



# Community Newsletter

September/October 2022

[www.cooperpedy.sa.gov.au](http://www.cooperpedy.sa.gov.au)

District Council  
of Cooper Pedy

*welcome to the opal capital of the world*



## From the Administrator

Let me at the outset apologise for the late distribution of the June/July hard copy newsletter – the printed copies got ‘lost’ for a period of time. It has been another busy few months in Cooper Pedy as you will read.

### Airport

The airport has been operating at a significant deficit for a number of years. With the onset of the pandemic, the Council decided to delay addressing the situation until economic conditions improved.

Now the economic impact of the pandemic has all but disappeared, the Council has decided to significantly increase the charges to use the airport to ensure it is run commercially which involves recovering seventy five per cent of costs to operate it along with a five per cent return on the community’s capital investment. Unfortunately, this will result in increased flying costs. It will however reduce significantly the subsidy from Cooper Pedy ratepayers. It was felt that as the town benefits generally from having an air service ratepayers should fund 25 per cent of its costs.

### Annual report

Councils are required to report annually on their activities. In the case of Cooper Pedy this has not been possible in recent years due to limited resources and poor systems. This year an annual report will be produced. It will be a ‘State of the Council’ annual report designed to provide the incoming Administrator with the lay of the land.

### Anti-social behaviour in public areas

The Council wrote to the Premier in June calling on the State Government to urgently introduce a raft of measures to address this issue as the current approach is not working. A meeting with the Premier was sought. Unfortunately no response has been received and numerous follow ups have also failed to get a response. While we will continue to pursue a meeting with the Premier, the issue was raised and discussed with our Federal and State politicians at Cooper Pedy Roundtable.

### Banking

A few weeks ago BankSA announced the closure of the Westpac bank in Cooper Pedy. This decision will have a significant impact on the town. The bank is anxious to make the transition as painless as possible. It will encourage the greater use of electronic banking and for those wishing to continue to do face to face banking an agency arrangement will be set up with the Post Office. The Administrator and the Council CEO had a face-to-face meeting with the BankSA State Manager in Adelaide on 11 October 2022. Unfortunately, bank closures are now common in regional Australia. While some politicians are making noises the likelihood of a short- or medium-term solution is remote. Sometime the creation of a customer owned bank is investigated. Contact has been made with the community banking sector – Bendigo Bank and the Customer Owned Banking Association. It will not be easy to establish a community bank in Cooper Pedy. It would require approximately \$100 million in business – mortgages, credit cards, etc. The last two attempts to establish community banks in Burra and Lobethal failed. It is the Council’s intention to shortly call a public meeting to discuss the issue including as to whether there is an appetite to pursue the establishment of a community bank in Cooper Pedy.

### CEO appointment

New CEO, David Kelly, has settled in well. David has been appointed for a 12-month period due to uncertainty regarding the future shape and size of the Council (refer to the letter to the Local Government Minister included elsewhere in this newsletter). David’s number-one priority is to transition the Council to a new business and governance model, whatever that is (again refer to the letter to the Local Government Minister). Since October last year, our General Managers, Desley Culpin and Steve Staines, have performed the Acting CEO on a rotational basis in addition to their current roles. We are extremely grateful for their efforts. →

## → Coober Pedy Golf Open

The Open was held on the weekend of 10 and 11 September. While numbers were not quite what was hoped for, all those involved had a very enjoyable experience. Congratulations to the organisers particularly Chevahn Hoad.

## Coober Pedy Together

The Coober Pedy Together process is about getting everyone to work together to make Coober Pedy a better place. It is a unique and bold experiment in community governance. While initiated and funded by the Council it is vital that it is led by the town's citizens. It will be part of the overall governance arrangements for Coober Pedy in the future.

The Coober Pedy Roundtable was held on 5 October. The Roundtable is a forum designed to provide an opportunity for the citizens of Coober Pedy to hold their Federal Local and State members to account.

**COOBER PEDY TOGETHER**  
Moving Forward As ONE Community  
[www.facebook.com/cooberpedytogether](http://www.facebook.com/cooberpedytogether)

## Drive in

Our drive in is the only one left operating in South Australia – there are only 16 left in Australia. The primary reason for this is that it is operated by volunteers. As one of the volunteers I am privy to our list of volunteers. It is pleasing to see a large number of people under the age of 18 involved. Well done! Less pleasing is the under representation of males.

## Dusty Radio

Coober Pedy is very fortunate to have a community radio station. There are only 30 in the State. Dusty Radio was established in 1997. Community radio is owned by the community. Its existence is totally dependent on volunteers. There are many roles on offer – on air or behind the scenes.

## Early childhood development and care

Since 2019 there had been general agreement with the State Government that this service would in future be part of the State education system.

Unfortunately, in the later days of the last State Government this agreement disappeared. The Council is currently trying to convince the new State Government that this is still the best way forward. In the meantime the Council will need to increase charges significantly to ensure ratepayers are not subsidising the service.

The continuation of the service is now guaranteed until 30 June next year. At that time a significant Federal grant may cease which would necessitate a further increase in fees.

## Future municipal and essential services governance in Coober Pedy

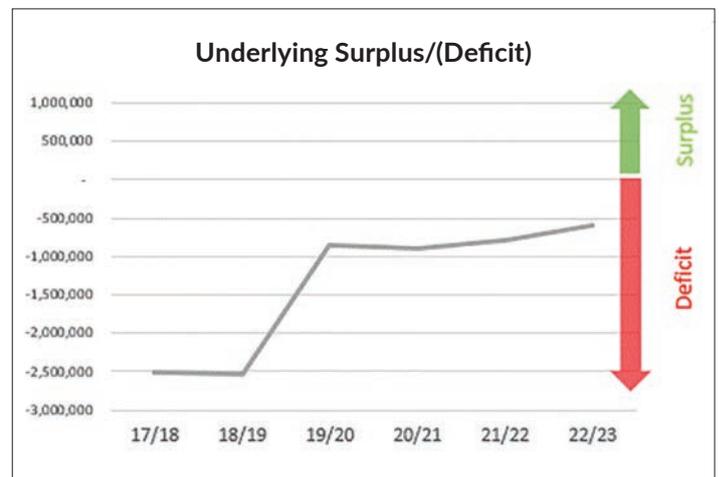
As previously advised the Council has written to Minister for Local Government regarding its views on this subject. A copy of the letter is included elsewhere in this newsletter. The State Government in response to the Council's letter has established a high level taskforce to deal with issues raised by the Council. They are issues that only the State Government can solve. The Council is of the view that the taskforce's brief should not be restricted to the future municipal and essential services. It should also look at the future of the town and the Far North.

## Health service

There has been concern about health services in Coober Pedy and the Far North for some time. The Far North Health Advisory Council has written to the previous and current Health Ministers about this. The Eyre and Far North Local Health Network in conjunction with the Rural Support Service has now commenced the development of a service plan that will identify improvements needed. While this does not guarantee improvement it is a step in the right direction. To assist with the development of this plan your views are sought. You can get a copy of the survey from the Community Health Service, Red Cross or the Council.

## Long-term financial planning

Councils are required to have a long term financial plan. We have had one since early in the term of the Administrator. This has help guide and drive the significant turnaround of the Council's finances (see graph below).



In the coming months a further review of this plan will be in undertaken albeit difficult with so many unknowns (again refer to the letter to the Minister for Local Government). You will notice from the graph that the improvement has plateaued. A significant increase in municipal rates is required if the Council is to be able to maintain and replace existing community assets when required. The Council has decided to not do this until the State Government provides a subsidy to Council to enable it to reduce water prices to Adelaide prices (again refer to my letter to the Minister for Local Government). The reduction in water costs would more than offset the increase in municipal rates. →

## → Municipal Elections

The State Parliament has decided to postpone the return of an elected Council in Coober Pedy until 2026. The Minister will have the ability to reinstate an elected Council earlier if he/she believes this is appropriate. This means another Administrator will be appointed shortly. As stated 12 months ago, I am not available for this role.

## Q&A

Just a reminder that you can pose questions to the Council on any subject within its sphere of responsibility by either coming along, either in person or online, to the Council meeting on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7pm or by submitting your questions in writing prior to the meeting. The more notice of the questions the more likely you will get an answer on the night.

## Parkrun

Parkrun commenced on Saturday 1 October in Coober Pedy. Parkrun exists all over the world. They provide a non competitive opportunity on a weekly basis for people to walk or run five kilometres. The Coober Pedy Parkrun will be one of only three in Central Australia. They are held every Saturday morning at 8am at The Triangle. Obviously, a regular event like this requires significant organisation so if you are able to volunteer to help that would be great.

## Water equity and security

The Council's preferred position on water system is to sell it to the State Government. Should this not be achievable, the system will be sold to the private sector with a requirement that it make the necessary investment in the system to ensure future water security. At the end of the contract period the system would revert to the ownership of the Council.

While this is being sorted out the Council is continuing to advocate for an immediate State Government subsidy to bring the cost of water in Coober Pedy down to Adelaide prices. I recently wrote to all Members of the State Legislative Council and South Australian Senators seeking answers to the following questions:

- Do you believe it to be equitable for Coober Pedy water consumers to pay three times what Adelaide consumers pay?
- Do you believe it is logical for the State Government to subsidise the cost of electricity in Coober Pedy so it is available at Adelaide prices but not to do the same for water?
- Do you support the immediate introduction of a State Government water subsidy for Coober Pedy water consumers?

We will create a register of answers received. This information will be made widely available.

Until next time.

Tim Jackson, Administrator, 0417 016 161



## CEO Update

**I had the privilege of joining DCCP on 23 August 2022 initially on a 12-month contract, and have been warmly welcomed by all staff and many people and organisations in the public arena. I thank all who have done so.**

As mentioned by our Administrator, my number one priority is to transition the Council to a new business and governance model, whatever that turns out to be.

Another high priority has been the DCCP organisational culture – one where we work as a cohesive team to deliver our mission of providing essential services to the community through representation, collaboration and effective delivery of services. We ran an Organisational Culture initiative that commenced before I started and completed a few weeks ago whereby we defined our culture – essentially what do we want our behaviours to be, or “how we do things round here”. We adopted a page of such behaviours and keep focused on behaving according to them all.

Equally high in my priorities is community. A significant part of my role is to represent the DCCP to the wider public, be accessible and become a proud local resident since effectively relocating to Coober Pedy in late August – I work three weeks out of every four in Coober Pedy and one week from Adelaide which works well given many key stakeholders are based in Adelaide (e.g., members of the State Government Task Force). I have met many people, businesses and associations, as well as attended numerous events and volunteered my time in multiple areas. Key to my focus on community is to be actively involved with Coober Pedy Together, an initiative funded by DCCP but with a charter much broader than the DCCP itself.

I look forward to doing my best to make DCCP and Coober Pedy as a town the best it can be, realising the substantial potential of both. And please feel free to introduce yourself to me.

David Kelly, Chief Executive Officer



## **DISTRICT COUNCIL OF COOBER PEDY**

*“Opal Capital of the World”*

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The Honourable Geoff Brock MP  
Minister for Local Government  
GPO Box 1533  
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Minister,

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister for Local Government. I look forward to working with you to progress the turnaround of Coober Pedy and its Council.

The purpose of this letter is to outline a proposed future municipal governance model for Coober Pedy.

It has been more than three years since the District Council of Coober Pedy was suspended. While significant progress has been made on public integrity systems and processes and improving the financial position, little progress has been made on the future governance model.

Due to the lack of interest or action by the previous Government, the water situation in Coober Pedy is now untenable. The rate of water leakage and bursts from the ageing infrastructure is at a point that between 30% and 50% of water is wasted each year. As a result, consumers pay three times what SA Water customers pay. This is inequitable and unacceptable. A petition signed by 900 citizens was tabled in the State Parliament in late 2019 calling on then government to recognise this inequity and to immediately introduce a subsidy to eliminate it. Nothing happened. The previous State Government's position was that it had no interest in assuming responsibility for the water system in Coober Pedy and that the Council should find a private sector investor and when found it would consider the issue of a subsidy. As a consequence, the Council sought expressions of interest from the private sector last year. The level of interest was good. Following this step, the Council called tenders for the purchase, investment, operation and transfer of the system to the Council at the conclusion of the term. This is commonly referred to as a BOOT Scheme. Unfortunately, it was necessary to postpone the process due to inadequate documentation. The Council has engaged the City of Playford to manage the project, including the tender, on behalf of the Council. We should be in a position, if necessary, to reactivate the tender process in the next three months. In addition to this, the Council has been working on a subsidiary model under the Local Government Act to manage its commercial undertakings such as electricity and water, again should this be necessary.

The recent change of government has opened up the possibility of a solution where the State Government acquires the Council's electricity and water businesses. This would have a significant impact on the future municipal governance model.

As you know the next Local Government elections in South Australia are scheduled for November this year. As a result, the State Government will need to make some significant decisions in the coming months regarding the future municipal governance model for Coober Pedy.

After just under three and a half years as Administrator I see four possible models for future municipal governance in Coober Pedy.

**Model One** is for the State Government to take on responsibility for electricity and water supply. This would result in a much smaller and simpler Council. It would reduce the Council's annual turnover from \$16 million to \$4 million and would result in assets being reduced from \$30 million to \$18 million. It would require the State Government to purchase the Council's electricity and water assets at their current value of \$12 million. This would enable the Council to clear its debt obligations of approximately \$10 million. Four citizen polls were conducted in 2019 by the Australian Election Commission on a range of subjects. The possible sale of the electricity and water business were polled and the majority of voters supported their sale provided it was financially prudent to do so.

If the State Government decides not to acquire the electricity and water businesses, **Model Two** would require the State Government to agree to establish a separate entity to provide these activities along with other commercial activities such as the airport, childcare and private works etc. The subsidiary would operate independently of the Council with a skills-based Board. This solution may require legislation to ensure proper oversight of these activities. The entity would be responsible for retailing water. It would not be responsible for production or reticulation of water provided a private sector partner can be found.

If the State Government will not agree to take responsibility for electricity and water or establish a subsidiary, **Model Three** is for the Council to establish a committee under the Local Government Act to manage the commercial undertakings of the Council. The committee members would be required to have appropriate commercial experience and knowledge.

**Model Four** would involve the Council overseeing the municipal and commercial undertakings of the Council. This is the status quo.

In all models the possibility of again having an elected Council could be entertained possibly next year. It might require a hybrid model in the first instance where an Administrator guides and mentors the new elected members as there would not have been an elected Council for four years.

Alternatively, the citizens may decide by a poll that they would prefer the continuation of an administrator.

Minister, I request an urgent meeting with you to discuss my proposed model so the citizens of Coober Pedy have access to good local governance. Our local State member, Eddie Hughes, has been consulted on this model and should be present at our meeting.

I strongly support the **Model One**. This will require the following:

- The State Government to acknowledge the inequity that currently exists in Coober Pedy in terms of water pricing compared to SA Water customers and in so doing immediately provide a temporary subsidiary of \$1.3 million per annum to enable the Council to provide water at SA Water prices.
- The State Government to immediately guarantee the Council's borrowings from the Local Government Finance Authority until it acquires the electricity and water assets.

- The State Government to assume responsibility for electricity and water, including reuse water, and purchase the assets at their current written down value of approximately \$12 million.
- The Council to repay its borrowings of approximately \$10 million.
- The Council to conduct a poll of citizens to increase municipal rates by more than CPI to adequately fund its asset replacement program from revenue.
- The State Government to delay the next scheduled election in Coober Pedy.
- The Council to conduct a poll of citizens to determine their preference for the return of a voter elected Council.
- The Council to recruit a Transition CEO for a period of six to twelve months to manage the divestment of electricity and water.
- The Council recruit a CEO to lead the much smaller and simpler municipal operation once the divestment has been completed.

Many components of the recommended model have been raised unsuccessfully with the previous government at various times.

The regulator, ESCOSA, and the Local Government Finance Authority have been consulted during the development of these models.

Obviously, more detailed work will be required on some aspects of the model if it is supported in principle.

Coober Pedy has endured a long period of dysfunction and financial instability and this proposal presents a once in a life time opportunity to fix it.

Yours Sincerely  
Tim Jackson



Administrator

# Coober Pedy Together



*Coober Pedy Together* continues to move forward, finding new ways to continue to build a sense of community pride, spirit, and coming together, and playing a role in the bigger strategic picture. A community gathering was held in late July to provide an update, with added fun and games.

*Coober Pedy Together* was successful in receiving \$10,000 from the SA Arid Landscape Board Grassroots Grants, which enabled a tree planting event to happen on Saturday 20 August. Over 150 members of the community came out to plant 300 native trees and shrubs around the community playground and skate park. It was a great day with many great conversations had, an amazingly delicious BBQ prepared and shared together, and just a lot of good old-fashioned fun.





# Coober Pedy Together

Hamish from SA Arid Landscapes provided expert tips in tree planting and worked alongside the community. A big thank you goes to Hamish, as well as support from Oz Minerals and Peak Iron Mines. The grant provided funds for irrigation to be installed to water the new trees and shrubs. A big thank you Ken Boland and the District Council of Coober Pedy for helping to install the system. All of us now need to keep an eye on the new trees and shrubs and support them as they grow.

Coober Pedy Together continues to support a playground action team on a fortnightly basis, meeting with community members, and key district council staff, to keep making progress together. This work has seen benches resealed, regular cleaning and safety checks taking place, additional bins provided, new lighting installed, and as much as possible a working toilet.



The action team is preparing a draft masterplan for the recreation precinct, which includes the playground and skate park. The plan will be shared with the community once ready and will seek as much input from community as possible to determine the final way forward. Coober Pedy Together in partnership with district council has secured \$160,000 to upgrades modules of the playground equipment and is seeking to complete this work as soon as humanly possible, within the proper process.





# Coober Pedy Together



New benches and other equipment, and potentially a new simple toilet is needed at the playground. *Coober Pedy Together* is starting by raising funds to purchase new benches. Donations have been received from John's Pizza Bar (\$500) and Umoona Child Care Centre (\$500), with donations received towards cupcakes and the lunch at the tree planting event. The first of many fun quiz nights were held on Saturday 27 August and Saturday 17 September.

Over \$2,600 has been raised so far. The Quiz Nights are also another way to find a way to rediscover our mojo together.

They have been fun, adventurous, a little crazy, and just a great way to do life together. *Coober Pedy Together* will be looking to continue these nights and is in the early stages of planning a community Christmas celebration for November 2022.

If you'd like to be involved, reach out, it would be great.





# Coober Pedy Together



Coober Pedy Together has been advocating on behalf of the community to the State Government for some time. The facilitation group played a significant role in hosting the Hon Geoff Brock MP, Minister for Local Government on Tuesday 23 August 2022. The Minister was able to meet with several groups of residents during the day, including the facilitation group.

The Minister has asked the facilitation group to play an ongoing role in connecting the community with the announced State Government task-group to ensure that residents have significant input into next steps. The Minister will return to Coober Pedy on a regular basis, with the next visit in late October. More information will be made available to the community as soon as possible.



Coober Pedy Together has also started bringing together a group of young adults, who are keen to see Coober Pedy grow and thrive, and who have a range of different ideas and thoughts.

This group was able to meet with the Minister during his visit, and the facilitation group will continue to support and develop this conversation and ensuring that the emerging and younger generations have a voice in the ongoing conversations re the future of Coober Pedy.

Coober Pedy Together is currently facilitating an expression of interest process for new members. If you would like to be part of the facilitation group, you can put your name forward. You will need to present to the wider community at a community gathering and be successful in an election process. If you would like to just be involved in planning and making things happen, please get in touch. For more information or if you have any questions get in touch at [cooberpedytogether@gmail.com](mailto:cooberpedytogether@gmail.com)



# Father's Day Cricket Tournament a success!

On Saturday 24 September, Mini Gems hosted a Father's Day Cricket Tournament at the Town Oval between the Mini Gems Fathers and Coober Pedy Strikers.

The day was a great success with community coming together to celebrate Father's Day and support the players. There were games and activities for the kids, barbeque and prizes on the day. The CFS were out as well with the fire trucks – the children had a ball spraying the fire hose and blaring the siren.

South Australian Cricket Association donated a signed cricket bat and T-shirt signed by the Redback cricket team. A big thank you to Joe Cufone from South Australian Cricket Association for organising the donation.

Coober Pedy Strikers were the champions of the day. Prizes and trophies were given to the winning team and best players of the day. Congratulations to the following people:

Chathuranga Dias – Best Batsman

Nalin Dodampegamage – Best Bowler

Samuel Harris – Best Fielder

It was beautiful weather and good community atmosphere, and we could say that this event was very successful! Mini Gems Childcare would like to thank all those who volunteered and were involved on the day. Events like this aren't possible without your help.

At Mini Gems, we aim at working with community in all events to contribute to a healthy community.

**Madu Nithyani, Centre Manager**



# Dogs in Coober Pedy

Over recent weeks the Council has been contacted more than usage by community members and tourists about the large number of dogs 'patrolling' unsupervised and more worrying being advised of dog attacks on children and adults. There have been several unprovoked dog attacks on Coober Pedy residents and children.

Tourists have contacted the Council on many occasions to complain of multiple dogs surrounding them and several unprovoked attacks, especially at night, and many people are frightened to walk on their own early in the morning or late at night. Most alarming is that several attacks have resulted in serious bites and aggressive chases.

The Council has an Animal Management Plan which is available on the Council's website and the Council employs an Animal Control Officer. The Animal Control Officer has been working with the community quite well over the past years by knowing whose dogs belong to who. The Officer often returned the dogs to the owners and works with them to either understand the implications of the dogs wandering and being unregistered and also works very closely with volunteer animal rescue programs within Coober Pedy.

It is most unfortunate that the situation has become beyond one Animal Control Officer's duties, and he himself has suffered several attacks and bites, with the number of dogs in the community seriously out of control again.

## The Council by-laws state:

By-law made under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and the *Local Government Act 1999*

DOGS BY-LAW 2021 | By-law No. 5 of 2021

For the management and control of dogs within the Council's area

By-law made under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and the *Local Government Act 1999*

CATS BY-LAW 2021 | By-law No. 7 of 2021

To limit the number of cats that can be kept on premises and to provide for the management and control of cats in the Council's area.

The Council is currently updating their expiation notices to provide notices of offences under the Acts and Bylaws. The Council is currently negotiating with several animal remote support groups and visiting vets to assist with these very serious issues, which can no longer be tolerated.

## Electricity Department

**Congratulations to Mark Hoad and Alexander Carmichael for completing their electrical apprenticeships!**

Mark and Alex started their apprenticeships in 2018 and are now employed as full-time electrical linesmen at Council.

They are a great asset to the community in keeping the distribution network maintained and in safe working order.

**Well done Mark and Alex!**



District Council  
of Coober Pedy

## Service contact numbers

Administration  
Office  
(08) 8672 4600

Mini Gems  
Children's Centre  
(08) 8672 4623

Library  
(08) 8672 4635

Electricity, Water,  
Works Depot  
(08) 8672 4626

## On-call numbers

Aerodrome  
0400 108 230

Dog Control  
0408 693 672

Electricity  
0417 814 617

Water  
0417 811 470

Works  
0417 813 571