

Draft response to questions without notice from the Blackwood Action Group presented to the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 6 August, 2014.

Wastewater Issues

The Municipal Strategic Statement within the Moorabool Shire Council's planning scheme states: "Blackwood is planned to be seweraged because of ongoing water quality issues with the Lerderderg River."

- 1. Based on the MSS, is Council still advocating sewerage for the town as the best way forward?**

In 2005 the State Government announced that Blackwood would be seweraged, to date Council has not been advised in writing by the Minister for Water Mr Peter Walsh or Central Highlands Water Authority that this project has been abandoned. The responsibility for seweraging the town of Blackwood falls with Central Highlands Water and is subject to funding from the State Government. Council is still advocating for the seweraging of Blackwood within these constraints. Should the funding not remain available the MSS will need to reflect these changes. A review of the MSS is due to be undertaken.

- 2. How does the draft DWMP fit the MSS statement if Blackwood is not likely to be seweraged?**

It should firstly be noted that the DWMP is a whole of Shire plan, not a specific plan for Blackwood. Also Council has not been advised that seweraging Blackwood has now been abandoned.

The DWMP is a Plan with two purposes: to manage existing onsite wastewater systems within the Shire and guide Council in how to ensure new systems are planned, installed and maintained to contain wastewater onsite. If Blackwood is not seweraged the DWMP indicates that existing systems should be brought as close to today's standard as issues are identified or alterations are made to dwellings. New Dwellings in Blackwood will have to comply with Code of Practice for Onsite Wastewater 891.3, as all new dwellings in the Shire must.

- 3. Will the results of the Audit of Septic Tanks in Blackwood be made public and what do these results mean for the town in terms of compliance with the DWMP?**

Due to privacy legislation the results will not be released to the public on an individual basis but are likely to be released in terms of identifying the percentage of systems which are failing and need further work. As failing systems are identified in Blackwood Council officers will work with property owners to identify the most cost effective way to improve the systems and bring them closer to today's standards.

It should also be noted that any upgrade to a dwelling may trigger a requirement for an existing system to be upgraded to comply with today's standards.

4. **How will the results of CHW's testing of the Lerderderg River fit with the DWMP?**

Any relevant new data provided by CHW will be incorporated in subsequent versions of the DWMP.

5. **Should issues arise as a result of the water testing results, how will these problems be addressed through the DWMP or will sewerage once again be advocated?**

Noting Council has not been advised that the project for sewerage Blackwood has now been abandoned.

Once the results of this testing have been released Council will work with all relevant stakeholders to identify the best solutions for Blackwood, however specific town based solutions are outside the scope of the DWMP.

Bushfire Issues

Blackwood is listed as one of the 52 high bushfire risk towns in Victoria. In other similar high bushfire risk towns such as in the Dandenong Ranges and Otway Ranges, a lot of effort is going into constructing fuel breaks where needed to protect the town. However, similar pro-active fire prevention works are not being undertaken to help protect Blackwood and fire management tracks close to the town are becoming overgrown. How can Council help BAG to create and ensure that fuelbreaks are maintained as needed around Blackwood?

Responsibility for fire prevention around Blackwood lies with both DEPI and Moorabool Shire with assistance from CFA. Moorabool Council's responsibilities are limited to inspection of private property (issuing clean up notices) and undertaking roadside slashing on roads which are maintained by Council that have been strategically identified as required for fire suppression.

DEPI has provided the following information regarding fuel breaks around the Blackwood township and fire access tracks within the Forest:

- DEPI is responsible for managing crown land. Scheduled works including planned burning and mechanical treatments are described in DEPI's Fire Operations Plan. The current and proposed Fire Operations Plan for the Midlands District is available on the DEPI website. www.depi.vic.gov.au
- DEPI has conducted a significant amount of planned burning within the Wombat State Forest and Lerderderg Park in the last 10 years. A number of burns within close proximity to the town were completed last season.
- DEPI currently has the Midlands Fire Operations Plan (FOPs) on its website www.depi.vic.gov.au/burns for community consultation and feedback until the end of August 2014 which the Group may like to provide comment into.

Moorabool - MFPO Inspections

Moorabool's MFPO commences inspections for Fire Prevention Notices on private property in mid September through to mid December across the whole Shire. Then undertakes second inspections to ensure compliance with the notice. Property owners are advised to maintain their property throughout the whole fire danger period. The CFA Act does not provide the MFPO the ability to issue notices on government land.

Fire Prevention Works and the Slashing Contract for the Shire commences in approximately early December depending on whether conditions for the East and West of the Shire.

Roads identified through the Fire Management Planning Committee that have slashing work undertaken include:

- *Greendale-Trentham Road to the freeway and to the Shire boundary in the opposite direction.*
- *Mt Blackwood Road*
- *Grace Road, Blackwood (From Martin St to Greendale – Trentham Rd)*
- *Martin Street, Blackwood (from Greendale – Trentham Rd to Grace Rd)*

Moorabool Shire Council – General Parks and Gardens Works Blackwood

A contractor maintains (mows):

- *The area surrounding the Blackwood public toilet on Byers Road and the area at the intersection of Martin Street & Byers Road.*

Furthermore Parks and Gardens also maintain the following areas from an amenity perspective:

- *The Blackwood garden bed on the Corner of Byers Road and Golden Point Road. (Maintained once every 6 weeks).*
- *An area on the Corner of Whalebone Road and Martin Street. (Maintained once every 6 weeks).*
- *An area on the Intersection of Recreation Reserve Road and Simmons Reef Road (Maintained once every 6 weeks).*
- *The Traffic Island on the Intersection of Greendale-Trentham Road and Martin Street. (Maintained once every 6 weeks).*
- *The Roadside from Cann Street to Terrill Street (Maintained once a year)..*

DSE and the local CFA Brigades undertake strategic fire burning works.

7. To help address the fire issues in Blackwood, BAG would like to be represented on the Municipal Fire Prevention Committee. How can Council make this happen?

Municipal Fire Prevention Committees no longer exist in most municipalities including Moorabool Shire Council. Moorabool has moved to Integrated Fire Management Planning and has a Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee which is a subcommittee of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee. Many Council's moved to the process of the Municipal Fire Prevention Officer (MFPO) attending CFA Group Meetings when they are held to discuss issues of an operational nature. Group Officers from CFA and Regional CFA are represented on the Fire Management Planning Committee. The next meeting of the Sub Committee is scheduled for November and BAG could be invited to address the committee if they would like as many agencies are represented. BAG should write to the chair of the Fire Management Planning Committee to arrange a presentation.

8. The community needs to be given the confidence that people will be able to build or rebuild to ensure the town's survival. This will also minimise the risk of people putting their lives in danger trying to protect their house in a bushfire.

Any application to rebuild will need to be considered against the provisions of the Moorabool Planning Scheme. It should be noted that after the 2009 bushfires the State Government introduced specific policies which dealt with this issue.

The provisions of the Bushfire Management Overlay were amended on 31 July 2014 ensuring a dwelling could be constructed in any residential zoned area (including township zone), subject to other relevant provisions of the Moorabool Planning Scheme.

9. What is the Council's policy on burn-offs in and around Blackwood?

Moorabool Shire Council does not carry out burn offs but provides permits for local residents in conjunction with the Regional and Local CFA Members. Details about all permits can be found on Council's website www.moorabool.vic.gov.au. Council also provides agencies with permits and consent to work in road reserves where burns may be conducted. Burns that are undertaken by DEPI are listed on their website www.depi.vic.gov.au/burns under the Midlands Fire Operations Plan. Brigade works vary according to volunteer availability, weather conditions and traffic management arrangements from year to year.

10. With the responsibility shared between some half-dozen authorities, how can weed control in the greater Blackwood region be addresses in a comprehensive and co-ordinated fashion?

The Blackwood/Barry's Reef Landcare Group have been very proactive on this matter. Over the last two years they have coordinated four meetings that have involved the relevant agencies (ie Parks Victoria, DEPI, Melbourne Water, VicRoads and Council) to address the weed issues in Blackwood and there have been positive outcomes as a result.

Currently, Council undertakes an annual weed control program on Council roadsides in Blackwood and Barry's Reef that tackles the priority weeds as identified by the Landcare Group. During the last financial year the Landcare Group also contributed funds to ensure that additional roadsides were treated as part of this program.

Last financial year Council spent approximately \$2116 on weed control, \$1000 of this was from a grant. The roads covered by this are as follows:

- *Greendale - Trentham Road*
- *Golden Point Road*
- *Simmons Reef Road*
- *Old Golden Point Road*
- *Byres Road*
- *Bates Road*
- *Matheson Lane*
- *Wall Street*
- *Thompson Road*
- *Huggets Lane*
- *Cann Street*

Under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 Council is only responsible for weeds identified in our Road Management Plan as follows:

- *Gorse*
- *Broom*
- *Blackberry*

Council does not run a similar program anywhere else in the Shire. The increased program for Blackwood is in response to high environmental values and to provide additional support to the work being undertaken by the local Landcare group and State Government agencies. Our other programs are focused on larger land area and only target Gorse and Serrated Tussock.

11. Will Council consider supporting local initiatives in fire risk management? One such project is a community greenwaste collection point on open land for burning or chipping.

Council do not provide a greenwaste collection within the Moorabool Shire but do provide for the disposal of greenwaste at our Transfer Stations at ½ the cost of general waste. However, Council is in the process of adopting a Waste Strategy. As a part of the Waste Strategy Council will be surveying residents over the next 12 months regarding Green waste.