



# **Late Correspondence BUSINESS PAPER**

**Ordinary Council Meeting  
Thursday, 15 February 2024**

**I hereby give notice that Ordinary Council Meeting will be held on:**

**Date: Thursday, 15 February 2024**

**Time: 8:00am**

**Location: Winton Shire Council Board Room**

**Dirk Dowling  
Chief Executive Officer**

## **Mayor**

Cr Gavin Baskett

## **Deputy Mayor**

Cr Tina Elliott

## **Councillors**

Cr Shane Mann

Cr Frank Standfast

Cr Cathy White

Cr Anne Seymour

## **Management Team**

Dirk Dowling (Chief Executive Officer)

Shannon Van Bael (Executive Manager  
Community)

Roger Naidoo (Director of Works)

**16 Late Correspondence ..... 30742**  
16.1 Late Correspondence..... 30742

**1 LATE CORRESPONDENCE**

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**File Number: 167540**

**Attachments: 1. CTS 02299-24 - Winton Shire Council.pdf**

**Meeting Date: 15 February 2024**

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the late correspondence be received.

**REPORT**

Please see attached



Department of  
**Environment, Science and  
Innovation**

Our Ref: CTS 02299/24

12 February 2024

Councillor Gavin Baskett  
Mayor  
Winton Shire Council  
PO Box 288  
WINTON QLD 4735

Dear Mayor

I am writing to provide an update on the Queensland Government's recent acquisition of two properties in Western Queensland. These acquisitions represent a nationally significant conservation outcome, increasing the national reserve system and protecting the headwaters of the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin.

The Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (the department) has recently acquired the 138,000 hectare Tonkoro Station near Longreach and 65,000 hectares of Melrose Station adjoining Bladensburg National Park near Winton. Once dedicated, Tonkoro Station will connect the protected area corridor from Diamantina and Astrebla Downs National Parks, Mt Windsor Nature Refuge, Pullen Pullen Special Wildlife Reserve and Goneaway National Park to create a total protected area landscape of approximately 1,220,000 hectares. Once the acquired part of Melrose Station is dedicated, it will almost double the size of Bladensburg National Park, to approximately 150,700 hectares.

As you would be aware, *Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030* (the Strategy) set out the clear commitment of the Queensland Government to expand, Queensland's protected area system. Through the 2022-2023 State Budget, the Queensland Government allocated \$262.5 million over four years to implement the Strategy and expand and manage public protected areas. The acquisition of these properties for protected area will contribute to the Australia Government's international commitment to ensure 30% of national terrestrial land is protected or conserved by 2030.

Both properties contain outstanding biodiversity and First Nations cultural heritage values. They help to consolidate suitable habitat for rare and endangered species, including the critically endangered Night Parrot and the Opalton Grasswren which only occurs in the area. The properties also contain Great Artesian Basin springs and wetlands of significance. The acquisition of the properties followed detailed analysis and assessment through the *Queensland National Park Investment Prioritisation Framework*. Tonkoro and Melrose Stations were assessed as being particularly high priorities for conservation, offering opportunities for improved landscape connectivity, and unique ecosystems that are underrepresented in the current protected area system.

The department is aware of the active, small-scale opal exploration and mining operations that are authorised on Tonkoro Station. Please be assured that the existing authorities are unaffected. The department together with the Department of Resources is working to ensure a balance between these operations and the conservation of the important natural and cultural values on the property. For these properties, a suitable mix of protected area and other tenures will be developed to manage the bulk of the acquired areas for conservation while also allowing existing small scale opal mining operations to remain in place.

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The acquisition of these properties also involves a two-year transition period to allow the former landowner to meet existing contracts and adopt a staged transition of their cattle business and infrastructure off the properties. This two-year period will also allow time for the department to engage with the Department of Resources, local governments and other key partners and interest holders including First Nations peoples, opal miners and industry bodies.

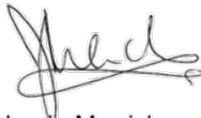
The Queensland Government is conscious of the value of the local economic activity these mining activities represent. I would also like to assure you of the department's intention to make significant investment in these properties that will extend to infrastructure and land management activities to support the transition to new protected areas, supporting local economic activity.

Additional locally-based rangers will undertake management of the properties. Facilities (including new signage and interpretative materials) will be designed to attract visitors and support the growth of outback tourism. The benefits of increased tourism will flow directly into local economies. These new protected areas will be established well before the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games and be ready to welcome the expected influx of visitors exploring Queensland's remarkable landscapes. Management activities will also include enhanced pest and fire management actions, consistent with the department's determination to be a 'good neighbour' and support local landscape wide pest management programs.

The ongoing implementation of the Strategy is a priority of the Queensland Government. The department is unable to disclose any further land acquisition proposals, given the commercial-in-confidence nature of these dealings and to respect the wishes of vendors. I can though advise that any further land acquisitions in Western Queensland will apply similar considerations to those applied to Tonkoro and Melrose Stations and a commitment to invest in the long-term management of the properties for community, environmental and economic outcomes.

Should your advisors require any further information, they may contact Mr Ben Klaassen, Deputy Director-General, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships of the department on (07) 3199 7547 or by email at [desiqpwsddg.corro@des.qld.gov.au](mailto:desiqpwsddg.corro@des.qld.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



Jamie Merrick  
**Director-General**

**2 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Ordinary Meeting 14 March 2024