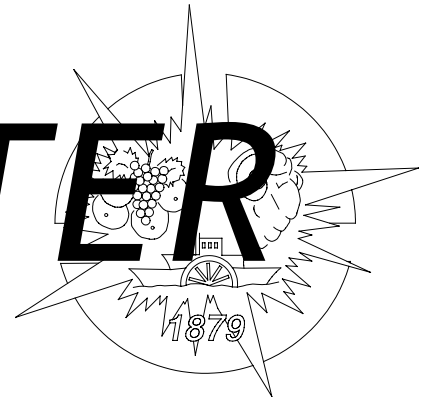


NEWSLETTER

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“Keeping our community informed”

State Government water legislation leaves ‘no option’ Shire will be forced to raise rates: Mayor

RATEPAYERS in the Wentworth Shire are facing a huge increase in rates following a NSW Government decision to reduce land valuations for irrigated farmland.

An increase of up to 20 per cent for some ratepayers is being foreshadowed, but Council refuses to take any blame for the impost.

“The blame for this lays directly at the feet of the State Government,” the Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said. “Removing water entitlements from land valuations for irrigated holdings as the State Government has done will significantly reduce Council’s income.”

“Council will have no choice but to redistribute the rate burden amongst other ratepayer groups in an effort to recover the revenue lost due to reduced irrigated land values,” she said.

And the Mayor has singled out dryland farmers and urban ratepayers as those who will have to shoulder an increased rate burden as the Council seeks to recoup lost rate revenue to avoid financial ruin.

“Wentworth Shire Council has been working hard to develop a fair and equitable rating model for this scenario but legislative restrictions and the lack of reliable and consistent information makes this almost impossible.”

The Shire is facing a financial crisis as it struggles to find a way to recoup the



• *Wentworth Shire Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson... “Don’t blame the Council, blame the State Government.”*

\$274,000 it has estimated it will lose in rate revenue. It is currently looking at a range of options, including the distribution of the shortfall over all properties -- that is irrigation, dryland farmers, residential and business categories.

“No matter what option we try, some properties face a rates increase of 20 per cent and it is also likely the increase will occur for the next two years.

“There is no doubt this will cause additional hardship for many of our

ratepayers already experiencing difficult times.”

Mayor Thomson said Wentworth Shire Councillors and officers are not to blame for the increases, set to become effective from July 1, 2007.

“This debacle is the result of a NSW Government that has little understanding of the impacts of its legislation and the rating imbalances it will cause,” she said.

Cr Thomson said municipalities at a regional level had consistently taken up the matter during the past two years with the State Government.

“We have difficulty in getting reliable information on valuation methodology and the reasons for vast variations in both irrigated and dryland valuations, which fluctuate dramatically from area to area and even from property to property in the same area,” she said.

“Wentworth Shire’s General Manager and our officers are working extremely hard to come up with rating strategy options aimed at minimising the impact on our ratepayers as much as possible.”

Meetings with Government officials on March 8 and 30 this year to explore opportunities for an acceptable solution to the problems confronting Councils resulted in no positive outcomes for the problem, the Mayor said.

Mayor Thomson urged Wentworth

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Get your sweatbox entries in



• *Daylesford's Steve Futo has been a staunch supporter of the competition, taking home several prizes in past year's including the Open Sculpture section in 2005 and a special judge's award last year.*

ENTRIES are now being taken for Wentworth Arts' popular Sweatbox Art & Furniture Competition.

The event returns for the fifth year, thanks to the generous naming rights support of Sunbeam Foods and a number of other local businesses that, like past years, are sponsoring the event.

Sunbeam Food's General Manager Domestic Fruit Supply, Chris Ellis, who has also been involved as a judge for

the past two years, said Sunbeam Foods was proud to once again have its name associated with the competition.

"It is truly a unique event and fits well with our history and our products as well as our policy of supporting local events," he said.

Entry forms have been forwarded by mail to last year's entrants and they are also available at the Visitor Information Centres in Wentworth and Mildura.

Rate rise 'inevitable'

Continued from Page 1

Shire ratepayers to contact their local State Member of Parliament to express their concern.

Wentworth Council will be writing to the Minister for Local Government expressing their deep concern on this matter, the Mayor promised.

Council will host a series of public information meetings to explain how Council intends to address the issue and explain the reasons for the change.

The meetings will be held at the Midway Community Centre on Thursday, April 26, from 7pm; at Dareton in the Senior Citizen's Centre on Monday April 30, from 7pm at the same time in the Wentworth Town Hall on Tuesday evening, May 1.

The Mayor is encouraging ratepayers to attend these meetings as information will be provided on Council's preferred option for a new rating model -- increasing the base rate for all rating categories by \$30 per property with the remainder of the lost revenue recouped by spreading the rate revenue deficit across Farmland Irrigation and Dry Land Irrigation properties.

The Mayor said that while the main issue at the information meetings was land and water separation, it would also be possible for ratepayers to ask questions on any issue and meet Wentworth Shire's new General Manager, Mr Peter Kozlowski.

Road and drainage works program continues

THERE's been quite a bit of work going on in the Shire lately.

Reporting to the April monthly meeting, the Shire's new Director of Assets and Infrastructure, Bill Turner, said recent road works have included upgrades to the Rufus River, Arumpo and Pooncarie/Menindee Roads.

He said work on a four-kilometre section of the Rufus River Road was nearing completion as was work on a number of Arumpo Road trouble spots with a total of about 1.5 kilometres within a particularly bad section of about nine kilometres having been repaired with 75 millimetres of gravel overlay.

Sealing 4.2 kilometres of the Pooncarie/Menindee Road towards the Shire boundary, Mr Turner reported,

had been completed.

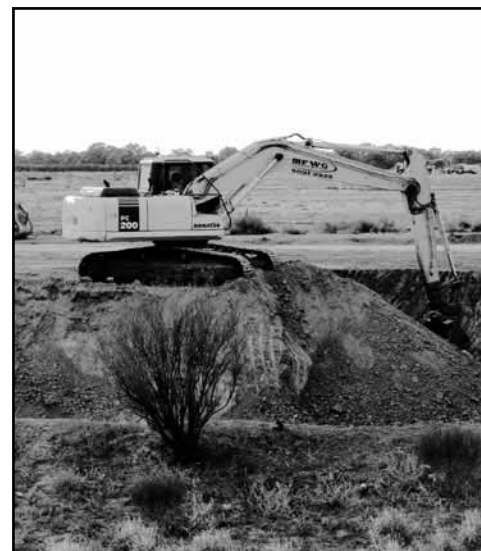
Another large ongoing project is the construction of the drainage retention basin and outfall at Buronga.

This drainage system, Mr Turner said, will discharge stormwater from the new industrial development area in Corbett Ave.

"The large pipeline across the Silver City Highway is installed and work has begun on the retention basin," he said.

"The main works that remain will connect the industrial area to the retention basin and include the construction of inflow and outflow structures within the basin.

"The project will be finished during this financial year," Mr Turner promised.



• *The new Buronga drainage retention basin takes shape.*

Restrictions reinstated by popular demand

PUBLIC demand has prompted Councillors to reinstate watering restrictions they removed last month.

At this month's meeting, Councillors voted to re-apply the restrictions they removed at their March meeting.

"We have answered the calls of our residents," Mayor, Margaret Thomson, said. "So until further notice, the restrictions remain in force."

The Shire's water customers – the majority of those living in municipality's village areas – are now encouraged to adhere to the following watering restrictions:

- Automatic sprinklers may be operated only between 10pm and 10am.
 - Manual sprinklers may be operated only between 7pm and 10am.
 - Watering by hand held hose with a trigger nozzle can be done at any time.
- All of the restrictions apply regardless of the temperature.

But the Mayor has warned tough water restrictions appeared to be inevitable unless there was decent rain in coming months.

"Residents should prepare themselves for water restrictions, not just watering restrictions, unless we get some rain soon," Cr Thomson said.

"We will be discussing the worsening water situation with the State water authorities in coming weeks and it looks as though water restrictions are on the cards."

To date, the Shire's water allocation for town supplies has not been cut, but without some decent winter rains, Mayor Thomson expects that to change.

At their February monthly meeting Councillors adopted a regime of 'trigger points' to govern the introduction of more severe restrictions should they be required.

As the availability of supply reduces, Council will refer to the appropriate stage in the restriction trigger points.

"The formula for the trigger points is quite complicated," the Mayor said, "However the simple truth is that the less water the Shire is allocated, the more severe the restrictions will be.



• *Watering restrictions have been reintroduced by popular demand.*

The trigger points adopted by Council are:

Stage 1: restrictions will generally be triggered when the State announces a seasonal allocation for the Murray Darling Rivers system below 100%, but not less than 80%, in September of any year and the chances of receiving a 100% allocation by February the following year is less than 50%.

Stage 2: restrictions will generally be triggered when the September seasonal allocation is below 80% but not less than 70% and the chances of receiving an 80% allocation by February the following year is less than 50%. Implementation of Stage 2 restrictions may be delayed pending the authority's demand hydrograph (accumulative consumption for the financial year) remaining below 70% of the five-year average.

Stage 3: restrictions will be triggered if the September seasonal allocation is below 70% but not less than 60% and the chances of receiving a 70% allocation by

February the following year is less than 50%, but maybe delayed if the demand hydrograph is below 60% of the five-year average.

"My hope is that we never need to implement them because the drought will break," the Mayor said.

Council will develop a Council by-law to manage water restrictions should they be needed in the future.

Footpath concern

THE Mayor has asked for an audit of footpaths in Dareton, like that completed in Wentworth some time ago.

"I have been advised that some of the footpaths in Dareton need investigating," Cr Thomson told her fellow Councillors at this month's meeting.

"We need to highlight problem footpaths so that they can be fixed to avoid the risk of a person tripping," she said.

Wentworth Shire to get a new doctor

WENTWORTH Shire Council has secured the services of a new doctor to replace Dr Claire Thys who left the municipality's medical practice to pursue other career options.

The new doctor is Ramzi Al Attar, currently working at Mildura Base Hospital.

Dr Al Attar will start work with the Wentworth Medical Practice next month, joining Dr Ali Alhadi. Dr Alhadi joined the practice as its second doctor in April 2006.

Dr Thys had been with the practice since 1999.

Wentworth Shire Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said the Shire-run practice, with clinics in Wentworth and at Dareton, had been "very fortunate" to find a replacement for Dr Thys so quickly.

"Council regards the medical practice as an essential service for the communities of Wentworth and Dareton," the Mayor said. "It was imperative that we found a replacement, and found them quickly."

The Mayor advised patients the Dareton clinic had been temporarily

closed but the Wentworth clinic continued to operate Monday to Friday and that appointments should be made by telephoning 5027 2366.

The Shire's medical practice is a successful business in its own right and run by Council for its residents.

It has been the subject of much praise by other rural remote municipalities that have struggled to repeat the success of the Wentworth model.

"The medical practice is something Council and the community can be very proud of," Mayor Thomson said.



• Wentworth Medical Practice manager, Jan Campbell, right, welcomes Dr Ramzi Al Attar to his new job. Dr Al Attar was inspecting the practice's Wentworth clinic over the Easter weekend.

Two by-election candidates confirmed

TWO candidates have been officially confirmed for the election of a new Wentworth Shire Councillor in the by-election poll scheduled for Saturday, May 19.

They are Dareton's Don McKinnon, a former Councillor and long-serving Mayor, and Gol Gol's Rob Whitworth, a Mildura business owner.

A third candidate, Dareton's Robert Rigby, officially withdrew his nomination this week.

The catalyst for the by-election was

the resignation of Peter Crisp from Council in February following his election as the Member for Mildura in the November 2006 Victorian State elections.

The timetable for the election is:

POSTAL VOTING

Now open.

Close of postal voting applications. 5pm Monday, May 14.

Closing time for return of postal votes 6pm Monday, May 21.

PRE-POLL VOTING

Pre-poll voting period from Monday, May 7 to 6pm Friday, May 18.

DECLARED INSTITUTION VOTING

Declared Institution voting Monday, May 14; Tuesday, May 15 and Wednesday, May 16.

POLLING DAY

Polling day: Saturday, May 19. Polling between 8am and 6pm.

DECLARATION OF POLL

Result declared Thursday, May 24.

Concrete recycling plant gets OK with conditions

COUNCIL has approved a concrete recycling operation at Dareton, taking great care to balance the interests of the proponents and others living and/or working the immediate area.

The development will be subject to a list of conditions aimed at protecting the amenity of the area; ensuring the operation does not adversely affect adjoining landholders and to increase the safety for motorists using roads and intersections in the area.

Waters Excavations sought Council's planning permission to use a portion of the former Mildura Co-operative Fruit Company site at Dareton to establish the recycling business.

The site is an area of about 1.5 hectares bordered by Tallawalla Road to the east and Pump Station Road to the west. The southern boundary borders private land and to the north are the former Co-op buildings.

Director Development and Environment, Ken Ross, told Councillors as they deliberated on the application that the site is zoned 4(b) Light Industry.

"The application has been referred to Western Murray Irrigation, Department of Environment and Conservation and the Road Traffic Authority," Mr Ross said.

"Western Murray Irrigation raised no objections, neither did RTA as long a number of conditions were included in Council's development consent to safeguard traffic movements in the area.

"The proposal was advertised for fourteen days and two submissions objecting to the development were received.

"The first submission objected to the proposal on the grounds of its potential for dust and the second from the P & C Association of the Coomealla High School raised safety, health and environmental concerns, including the dust issue."

Mr Ross after referring the grounds for objection to the proponents for comment, Mr Ross said he was confident all the objectors' concerns could be addressed with the inclusion of stringent conditions on the development approval.

"For Council to approve this application



• The proposed site at Dareton off Pump Station Road can be seen at the far right of the photograph.

it must be satisfied that the intended use is permissible under the current zoning proposal, i.e. not an offensive or hazardous industry," Mr Ross said.

The LEP defines an offensive or hazardous industry as one: "...which, by reason of the processes involved or the method of manufacture or the nature of the materials used or produced, requires isolation from other buildings."

"The issues raised by the objectors are relevant with dust being the number one concern. However, with adequate dust suppressing techniques, like an automated watering system, the conflict between the zones will be markedly reduced."

Council approved the application to establish the business, provided Waters Excavations could meet the following conditions among others:

- No work is to be carried out on the site which would cause nuisance by way of the emission of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, vapour, steam, soot, ash, dust, grit oil, waste water, waste products or otherwise.
- An automated watering system is to be installed to ensure dust suppressant measures are implemented to minimise the spread of dust and dust particles onto adjacent properties.
- Lead particles, asbestos and other containments are to be removed from the product prior to transfer to the site.

• Noise from the premises must not exceed the maximum noise level calculated in accordance the EPA's Environmental Noise Management: Industrial Noise Policy when measured at the nearest noise sensitive location.

• Trucks entering and leaving the premises that are carrying loads must be securely covered at all times, expect during loading and unloading.

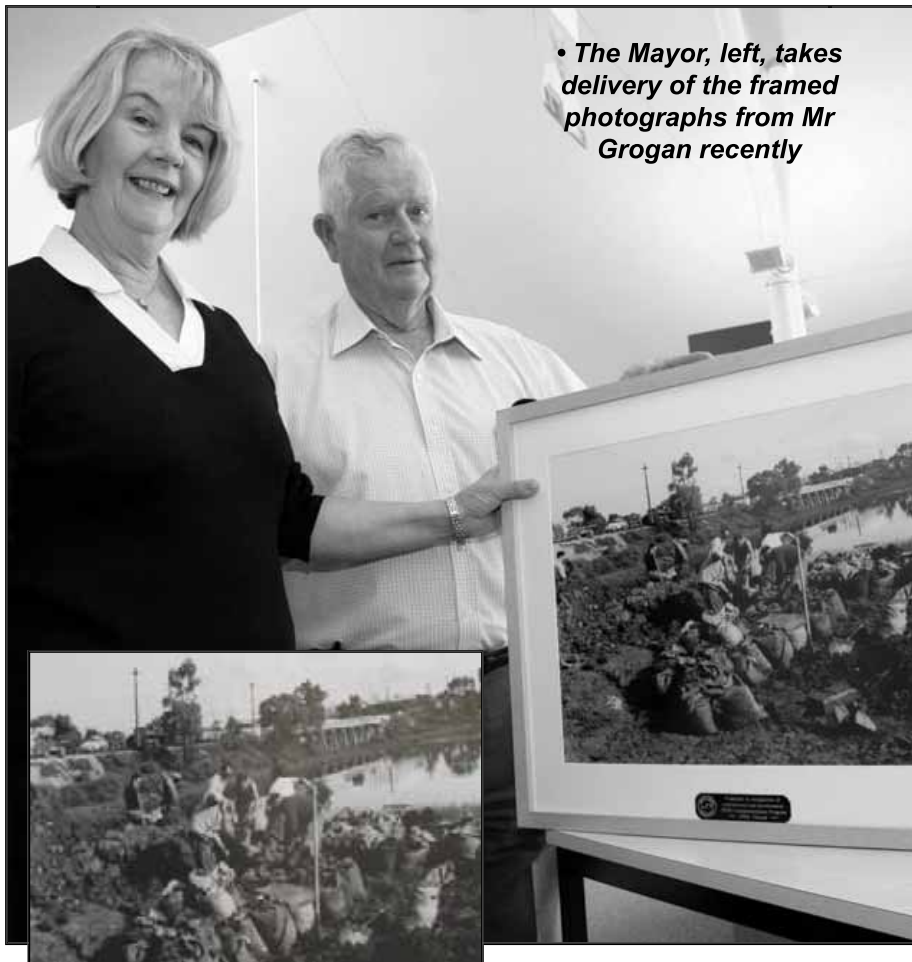
• The proponent shall ensure horticultural activities on properties adjacent to the site are not adversely affected by dust. Should horticultural activities be affected, the proponent shall identify measures to remediate this impact in consultation with the owners of the affected properties.

• The proponent shall ensure that the site occupied by the Coomealla High School is not adversely affected by dust generated. Should the Schools activates be affected, the proponent shall identify measures to remediate this impact in consultation with the owners of the affected premises.

• A buffer be planted along Tallawalla Road and maintained to Council's satisfaction.

• Access to the site is to be via Pump Station Road and not from Tallawalla Road.

• All vehicles are to enter and exit the subject site in a forward direction.



• The Mayor, left, takes delivery of the framed photographs from Mr Grogan recently

Call for toilets to be taken more seriously

COUNCILLORS Brian Wakefield and Jim Macri are keen to see the issue of the Shire's public toilets taken more seriously in the future.

Cr Wakefield told the April monthly meeting that the toilets at Gol Gol and Buronga are being used heavily by visitors to the area and requested they be repainted or sandblasted back to bare bricks in an effort to make them look more presentable.

Cr Macri agreed saying the Shire's public toilets were important because they are deemed to be "an introduction to a town" and "if the toilets are clean and well kept than that is the perception of the condition of the whole town".

Director Development & Environment, Ken Ross, advised that the Shire's Management Plan will be reviewed and include a review of public toilet maintenance and "money will be put away each year in the budget to facilitate this ongoing maintenance".

Bringing back the past

Row upon row of sandbags was, in many cases, all that stood between the district's embattled residents and the disastrous influx of water generated when the Murray and Darling Rivers flooded at the same time in 1956.

The INSET photograph taken by veteran photographer, Ted Lawton, says it all. Cigarettes wedged between the lips of mud-spattered workers while they repair damaged levee banks and cart sandbags by the thousands to fend off the rising waters.

For the past half-century many photos of the flood have been stored away across Sunraysia, but last year 30 evocative images were framed for display at the Mildura Arts Centre to commemorate the great flood of '56; each with it's own plaque to tell the story of the photo.

This year the photos are being donated to government organisations across the district by the Murray Darling Environment Foundation. It's chairman, Brian Grogan, claimed it was time to return images to where they had been taken.

"The photos taken in New South Wales

naturally belong to Wentworth Shire Council and I have driven eight of them to Berri as well.

The remainder will remain in the custody of Mildura Rural City Council.

Pointing to Ted Lawton's photo, Mr Grogan said: "We are hoping this one will be displayed in the Mildura Library, so it is accessible to all residents and visitors."

"Mildura Library manager, Sue Kelly, assisted in the historical research for the photos, so its return to the library seemed appropriate," he said.

He also said it seemed appropriate that Wentworth Shire Council become custodian of the photographs taken on the NSW side of Sunraysia.

Wentworth Mayor, Cr Margaret Thomson, said she was "sure Council can find a place for them".

"They are a part of our history and the way the residents fought the floods is a source of great pride in our communities," she said.

- Photographs and story courtesy of the Mildura Weekly.

Shire contacts

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2648

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email: council@wentworth.nsw.gov.au

Libraries

Wentworth: (03) 5027 5060

Dareton: (03) 5027 4258

Buronga: (03) 5023 3078

Shire after hours emergency number: (03) 5027 5091

For all water, sewerage, rubbish tip hours, emergency dog matters, stray stock and cemetery emergencies.