

Lightning Ridge Area Opal Reserve

SUMMARY

Board meeting held on Monday, 11 September 2023

Previous Minutes

Board meeting 10 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

Action Items

The Action Items were discussed noting matters listed on the Agenda for consideration and updates provided.

Further discussion followed on:

- Income generating ideas to be included within the Funding/Grants Agenda item Funding.
- Location options to use fencing materials with the far western boundary with Muttabun a possible site. The Reserve should not incur any additional costs with the map of the area to be reviewed. The Board agreed the Acting Reserve Manager (ARM) proceed and obtain quotes for fencing at the far western boundary with Muttabun.
- Mapping technology and using the QGIS platform which was a suitable, free and open source program. It was noted there would be a one day training cost of \$850 for the ARM. It was requested the ARM investigate the number of participants able to attend training and if this may be more cost effective. The Board supported proceeding with the QGIS platform. It was noted other programs could be investigated for future use.
- The draft Road repair policy circulated with changes requested to minimise liability risks should the Reserve be unable to undertake grading. The budget allocations amounts were noted and it was suggested a peer review be undertaken on the policy at some stage. The Board adopted the road repair policy, subject to incorporating the amendments discussed.
- Plan of Management full day workshop to be held before the November 2023 Board meeting with the ARM to issue invitations to all.
- New REF document circulated by email, noting MEG would not provide a printed version. It was suggested one printed copy be organised for the office. The due date for submissions was unknown **with the process undertaken by the Department considered unsatisfactory.**
- The scope of work and engaging an expert to prepare a plan for the eradication of Hudson Pear was considered redundant as actions and strategies were being taken and target locations for treatment were known. Total eradication may not be possible with efforts to be initially concentrated on outlying infestations. The ARM advised the boundaries of the Reserve where large infestations were located were being sprayed, with further consideration given to Reserve areas to focus on. It was suggested a brief action plan, similar to the road repair policy, was required. The rain and thick vegetation in certain areas required additional measures noting the action plan should outline the areas to concentrate on and the identified actions and options to undertake such as grading, burning, use of the cochineal bug, re-seeding and planting other vegetation such as saltbush. Crown Reserves Improvement Fund (CRIF) monies would be utilised for urgent spraying. Smaller trial sites for control and management could be completed along sections of Grawin Road with burning of the vegetation undertaken. Time could possibly be designated for early 2024 with the suggestion action be taken as soon as possible to at least clear a fire break.

- Access and education ongoing with the Department of Environment and Planning NSW regarding the use of drones and sensory mapping on the Reserve to create comprehensive records of Hudson Pear infestation.

Public Platform - nil

Conflicts of Interest

The Chair declared a conflict of interest in one agenda item, with the Chair leaving the meeting during discussions. There were no other declarations of conflicts of interest.

Matters for Decision

R1 General Industrial and IN1 Industrial Zoned Land

Directors noted the information and maps provided.

The following matters were highlighted and considered:

- Income generating idea with areas on the Reserve zoned for housing offering development potential and/or the ability to sell land. Sales could be staged over time to provide ongoing generation of funds.
- Options for the Reserve to retain ownership noting the land was a community asset. Lots could be developed in collaboration with other services to provide community infrastructure and possible social housing options.
- Industrial precinct, facilities and buildings should also be considered noting areas of the Reserve were also used for primary production or special purpose.
- The Council was able to change zoning under their local environmental plan (LEP).
- Requirement to obtain expert advice on the possible options for developing the land without having to sell or impinge on the land value for the Reserve. It was suggested urban planners be engaged to review the whole of the Reserve, provide recommendations on possible options to pursue and advise on the process to be followed. A brief would need to be developed to provide to the urban planners and quotes obtained noting the planners should have experience in commercial and community based projects.
- It was suggested a selection panel be formed to interview the urban planning candidates and review quotes. Wendy Spencer advised she would also follow up with University contacts on whether assistance could be provided to the Reserve on the matter.

The Board resolved to engage the services of an urban planner to undertake a feasibility review on the potential development of Reserve land for residential, industrial and commercial activities.

The Board further resolved the ARM be authorised to create a brief on the proposed development plan to provide to the urban planners and obtain quotes, with a selection panel to be formed to interview candidates.

David Lane left the meeting during discussions on the following matter.

3 Mile Road Maintenance

Directors noted and discussed the information provided and the two options outlined, including:

- Requirement for a full financial model of the costs and benefits including the upkeep per kilometre and how costs would be apportioned between all parties.
- Gazetting the road under Option 2 was possible with the Council to be responsible for maintenance and upkeep. However, this may not be in the interests of the Miners Association as the area was an active opal mining field and the miners would not want to sterilise the ground.

- Option 1 was preferred noting the costs of the water truck hire would need to be obtained.
- Further research was required on the two options and separate plans prepared for the road management and road maintenance to be presented by the LRAOR to the stakeholders.
- A meeting was required involving all interested parties being the Reserve, the Walgett Shire Council (Council), AOC, Chambers of the Black Hand and Crown Land to discuss the matters.
- Potential to apply for CRIF funding for monies to cover the costs of the road base.
- Obtain confirmation in writing on the action the Council proposed for 3 Mile Road and why the motion to gazette the road did not proceed.

The Board resolved to proceed with Option 1 to partner with additional stakeholders including the AOC, Walgett Shire Council and Chambers of the Black Hand to develop a road management plan as well as a separate road maintenance plan for 3 Mile Road.

The Board further resolved:

- a) The Acting Reserve Manager develop a financial model for Option 1, including costs and actions required for the road management plan, to be presented to all stakeholders.
- b) A letter be forwarded to the AOC for water carting to commence on 3 Mile Road at the expense of the AOC during construction.

David Lane re-joined the meeting.

Pest Management and Animal Welfare

Directors noted and discussed the information and recommendation provided, including:

- Pest control and economic potential for a social enterprise such as turning feral animals into compost preferred to the baiting program.
- Permit required if undertaking pig and/or kangaroo hunting on the Reserve.
- Contacting the Narrabri office of National Parks to ascertain if able to participate in the use of the helicopter to shoot feral animals. CRIF funding may possibly be applied for to engage contractors to assist with the culling of feral animals.
- Animal welfare issues, for example pigs being stuck in the mud around Cocooran Lake and other wildlife eating carcasses of animals which had been baited.
- A policy was required on animal management on the Reserve particularly foxes, cats and pigs. Trapping of goats was a preferred option, however infrastructure would be required, for example fencing and water. The sale of goats could generate income for the Reserve however, a full time position would need to be created to manage the operation.
- Utilise community projects and volunteers to undertake trapping or eradication activities to achieve environmental outcomes. Promoting the sterilisation of cats should also be considered noting Council services were available.
- Undertaking a project to show the threat to the Reserve and damage caused by the cat population noting night time cameras were able to record and show cat movements.

The Board accepted the recommendations that:

1. The Reserve join the LLS baiting program, with the ARM to undertake Vertebrate Pesticide Training.
2. The organisation be registered for a Firearms Licence for the eradication of pests on Primary Production Land.

3. The ARM obtain a firearms licence.
4. An application be made to the Crown Reserves Improvement Fund (CRIF) for monies for pest management.

Matters for Decision

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's report as at 4 September 2023 was tabled and discussed, including:

- The substantial reduction in the income from the Mines Department with only \$12K received over the past two months in comparison to the previous two year periods of \$90K and \$100k. There were contributing factors to the reduced number of mining claims however the Mines Department had mismanaged the issue resulting in a significant impact on the Reserve's income noting the costs of operation still needed to be covered.

The Treasurer's Report as at 4 September 2023 was accepted.

Manager's Report

The Manager's Report was tabled and discussed, including:

- Mine shaft subsidence information forwarded to the Mines Department.
- Issue of firewood harvest permits, noting care was required as the removal of dead wood had negative habitat impacts. The Board requested the ARM follow up with Forestry NSW on the Reserve being able to issue firewood harvest permits and charge fees.

The Manager's Report was accepted.

Independent Review of Small-Scale Mining Titles

Directors discussed the information provided noting:

- Publication of the REF of OPA4 and potential impact on the future of opal mining, with consideration of the position to be taken by the Reserve. Terms of reference were required and outcomes obtained from the process.
- Stephen Lawrence had been appointed as envoy by the Minister to liaise with stakeholders although no progress was being made. It was suggested the ARM facilitate a face to face meeting of all stakeholders to consider the preparation of a position paper or statement on the matter of not granting any new mineral claims in OPA4 until after the review concluded.

Club Grants Project to be Amended

Directors noted and discussed the information provided.

The Board requested the ARM provide the Board with updates on the Club Grants Project and modifications made for the funding allocated.

Culvert and Track Maintenance Coorcoran

Directors noted and discussed the information provided, including:

- The water leaking from the bore on the nearby property was the cause of the problems on the track.
- The ARM was requested to advise the property owner to fix the water leak issue otherwise the costs of repairing the track would be sought.

Funding/Grants

Directors noted the information provided, including:

- The remaining CRIF funds for Hudson Pear were now \$49k.
- CRIF funding applications were now open.

Plan of Management - noted.

Roads and Tracks

Directors noted and discussed the information provided, including:

- The Reserve was not a road management agent with consensus required on road maintenance and contribution to costs noting there were limitations on the Reserve's funding.
- A Discussion paper was required on the roads to consider for maintenance and/or gazetting, including the main tourism roads and the number of mining claims along the roads, for further consideration. It was noted the Mining Association would raise objections to gazetting roads due to sterilising mining ground.
- Legal advice was required on the implications on road ownership and the gazettal parameters for stakeholders. It was noted State and Federal funding was available once a road was gazette.

Hudson Pear

Directors noted and discussed the information provided.

Wendy Spencer advised the four DEG rangers had completed chemical training and could possibly contribute in-kind to the spraying effort. The rangers' wages were covered with only the need to provide equipment and supervision. The ARM advised she was able to provide the equipment training and supervision with consideration required on the terms for lending any Reserve equipment.

Bushfire Mitigation

Directors noted the information provided, with the suggestion Brenda McBride accompany the ARM during any grading conducted along fence lines to ensure no cultural sites were affected.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for 13 November 2023.