COVID-19 RESPONSE STATEMENT – 27 MARCH 2020

As the Queensland Government has closed the western and southern state borders, the 21 councils of Western Queensland are stepping up to monitor and restrict access to their communities.

With the threat of Coronavirus (COVID-19) rising in Queensland, Western Queensland's leaders have made the move to restrict travel not only to protect locals and essential service workers, but potential travellers as well.

The action stems from the very real concern of being able to adequately respond should the virus reach our regional and remote communities. Western Queensland's reality is vast distances from major centres, a lack of resources, and a significant number of the community are at high risk such as Indigenous people and the elderly.

The impact would reach beyond Western Queensland. The State economy would also take a significant blow with the region covering almost 60% of the state's landmass and generating $9.35 billion of the State's Gross Product.

Mayor of Carpentaria Shire Council, Jack Bawden said:
"At present we are COVID-19 free and hope to keep it that way, if not minimise any impact. Our local councils are doing everything they can to keep our communities safe, and are asking non-essential travellers to "stay away" or "go home and be safe". This is in-line with State and Federal government and health authority directives as we continue to work with them through our District Disaster Management Groups."

Mayor of Barcaldine Regional Council, Rob Chandler said:
"Fresh off the successful year of Outback Tourism where visitor numbers broke the one million mark while we are still tackling the drought, this breaks our hearts. But the message from across the region is that we most definitely love you and want to see you again, but right now the health of all of us and the future of our communities and local economies is at stake."

Mayor of Balonne Shire Council, Richard Marsh said:
"While our mates in well-resourced cities will have access to options, our reality is we have limited capacity and won't necessarily have an easy plan B. For everybody's sake, and in particular for those at-risk please heed the advice and we'll be ready to see you again – better than ever!

Actions being managed by the councils in coordination with their Local Disaster Management Groups:
- Electronic road signage is in place at key locations along major routes to give ample warning – such as notifications in Cloncurry and Julia Creek advising of only essential travel permitted into northern shires.
- Shires on the State borders are also working with authorities to best manage access for essential travel including supplies and stock transport for properties on either side of the borders.
- We are continuing to look after travellers already on the road as best we can, but the message is clear no more non-essential travel to our region.

Stay up to date with information from the Queensland Government (www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19) or check with local councils by phone, website or Facebook pages for what is happening locally.

The Western Queensland Alliance of Councils members include the councils of the North West Regional Organisation of Councils, the Central West Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board, and South West Queensland Local Government Association.

- ENDS –

Representing: Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Flinders, McKinlay, Mount Isa, Richmond; Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Boulia, Diamantina, Longreach, Winton; Balonne, Bulloo, Maranoa, Murweh, Paroo, Quilpie

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