

Tourist numbers soar as van fans flock to Balonne

Caravanners and other visitors exploring the Balonne Shire are swelling tourist numbers to near-record levels this winter.

Tourism is a very important industry in the Balonne Shire and there is no doubt we are enjoying one of our best winter tourist seasons ever.

Residents are commenting on the numbers of caravans, motor homes, camper-trailers and other recreational vehicles cruising the local highways and rolling into our towns.

And it is not just the traditional “grey nomads” who are visiting: increasing numbers of younger family groups are taking the opportunity to explore regional Australia.

Caravan parks and other accommodation providers throughout the Ba-

lonne Shire are reporting higher than usual numbers of visitors, certainly well above average.

Events like the St George Yellowbelly Festival – a week-long celebration of country music, bush poetry and camaraderie in the great outdoors in general – and the Paul Kelly concert in Dirranbandi have also boosted visitor numbers.

Staff at the Visitor Information Centre in St George have also had a hectic time answering inquiries. In fact, on one Monday in late June they answered what they believe is a one-day record of more than 200 inquiries.

There have also been increased numbers of visitors taking tours, like the cotton-farm-and-vineyard tour and the heritage tour.

Figures at the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in St George show more than 2,200 visitors went through the VIC last month, the best figure for the month of June in years.

All this is wonderful news for Balonne businesses, with extra money flowing into cash registers right around the district.

Part of this increase is no doubt the effect of Australians not being able to holiday overseas at present, and so visiting regional areas for their holidays instead.

However, it is also the result of Balonne’s enthusiastic and hard-working tourism and visitor information staff constantly promoting the attractions of the Shire. They are doing a terrific job.



Caravans crowding The Terrace in St George.

What's On

First 5 Forever

A weekly session for children aged 0-5 and their parents/guardians, aimed at building strong literacy foundations and neural pathways in kids.

WHERE: St George Library

WHEN: each Friday, 9.30am

St George JRL 50 years

Prepare for a trip down memory lane! St George JRL is celebrating their golden anniversary in style with a reunion and footy games.

WHERE: Rowden Park, St George JRL clubhouse.

WHEN: 24-25 July

Polocrosse at Dirran

The thriving Dirranbandi Polocrosse Club is hosting two days of competition at its new clubhouse and fields.

WHERE: Dirranbandi Showgrounds

WHEN: Saturday-Sunday July 31 – August 1

Mungindi Show 2021

The ever-popular Mungindi Show is fast approaching and it will be another great weekend jam-packed with family fun.

This year, tickets will only be available online, so search "Mungindi Show 2021" on trybooking to secure yours.

WHERE: Mungindi Showgrounds, Mogul Street, Mungindi.

WHEN: Saturday-Sunday, August 7-8.

Got a story, event or notice?

Tell us! We can include your information in the newsletter.

Phone: 07 4620 8888

Email: media@balonne.qld.gov.au

A message from the Mayor

Recently, I had the privilege to be invited to officially open NAIDOC Week in Balonne.

NAIDOC Week is an opportunity to come together as a community, to pay our respects to elders – and past generations who have passed down the world's oldest oral stories that guide us – and to more broadly celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The 2021 theme for NAIDOC is "Heal Country, Heal our Nation" recognising the increasing concern of Country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The 2021 theme acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's continued survival, and spiritual connection to country and to the surrounding land, sky, water and sea.

Recognising that we cannot change history but, by truth-telling and understanding our nation's past, can change the way the past is viewed, we can look forward to how we can heal country and heal our people.

I hope in NAIDOC Week – July 4 to 11 – many people took the opportunity to learn and gain better understanding about our local Indigenous nations, to recognise and acknowledge the injustices of the past and to look forward to the future.

As a community, we need to continue conversations on how we can draw our whole community together and demonstrate actions to ensure positive outcomes for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

When we came together in NAIDOC Week last November, I committed for the Balonne Shire Council to continue to strengthen our relationships with Elders, Indigenous leaders, Indigenous organisations and other people to work together to build a stronger community.

Council has continued to work to build and, in some cases, rebuild those relationships.

We have begun our work to create a Youth Council, working closely with the Big Buddy program to encourage all young people across the Shire to participate to give a voice for youth.



We have opened a Country Universities Centre (CUC) in St George and Dirranbandi and there is a local Indigenous person on our CUC Board.

We are working with locals in all parts of the Shire to grow and strengthen opportunities for Indigenous tourism.

It was absolutely an honour to officially open the Nullawokka First Nations Gallery in Bollon early this year.

The Council's rural services staff are working with Indigenous rangers and Indigenous groups to implement a Traditional Burning Project to share knowledge about caring for country.

This project has begun near Thallon but is hoped to evolve and expand to have cross-cultural knowledge-sharing to include private landowners and other locations throughout the Shire as appropriate.

As Mayor, I am keen to establish an Indigenous Advisory Committee to facilitate better consultation with all Indigenous nations in Balonne going forward.

These are small steps we are taking in Balonne because working together is better. And we will continue to be brave, to have the tough conversations and to be focused on a better future.

I want to congratulate the organising committee for their commitment and for the many events they arranged across the Shire. I hope everyone had a deadly week.

Mayor Samantha O'Toole

NAIDOC Week flags important issues

NAIDOC Week has been celebrated throughout the Balonne Shire with events that included a ceremonial flag-raising outside the Council chambers in St George and a range of awards.

NAIDOC Week – running from July 4 to 11 – was officially opened by Mayor Samantha O’Toole.

Covid-19 forced last year’s events to be put back to November but this year saw a return to a more traditional celebration in July.

The launch of NAIDOC Week in Balonne began with the official opening ceremony, including the raising of the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag alongside the Australian Flag outside the Shire Council chambers in St George.

The theme for NAIDOC Week this year was “Heal Country, Heal our Nation”, recognising the increasing concern of Country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s continued survival, and spiritual connection to Country and to the surrounding land, sky, water and sea.

There were a number of awards presented during NAIDOC Week, including for junior categories.

Indigenous High School Junior Student (Grades 7-10)

Shown regular attendance, extra-curricular activities, exemplary behaviour and strives to do their best in every aspect of school life.

Nominations were:

- Grace Waters
- Jacob Hiles
- Tomas Kunde
- Safina Saunders

The winner was Safina Saunders

Indigenous High School Senior Student (Grade 11-12)

Nominations were:

- Hayley Moloney
- Taeah Hiles

The winner was Taeah Hiles



Indigenous Primary School Junior Student (Prep- Grade 4)

Nominations were:

- Abigail Tierney
- Mathew Colt
- Kade Davis
- Anneka Weatherall
- Quade Cowburn
- Porsche Thurlow
- Ruby Passman
- Taetum Casey

The winner was Quade Cowburn

Indigenous Primary School Senior Student (Grade 5-6)

Nominations were:

- Isla McNamara
- Sedeequa Clevin
- Chase Davis
- Jackson Beardmore
- Layla Weatherall

The winner was Sedeequa Clevin

Indigenous Junior Apprentice/Trainee (18 years and under)

Regular attendance, shows initiative and a positive attitude towards the job.

Nominations were:

- Ashton Dyball
- Preston Thurston
- Brendan Draper
- Shontayne Prince

The winner was Brendan Draper

Indigenous Junior School Based Apprentice/Trainee {18 years and under}

The winner was Paige Clark

Indigenous Female Junior Sportsper-son (18 years and under)

Committed to training, shows good sportsmanship, encourages team spirit and respect of coaches/club and other team members.

Nominations were:

- Kahlia Duncan
- Sedeequa Clevin
- Emma-Leigh Turbull Bennett
- Paige Clark

The winner was Emma-Leigh Turbull Bennett

Indigenous Male Junior Sports person (18 years and under)

Nominations were:

- Rhyder Hooper
- Tyrell Lacey
- Trent Duncan
- Amdes Saunders
- Shontayne Prince
- Jacob Hiles

The winners were Jacob Hiles, Shontayne Prince and Amdes Saunders

The judges could not split the three winners of this category, deciding all three of these young men deserve an award. They are great role models and are committed to their team mates and coaching staff regardless of what sport they are playing.

Note: Further NAIDOC Week award winners will be published in the next edition of “Balonne Bulletin”.

Cr Fuhrmeister “guardian” of historic agreement

Balonne Shire Councillor Robyn Fuhrmeister will serve as one of five “guardians” of a historic agreement intended to amplify the voice of rural and remote Queensland.

Late last month, Deputy Premier and Minister for Local Government, Steven Miles, and Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) President and Sunshine Coast Mayor, Mark Jamieson, signed a Rural and Remote Councils Compact.

Mr Miles and Mayor Jamieson said the agreement pledges to amplify the voice of these communities on the State Government stage, and also aims to improve outcomes for the State’s 45 rural and remote Councils and their local communities by enhancing engagement between both levels of government.

It will initially focus on three key issues to these councils: financial sustainability; roads; and housing.

Mayor Jamieson gave special thanks to five rural and remote Mayors and Councillors from the Balonne, Cook, Diamantina and Flinders Shire Councils and Western Downs Regional Council for serving as guardians of the Compact.

They include long-serving Balonne

Shire Councillor Robyn Fuhrmeister.

“These five community champions have been instrumental in shaping this Compact and ensuring it focusses on the areas of most importance to the communities it is designed to assist,” Mayor Jamieson said.

Signing the Compact represents a critical first step in improving the lot of rural and remote Queensland communities, Mayor Jamieson said.

“The Rural and Remote Councils Compact aims to ensure the realities facing these communities – like small populations, funding and policy uncertainty, and the tyranny of distance – are better understood by State Government decision-makers so future policies can be better tailored to meet their needs.

Mr Miles said the Government is committed to working with Councils to better address the challenges facing rural and remote communities.

“This Compact will improve the focus on our rural and remote Councils and ensure they have a louder voice for the Government to hear.

“I am looking forward to seeing the benefits it can deliver for those communities,” he said.

New seniors living option is coming to St George

The Churches of Christ has announced it will be offering serviced apartments to St George seniors, which it says will meet a need the local community has identified as going unmet.

Regional Manager Camilla Taylor said expressions of interest are invited between now and August 31.

“An existing cottage at Warrawee Aged Care, which Churches of Christ operates in addition to home care services, will be re-purposed as the new, 13-unit serviced apartment offering,” Mrs Taylor said.

“These units are intended for seniors who want to maintain their independence and connection with their community, while downsizing and getting some help with day-to-day tasks.

“We invite local seniors to register their interest in moving into a serviced apartment where they can have their meals, laundry and cleaning services included in their weekly rent.”

She said the serviced apartments will be available to rent for \$335 per week.

The decision to create a serviced living offering was made in collaboration with the local community.

“This all started with a kitchen table meeting with residents and community members identifying an unmet need for local seniors to get the support they need while maintaining their independence.

Mrs Taylor said the community is highly engaged in the service and have asked to be involved in the naming of it, with a competition for the best name now open.

Mrs Taylor said the serviced apartments do not require an ACAT assessment to enter and the weekly rent is not means-tested. Residents will be able to access Home Care services for extra support.

Expressions of interest can be submitted to Jennifer.mckay@cofcqld.com.au or by calling 07 4620 2000 by 31 August 2021.



LGAQ President Mark Jamieson (left) and Queensland Minister for Local Government Steven Miles sign the Rural and Remote Councils Compact, with (L-R) Flinders Shire Mayor Jane McNamara, Diamantina Shire Mayor Robbie Dare, Balonne Shire Councillor Robyn Fuhrmeister and Cook Shire Mayor Peter Scott watching on.

South-western Councils focus on funding issues

The South-West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SWQROC) met in St George recently to consider a range of issues important to communities in the region

SWQROC comprises the Balonne, Bulloo, Maranoa, Murweh, Paroo and Quilpie Shire Councils, covering 320,000 square kilometres and 24,000 residents.

Mayors and CEOs met for two days and their discussions focussed in particular on the current review of the Federal Government Financial Assistance Grants program.

Guests at the SWQROC meeting included Queensland Local Government Grants Commission Chair Paul Bell, who is currently conducting a review of the Financial Assistance Grants methodology.

The Queensland Local Government Grants Commission commenced a review of the methodology for the allocation of the Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grant (FA Grant) earlier this year.

The Commission says it is 10 years since the last major review was completed.

The need for a review is supported through feedback received by the Commission from Queensland Councils and is in line with a resolution of the 2020 Local Government Association of Queensland Annual Conference.

The Commission has engaged Queensland Treasury Corporation to undertake a comprehensive review of the FA Grant allocation methodology.

The Commission says it strongly believes a more equitable distribution of the FA Grant can be achieved in accordance with the Commonwealth National Principles. Changing the allocation method will focus on achieving greater “horizontal fiscal equalisation” for Queensland local governments.

The objectives underpinning any changes to the allocation methodol-



SWQROC meeting and (below) Queensland Local Government Grants Commission Chair Paul Bell.

ogy are that it should be transparent, equitable, simple, reliable and stable.

Transparent

The Commission believes Councils should clearly understand the methodology and how their allocation is determined.

Equitable

Outcomes address relative disadvantage in the current environment.

Simple

Minimises complexity in the approach.

Reliable

Data is consistent and obtained from trusted sources.

Stable

Methodology ensures low variability of allocation outcomes

SWQROC supports the methodology review and valued the opportunity to discuss face-to-face with Mr Bell the detailed goals, principles and progress of the review.

Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning senior staff Sarah Webster and Peter Fletcher also took part in the discussions on FA Grants, along with the AEC Group’s Gavin O’Don-



ovan (Technical Director – Strategic Finance), who facilitated a workshop on the FA Grants methodology review.

State Member for Warrego Ms Ann Leahy presented outcomes from the State Budget and also discussed regional priorities.

Also, Regional Development Australia Darling Downs and South West (RDA DDSW) Chair Fiona Gaske and Director Trudi Bartlett discussed RDA DDSW digital connectivity initiatives; Phillip Currey from Southern Queensland Landscapes (SQL) discussed a SQL carbon farming study; and Bryson Head from the National Recovery and Resilience Agency discussed the Agency’s priorities.

More information will be made available on the SWQROC website: www.swqroc.com.au/

Paul Kelly and friends rock Dirranbandi

Thousands of music fans packed Dirranbandi Showgrounds when Aussie rock legend Paul Kelly hit the stage last week with some famous friends.

The line-up for the July 11 “Paul Kelly and Friends” concert included Troy Cassar-Daley, Ian Moss, Russell Morris, Hope D, Benny Nelson, Mitch Salisbury, Charlie Fittler and Fe Fi Fo Fum – and, of course, Paul Kelly himself, who mesmerised the more than 3,000 fans.

Dirranbandi exploded to at least five times its normal population as people poured in not just from round the region from Queensland and northern New South Wales but also from Brisbane and beyond.

Organiser Danny Sheehan from Sheehan Events described the concert as a real city meets country event.

“It’s real western hospitality, where the city folk come out and mix with the people in the bush.”

He explained that the event was raising funds for the Dirranbandi Ag Studies program, which helps students set up a future in local farming industries and connect with farmers for practical, hands-on experience.

Dirranbandi local and event co-organiser Frank Deshon said the program is for kids who are passionate about staying in the agriculture in-



dustry.

“Over the past years, we’ve had a migration of youth from our rural areas to the east. And generally, unfortunately, not many return. So, we want to ignite that passion in the children a bit earlier.”

As well as packing out accommodation in the area, concert-goers rolled up with caravans and other recreational vehicles, tents and swags, and were rewarded with a clear, crisp night under the stars to see some of Australia’s favourite entertainers.

For those who like to rough it in style, luxury tents were available for hire right beside the showgrounds. Many had taken advantage of packages that included flights from Brisbane, transfers, accommodation and concert tickets.

Whether locals or visitors, everyone at the concert seemed to agree on one fact: Paul Kelly rocks. And his friends were pretty great too.

Paul Kelly previously performed in Dirranbandi in 2018. There’s just one question now: how soon before he can come back again?

Yellowbelly Festival hooks big crowd

A week-long celebration of country music, bush poetry and camaraderie in the great outdoors in general has attracted more than 250 caravanners to the St George Showgrounds.

The Yellowbelly Country Music and Poets Festival from June 28 to July 4 lured a great line-up of country music performers and bush poets, plus lots of fun walk-ups from people wanting to try their hand.

Caitlyn Jamieson, one of the festival organisers, described it as a great event.

“Caravans packed into the showgrounds and people came from all over Australia,” she said.

“During the week, we saw individu-

als of all ages get up and have a go in the Alan Luscombe Memorial Walk-ups.

“There were also great community events held throughout the week, such as the Old Time Dance and a fishing lure demonstration by a young local, Dylan Hart.

“When the weekend rolled around, we saw legends in Australian country music and bush poetry up on stage, such as Chad Morgan, Brian Letton, Jeff Brown and many more.

“This year was the tenth year of the Yellowbelly Festival and we hope to keep it going for many years to come.

“A big thank-you is in order to the Balonne Shire for all of their assistance with the Festival.”



Students win laptops from CUC

Four Balonne students have won laptop computers from the Country Universities Centre (CUC).

“Get Inspired Student Packs” have been won by tertiary students Kellie Davis and Casey Smith and high-school students Lily Brimblecomb and Heather Wilesmith.

All four students said they were thrilled to receive the packs, which included refurbished laptops donated by NBN Co.

Bachelor of Early Education student Kelly Davis said: “Having the opportunity to receive a laptop assists in alleviating one of the biggest pressures when studying online.”

Casey Smith is currently studying a Bachelor of Midwifery through the Australian Catholic University. She said the laptop will help her stay on top of her studies when she has to travel onto campus and for future practice placements.

Lily Brimblecomb and Heather Wilesmith, though still at high school, both plan on pursuing higher education once graduating from Year

12 and said they were happy to have the technology to get started at the Centre this year.

CUC Balonne has had a successful start, with 24 students registered with

Alix Greenhill
Manager
UC Balonne Centre



Laptop recipients Casey Smith and Kellie Davis with Matthew Magin, Chair of CUC Balonne.



ST GEORGE
BATHS
open

EVERY DAY
10AM - 4PM

For the People
Balonne
Shire Council

Youth Council

Applications are open!

What's Youth Council?

An opportunity for people aged 12-25 to have their voice heard and make a change.

Want a new park?

A new arts or dance group?

This is how you can do it!

You can be active in your community.

Get your application from:

- School Office
- Lifeline
- Big Buddy
- Aboriginal Housing
- Balonne Shire Council
- Goondir Health

Want to know more?

Call: 07 4620 8888

Email: council@balonne.qld.gov.au

Visit: Balonne Shire Council

*You want change?
You make it happen!*



UPDATE

BALONNE SHIRE COUNCIL | LONERGAN PROJECT SERVICES

Disaster Recovery

Gunnindaddy Rd

- Expected completion: late-August
- Works are ongoing.
- Expected traffic delays less than 5 minutes.

Cambo Rd - upcoming

- Expected start: early-July

Honeymah Ln - upcoming

- Expected start: early-July



Work on Gunnindaddy Road.

Corack Rd - upcoming

- Expected start: late-July

Mundalee Rd - upcoming

- Expected start: early-July

Dingadee Rd - upcoming

- Expected start: mid-July

Noondoo-Mungindi Rd - upcoming

- Expected start: late-July

Council has engaged contractors to deliver these packages of works under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Completed Works

- Crescent Vale Rd
- Rutherglen Rd
- Cubbie Rd
- Unity Rd
- Middle Rd
- Whyenbah Rd
- Thomby Rd
- Wagoo Rd
- Cardiff Rd
- Powrunna Rd
- Mourilyan Rd
- Lower Plains Rd
- Narine Rd
- Commissioners Point Rd
- Thuraggi Rd
- Johnston Rd

Local Crews

During July, Council's crews are scheduled for the following works.

Bollon Crew

- Cardiff Road - 11 Days
- Jackelwar Goodooga Road - 30 Days
- Mulga Downs Road - 22 Days

St George Crew 1

- Whyenbah Road - 10 Days
- RMPC shoulder resheeting - 12 Days
- Heavy vehicle breakdown pad - 30 Days

Dirranbandi Crew 2

- Openbah Road - 3 Days
- Whyenbah Road (Whyenbah Bridge to Dirranbandi) - 10 Days
- Hoolavale Road - 6 Days
- Narline Road - 10 Days

St George Crew 3

- Teelba Road - 20 Days
- Kooroon road - 6 Days
- Kooroon Road resheeting 2km TIDS - 4 Days

Completed Works

- Runnymede Road maintenance
- Fernlee Road maintenance
- Bollon Western levee project waiting for second coat seal
- Hebel - Goodooga Road
- Honeymah Road
- Wagoo Road

This programme may vary, depending on weather and breakdowns.

TIDS = Queensland Government Transport Industry Development Scheme funding program.