



BORDER REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS MEETING MINUTES

1. MEETING DETAILS

Meeting Title: Border Regional Organisation of Councils Meeting Minutes

Date: 24 July 2026

Time: 9.10am

Location: Brewarrina Council Chambers

Meeting Chairperson: Councillor Rob Mackenzie, Goondiwindi Regional Council

Minutes Prepared by: Goondiwindi Regional Council

Welcome:

Mayor Tom Stanton (Tommy) welcomed the Border Regional Organization of Councils (BROC) to Brewarrina, acknowledging the Ngemba people as the traditional custodians of the land.

He highlighted Brewarrina's heritage, specifically mentioning the world-renowned Brewarrina fish traps on the Barwon River and the community's reliance on agriculture and tourism.

Tom and David Kirby (GM of Brewarrina) emphasized the importance of collective advocacy through BROC to ensure regional New South Wales receives appropriate investment and recognition.

David Kirby (GM of Brewarrina) provided an update on the repurposing of the former correctional centre into a regional youth facility.

The project is a collaboration involving the Premier's Department and the councils of Coonamble, Walgett, Brewarrina, and Bourke, focusing on youth development rather than just "diversionary" services.

David explained that the facility could house 50 to 60 young people and aims to serve the broader Orana and Northwest regions, from Moree to Dubbo.

The project requires legislative changes regarding youth justice and the age of criminal responsibility, and David stressed that councils must remain the driving force behind these working groups.

Attendance

Attendees: *Attended via Teams

Goondiwindi Regional Council	Cr Rob Mackenzie Amanda Martin
Brewarrina Shire Council	Cr Tommy Stanton David Kirby
Gwydir Shire Council	Cr Tiffany Galvin



	Cr Sean Coleman
Bourke Shire Council	Cr Lachlan Ford Leonie Brown
Inverell Shire Council	Cr Kate Dight
Moree Plains Shire Council	Cr Peter Mailler*
Paroo Shire Council	Cr Suzette Beresford Martin Leech
Balonne Shire Council	Cr Michaela Christensen Digby Whyte
Tenterfield Shire Council	Cr Bronwyn Petrie*
Southern Downs Regional Council	Cr Sheryl Windle*

Also in Attendance:

Qld Cross Border Commissioner	Bob Gee*
NSW Cross Border Commissioner	Kellie Urquhart*
Member for Southern Downs	James Lister MP*
Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers, QLD	Bernadette Plummer*
LGNSW	David Reynolds
Reconstruction NSW	Linda Witworth*
RDA	Russell Stewart
RDA	Robyn Haig*
Premiers Department	Sarah Barton
President MDA	Shari Blumer*
LGAQ	Lucy Abbott

Apologies:

Toowoomba North Electorate Office	Trevor Watts MP
Northern Tablelands Electorate Office	Brendan Moylan MP
Bulloo Shire Council	Cr Donna Hobbs
Walgett Shire Council	Cr Jasen Ramien Donna Ausling
Balonne Shire Council	Cr Samantha O'Toole Michelle Clark
Tenterfield Shire Council	Cr Greg Sauer
Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers	Hon. Ann Leahy MP
President LGNSW	Darcy Byrne
NSW Reconstruction Authority	Mitch Parker

That the meeting apologies be accepted

Moved: *Cr Tiffany Galvin*

Seconder: *Cr Lachlan Ford*

Carried



2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Border Regional Organisation of Councils meeting held on Friday 10 April 2026 in Cunnamulla (hosted by Paroo Shire Council) were distributed.

That the minutes of the Border Regional Organisation of Councils meeting held on 10 April 2026 as circulated to members, be confirmed as a true and correct record of that meeting.

Moved: Cr Katie Dight

Seconder: Tiffany Galvin

Carried

3. Deputation – David Reynolds Chief Executive Local Government NSW

LGNSW Advocacy and the 1% Funding Campaign

David Reynolds (CEO of Local Government NSW) addressed the ongoing campaign to return federal Financial Assistance Grants to 1% of Commonwealth tax revenue.

He clarified that while the raw dollar figure increased by approximately \$170 million nationally, the funding as a proportion of the total economy dropped from 0.53% to roughly 0.49%.

The group discussed the "mischievous" nature of federal claims that councils are receiving "more money," noting that it does not account for CPI, inflation, or the massive infrastructure costs in regional areas.

Cr Bronwyn Petrie raised concerns about how a fixed percentage would affect councils during economic downturns, to which David Reynolds replied that a percentage-based model allows councils to grow and contract with the national economy.

Disaster Funding and Regulatory Challenges

David Reynolds reported on proposed changes to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), including a move toward a 50/50 funding split and raising the minimum claim threshold from \$240,000 to \$2.7 million.

LGNSW is surveying councils to build an administrative case against these changes, with a workshop scheduled for the following week to gather direct feedback from General Managers.

Leonie Brown described the transition of transport funding to the Reconstruction Authority as a "debacle" and expressed concern over how councils will manage infrastructure reinstatement under the proposed federal changes.

Other issues raised included the Emergency Services Levy (ESL), "Red Fleet" asset accounting, and the need for a billion dollars in funding to bring regional water utility infrastructure up to standard.



4. FINANCIAL REPORT

National Australia Bank Business Account

Balance as at 15 July 2026	\$7.21
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National Australia Bank Savings Account

Balance as at 15 July 2026	\$40,833.23
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National Australia Bank – Term Deposit 42-388-8697

Matures 27 December 2026	\$12,056.28
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Warwick Credit Union – Fixed Term Deposit 100005924

Matured on 22 April 2026	\$0
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Moved: *Amanda Martin*

Seconder: *Cr Sean Coleman*

That, the Financial Report be accepted

Carried

5. CROSS BORDER UPDATES

Kellie Urquhart, NSW Cross Border Commissioner Update:

- Kellie provided an update on engagement with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, noting that she is working to establish a new avenue for managing ad hoc issues.
- A project in the Moree area that is helping young people born in Queensland but living in New South Wales obtain birth certificates to ensure access to education and support was highlighted.
- Discussions are ongoing regarding ambulance cover for New South Wales students who travel into Queensland.
- Kellie has launched a new, structured approach for local government to reach her office and currently has 33 live issues across various borders (the document will be shared with the Chair after the meeting).



Bob Gee, Queensland Cross Border Commissioner update:

The Queensland Cross Border Commissioner acknowledged the work that BROC members do for their communities. He also thanked the previous NSW Cross Border Commissioner, Kalina Koloff for the work that she has done whilst in the position and thanked the acting NSW Cross Border Commissioner, Kellie Urquhart for her work and many achievements in the last 3 weeks since holding the position. He then thanked all attendees of the ALGA conference and noted that there was a strong message of local government issues and disaster management.

- Bob reported on his work with the National Fuel Supply Task Force, emphasizing the current need for businesses to check their continuity plans regarding fuel.
- A roundtable is scheduled for September to address construction workforce licensing and skill sets in areas like Stanthorpe, Tenterfield, and Goondiwindi.
- It was suggested there is a major opportunity to improve tourism products for those traveling from the Gold Coast through Kyogle, specifically mentioning signage and collaboration with the Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce.
- A tourism-focused roundtable is also planned for September to explore potential funding sources and economic outcomes.

Biosecurity and Community Programs

- Bob noted the first case of bird flu in Queensland and advised that humans should stay away from dead birds and report sightings immediately.
- Links to biosecurity talking points and websites will be shared with the group by Bob and Kelly.
- Efforts are being made to improve communication regarding fire ant surveillance, specifically following observations in Winston.
- Bob highlighted the success of the "Blue Light Shearing" program, which helps youth in the far southwest get certifications and enter the shearing industry.
- The commissioners are acting as conduits for sensitive community issues involving youth justice, police, and child safety.

Regional Crime and Policing Concerns

- The meeting discussed the significant staffing shortfall in the New South Wales Police Force, which is currently approximately 2,600 officers short of its 20,000-person strength.
- The Chair and Queensland Cross Border Commissioner agreed to draft a letter to relevant agencies and ministers to formally record and support the need for better policing resources on the New South Wales side of the border.

6. Deputation Russell Stewart – Regional Development Australia

Inland Rail Project and Local Impact

- Russell Stewart (RDA) provided a frank update on the Inland Rail project, stating his belief that the project is effectively dead under the current federal government. He noted that money previously intended for the project appears to have been diverted to rail projects in Victoria.



- There was a strong call to finish the "green space" sections, specifically the 50km link to Goondiwindi, to connect with existing tracks and provide growers with better access to the Port of Newcastle, which is currently only at 50% capacity.
- The participants agreed that a fragmented approach to lobbying is no longer effective. Russell urged the group to form a solid, combined front.
- Cr Peter Mailer emphasized that the argument for the Inland Rail must move beyond politics—since the region is not a "swing" territory—and focus on hard economic drivers and the \$5 multiplier effect agriculture has on the national economy.

Moved: Cr Katie Dight

Seconder: Cr Lachlan Ford

That BROC move to call for the building of a coalition of Local Government Areas, districts and Industry to advocate for the reinstatement of Inland Rail.

Carried

Migration and Workforce Development

- Russell discussed the Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA), noting that the federal government might return control of these to the states by mid-next year. He emphasized that local RDAs are best positioned to manage this as they understand specific regional needs.
- Robyn Haig provided a Queensland perspective, noting that Migration Queensland is developing a statewide DAMA. However, there is concern that the existing regional DAMAs will be allowed to expire, and there is little clarity on how the new model will handle regional localization.
- Russell highlighted the "Welcome Experience" program, which focuses on helping the partners of new workers settle into the community to ensure long-term staff retention.
- Robyn mentioned the "ID Connect" events, with a new one being planned for Cunnamulla in late 2023 or early 2024 to help job seekers secure essential paperwork like birth certificates and licenses.

Regional Projects and Future Planning

- Robyn reported that a private rail freight hub in Toowoomba (Interlink) went into administration just two weeks after the Inland Rail cessation announcement, illustrating the immediate economic fallout.
- In the Darling Downs, the RDA is working on a workforce strategy for renewable energy projects. They are trying to coordinate "apprentice sharing" between projects so that trainees can complete their four-year requirements even if a single project's build phase is shorter.
- Early planning has begun for the 2028 solar eclipse, which will traverse the region. Robyn plans to reach out to the Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA) to discuss collective tourism opportunities.

7. Deputation – Shari Blumer President Murray Darling Association (MDA)

Shari addressed the meeting and provided an update on the MDBA Review process and the paper that they have just released.

Basin Plan Review (2026) – Where It Is Up To



- The 2026 Basin Plan Review is the statutory 10-year review of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan under the Water Act 2007 and is now progressing through the consideration of submissions and development of recommendations to governments.
- The review is occurring alongside several major processes, including the Water Act Review and the SDLAM Reconciliation process due by 31 December 2026.
- The MDBA's discussion material has highlighted three major considerations:
 - a) environmental outcomes achieved to date;
 - b) anticipated SDLAM shortfalls; and
 - c) climate resilience and future Basin management settings.
- Basin communities continue to advocate for a stronger focus on socio-economic impacts, community sustainability, investment certainty and regional resilience rather than additional water recovery.
- The Murray Darling Association is using its 2026 National Conference in Shepparton to bring together councils, industry, communities and governments to discuss Basin Plan 2.0 and identify practical solutions for the next phase of Basin management.

SDLAM Reconciliation – Why It Matters

- SDLAM (Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism) reconciliation must be completed by 31 December 2026.
- SDLAM projects were designed to deliver equivalent environmental outcomes while reducing the amount of productive water that would need to be recovered from Basin communities.
- MDA's submission argues that the MDBA's latest assessments indicate a possible shortfall of approximately 300 GL
- A key concern is that any SDLAM shortfall could trigger further reductions to the consumptive pool if governments choose additional water recovery as the response.
- MDA's position is that SDLAM reconciliation should not automatically result in more water being taken from communities through buybacks, entitlement changes or reduced reliability.
- MDA has argued that environmental outcomes delivered by SDLAM projects must be properly recognised and that governments have options beyond recovering more productive water.

Water Buybacks – Why Communities Are Concerned

- Basin communities remain concerned that further water buybacks remove productive water from regional economies and reduce economic activity in irrigation-dependent communities.
- MDA's policy position is clear: future Basin reform should focus on optimisation and better management rather than additional water recovery.

Community leaders continue to call for greater recognition of:

- a) employment impacts;
- b) effects on local business activity;
- c) population decline;
- d) pressure on council service delivery; and
- e) long-term community sustainability.

We have raised concerns that Basin-wide economic assessments often fail to capture the impacts experienced by individual towns and communities.



The preferred approach advocated by MDA is greater investment in infrastructure, efficiency projects, environmental works and complementary measures rather than more buybacks.

MDA and RAMJO "Save Our Communities" Campaign

The campaign is being developed jointly by the Murray Darling Association and Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO) to ensure community voices are heard during the Basin Plan Review and SDLAM decision-making process.

The hope is that other Joint Organisations and Communities will join.

The campaign focuses on telling the stories of communities affected by water reform, using community-led videos, local case studies, short-form social media content and coordinated advocacy.

Key campaign objectives include:

- a) highlighting the human impact of water recovery;
- b) protecting future generations in Basin communities;
- c) demonstrating the connection between water availability and community wellbeing;
- d) increasing community engagement; and
- e) influencing policy discussions before SDLAM reconciliation and future Basin Plan decisions.

The campaign seeks to shift the conversation from purely environmental outcomes to a balanced discussion incorporating environmental, economic and social outcomes.

A recurring narrative throughout campaign planning has been the question: "Is it acceptable for some Basin communities to disappear as a consequence of water policy settings?" This theme has been used to highlight local impacts often hidden within Basin-wide statistics.

There was mention of a model from Andrew Mconville which included temporarily trading water into the consumptive pool to fund environmental infrastructure (currently 16 assets and only 60 staff).

Shari also talked about the effect of carp on water quality and a community funded carp control fund which would support the release of the carp virus. The return to local water authorities model was also discussed.

The government will hand down the reform mid 2027.

8. Deputation – James Lister Member for Southern Downs

Budget Measures and Regional Funding

- James highlighted the permanent funding program for Works for Queensland (W4Q) as part of the recent budget measures released by Dave Cassidy, which aims to provide financial security regardless of the state's circumstances.
- The local government grants and subsidies program received an allocation of \$41.4 million.
- A new initiative, the Regional Water Security Infrastructure Fund, has allocated \$3 million to resurrect a dam project in Stanthorpe to address severe water shortages that have previously impacted the local tourism and agriculture industries.



Disaster Recovery Funding Concerns

- James and Minister Leahy are monitoring the federal government's proposal to replace the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements with a new Disaster Recovery Financial Framework.
- The proposed framework includes a 50/50 funding cap, a significant reduction from the 75% coverage Queensland has historically received.
- The threshold for triggering support for small disaster events is set to rise from \$240,000 to \$2.7 million, which James noted is a major concern for the regional councils represented at the meeting.
- Analysis by the QRA indicates that the state could be stripped of \$1.5 billion in disaster relief over three years, with an immediate \$600 million impact.
- Minister Leahy and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) are actively advocating and protesting against these changes.

Councillor Conduct and Complaints Review

- James announced that his committee is conducting a review of the councillor complaints and councillor conduct system over the next few months.
- Although the official submission period has technically ended, James confirmed the committee is still accepting submissions and looking for as much feedback as possible.
- The committee intends to travel widely and attend the LGAQ conference in Cairns to gather input before presenting a report to parliament later this year.
- James encouraged smaller regional councils to provide input via the Queensland Parliament website or by contacting his office in Stanthorpe.

Cross-Border Policing and Resource Issues

- James and Bob discussed the legislative and constitutional barriers preventing effective policing across the New South Wales and Queensland border, particularly regarding business break-ins.
- Bob noted that New South Wales police are currently facing a shortage of approximately 2,500 staff, which complicates cross-border security.
- There has been recent confusion regarding Triple Zero call-outs in border areas, though some progress has been made through coordination between ambulance, fire, and police services.
- Bob suggested a potential trial in the BROC area to address these complex cross-border issues.
- Rob and the LGAQ are penning a motion to formally support councils on the southern side of the border regarding these funding and security arrangements.

9. STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA FOR BROC (SPA)

SPA 1 – Economic Development and Tourism – Inverell Shire Council

Tourism –

- Cr Beresford (Paroo Shire Council) discussed the "Cellar Doors for Sunsets" tourist travel guide map, noting that the Stanthorpe Chamber of Commerce was surprisingly unaware of it until recently.
- A proposal was presented to create a regional events calendar to complement the map, aimed at encouraging tourists to stay in towns past the "crucial" 2 PM mark, after which many travellers typically decide to move to the next destination.



- Suzette has already received event data from four tourism officers and will lead the collation of this calendar, which will be posted on the BROC website.
- The group discussed using QR codes on physical maps to link to Visitor Information Centres (VICs) for live updates, ensuring the information remains current without requiring a fully dynamic, high-maintenance digital platform.
- Digby noted a trend where AI search tools are decreasing direct website traffic, suggesting that physical brochures and digital links must be optimized for AI searchability.

SPA 2 – Liveability – Moree Plains Shire Council

Health Access and Education Programs

- Mayor Bronwyn Petrie proposed mapping cross-border health access to identify where systems are working well and where improvements are needed.
- Bob Gee mentioned his direct link to the Rural Health Commissioner in Tamworth and agreed to take the health mapping project as an action item, with support from Inverell and potentially a Queensland council.
- The "Fresh Start" program in Gwydir Shire was highlighted as a success, currently supporting 48 trainees and apprentices; funding for this program has been extended to 2029.
- Participants discussed advocating for a similar "Fresh Start" framework in Queensland to help retain young people in rural areas by "growing their own" local workforce.

Regional Infrastructure and Housing

- Cr Pete Mailler shared information regarding affordable prefab housing options being used in Boggabilla that may be an option for use in Walgett as a potential solution to local construction backlogs, though he clarified that these were assembled on-site rather than being purely single-bedroom units.
- Regarding the road network, Cr Mailler noted that while \$50 million has been assigned to Moree roads for flood recovery, the funding model is flawed because it only covers specific damaged sections, leaving newer damage in between unfunded.
- Connectivity remains a significant frustration; the Chair reported that Telstra representatives have been slow to acknowledge the extent of regional connectivity issues.
- Cr Michaela Christensen warned that ADSL will be phased out by the end of the year, requiring a transition to Starlink or similar modem-based systems, which can be a slow and difficult process.
- Gwydir Shire Council shared that the mobile tower in Bingara is scheduled for an upgrade starting Monday, following a recent upgrade in Wyallda.

SPA 4 – Disaster Management – Balonne Shire Council

Disaster Recovery Funding and Advocacy

- The meeting focused heavily on proposed federal changes to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), specifically a threshold increase from \$250,000 to \$2.7 million for declarations.
- Mayor Beresford shared QRA modelling showing that under the proposed changes, New South Wales would lose \$134.6 million and Queensland would lose \$213.5 million in subsidies, while the Commonwealth would be \$328.9 million better off.



- Lucy Abbott from the LGAQ reported on a recent protest in Melbourne and offered to share template submissions and campaign materials with BROC members.

Moved: *Cr Beresford*

Seconder: *Cr Christensen*

That BROC make a submission to the National Emergency Management Agency prior to 19th August objecting to the proposed changes to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Carried

Moved: *Cr Mailer*

Seconder: *Cr Dight*

BROC continues to advocate that disaster management, recovery and reconstruction arrangements be better harmonised to provide consistency and improvement in cross-border disaster management procedures and supports.

Carried

Biosecurity

- Digby provided updates on biosecurity, noting the discontinuation of certain border fences and the success of wild dog exclusion fencing in Balonne.
- He explained a "workaround" in the Queensland Planning Act that allows councils to contract farmers to clear an eight-meter buffer around fences if it is included in the council's biosecurity plan.

10. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

Incorporation of BROC

The group discussed the Incorporation of BROC which would provide the formality needed to secure independent funding and grant opportunities.

Moved: *Cr Dight*

Seconder: *Cr Coleman*

That Border Regional Organisation of Councils apply to become an incorporated association in Queensland.

Carried



11. CORRESPONDENCE

Inwards

- Statement Summary's, Fixed Term Deposit - Warwick Credit Union
- Statement Summary – NAB
- Childsafe Organisations –
 - information sharing guidelines
 - training on obligations of new Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld)
 - information on Queensland Reportable Conduct Scheme
 - supporting Councils in their implementation of the Child Safe Organisations Act
- Kelly Grace, Ready Communities – Social impact in the region, Stanthorpe event
- Mitchell Parker – Change of role
- Kalina Koloff – Change of role and interim NSW Cross Border Commissioner
- Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee - Inquiry into the Operation and Effectiveness of the Councillor Conduct Framework in Queensland

Outwards

- Nil

Matters arising from correspondence

Nil

The inward and outward correspondence was received and noted.

12. GENERAL BUSINESS

- February meeting is to be moved from Friday 12 February 2027 to Friday 5 February 2027.

13. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of BROC will be held at St George hosted by Balonne Shire Council on Friday 9 October, 2026 at 9.00am (local time).

14. CLOSURE OF MEETING

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.23pm

Councillor Rob Mackenzie

Chair