 871 421

gunbowerharness

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## Orchestrated shaming

AT WEDNESDAY night's council meeting, a core group of four councillors engaged in a planned and orchestrated public shaming exercise.

Internal processes were bypassed to enable them to smear two of their fellow councillors.

This was a vain, self-serving attempt to deflect government attention from their own behaviour and the concerns of a worried community.

We will continue to represent our community and attempt to work for our community.

We welcome independent oversight and look forward to a full and thorough investigation.

Councillors representing their community and speaking on their behalf should be praised and not targeted.

Gannawarra Shire Council has never experienced the low community satisfaction levels that currently exist.

Our community groups are being bypassed. Consultation with some community groups we are affiliated with, including Cohuna progress, Kerang progress, Gannawarra liveability chamber and the Kerang Agricultural Society are at an all time low.

Our community's future should be put before some councillors' desire to silence their peers and subvert their ongoing attempts to ensure council remains open, transparent and accessible.

We support our local state member of parliament's call for a monitor to be placed in the Gannawarra Shire Council until the next elections in October 2020.

Our community deserves better.

Cr Mark Arians  
Cr Sonia Wright

## Letters to the editor

Gannawarra Times prefers letters to the editor to be no more than 300 words and they must indicate the author's name, address (not a post office box) and daytime telephone number for verification.

By submitting a letter for publication the author agrees that they may be edited for legal, space or other reasons.

Letters with pen names will generally not be considered for publication.

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## Vandalism

BETWEEN November 15 and 16, at least three vehicles in the Kerang area were graffitied using a black texta.

Meanwhile, police said vandals used spray paint and a white line-marker to deface the pavilion at the Kerang Football Netball Club last Saturday.

Sergeant Tony Keely of Kerang Police said offenders gained entry to the pavilion between 11am and midday when the doors were left open to provide access to the female toilets.

He said a small shed and brick wall on the first floor were marked with paint, as well as the carpet and walls, both internally and externally.

## Theft

IN EARLY November, a trailer was stolen from Boundary Street, Kerang.

## Damage to property

AT ABOUT 5.30pm on Friday, November 8, a section of a 750 metre lay flat hose has been damaged by a knife or something similar.

The hose was being used to water Red Gums at the River Track in Koondrook.

In a separate incident, which occurred between late October and Wednesday, November 13, damage has been caused to a caravan stored at the end of Park Road, Kerang.

# Code Red declared

YESTERDAY'S Code Red fire danger rating saw buses cancelled across the district, with some organisations and businesses encouraging staff living in rural areas to take the day off.

It is the first time a Code Red has been declared in Victoria since 2010.

The rating, which is the highest in the system, signals catastrophic grass and bushfire conditions that would make fires uncontrollable.

Victoria's Emergency Services Commissioner encouraged residents in the Mallee and Northern Country regions to consider evacuating their homes yesterday.

The Gannawarra Shire Council said its care staff were keeping in touch with vulnerable and isolated clients.

## Neighbourhood 'safer places' in the Gannawarra Shire:

Koondrook Football Oval, Penglase Street (opposite Reserve Street),  
Murrabit Football Oval, Browning Avenue (opposite Danson Street),  
Kerang Racecourse, Kerang-Koondrook Road (entry also off Park Road),  
Cohuna Secondary College Oval, Murray Valley Highway, at Cohuna.

For heat-related health issues phone **NURSE-ON-CALL** on 1300 60 60 24.  
For life-threatening emergencies dial Triple-Zero (000).

## FURTHER INFORMATION:

[gannawarra.vic.gov.au](http://gannawarra.vic.gov.au), [facebook.com/gannawarra](https://facebook.com/gannawarra),  
[betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au), [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au)



CFA investigators and Swan Hill CIU were at the scene on Thursday morning. Pictures: JENNY DENTON

# HOUSE DESTROYED

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"WHEN we got here, there was a massive glow, it was well and truly alight," Mr Hall said.

"The smoke was pretty thick and the tree out the front went up."

"There were embers everywhere."

Fellow Carbine Street resident, Rick Igoo, said he could see the fire from his bedroom window.

He and his cousin, Nathan Igoo, were overwhelmed by smoke when they tried to reach the scene.

"We came outside and the street was full of smoke."

"All you could smell was burning."

"We went to the corner of Carbine and Mourilyan streets and we couldn't breathe because the smoke was really, really thick," Mr Igoo said.

"We had to come around the other way."

Two tankers, a pumper and a

support vehicle from the Kerang Fire Brigade attended the scene.

Captain Ramon Steel said when crews arrived the house was around 80 per cent alight.

"We did an aggressive external attack with crews in breathing apparatus," Mr Steel said.

"Once we knocked it down, we had crews go in to do an internal search."

The Kerang brigade was then joined by a pumper from Cohuna, with the new arrivals providing Kerang firefighters with some respite.

Mr Steel said the blaze was under control by 3.30am and crews stayed at the scene mopping up until 5.30am.

Firefighters put to rest initial concerns that somebody may have been inside the house, confirming the building was empty.

CFA fire investigators and the Swan Hill criminal investigation unit spent several hours at the scene yesterday morning.



Firefighters check the inside of the building to ensure the fire was fully extinguished.

