

Richmond  
Valley  
Council



# **SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

## **Ordinary Council Meeting**

**Date: Tuesday, 22 October 2019**

**Time: 5.00 pm**

**Location: Council Chambers  
10 Graham Place, Casino**

**Vaughan Macdonald  
General Manager**

## **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

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**1 MAYORAL MINUTES****1.1 MAYORAL MINUTE - BUSHFIRE RECOVERY RELIEF****Author: Robert Mustow, Mayor****RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. Note the significant impacts of the Busbys Flat Road fires and Council's role in the response and recovery effort,
2. Commends the efforts of Council staff who responded quickly and in a very committed manner to support the efforts of the emergency services,
3. Commends the untiring efforts of all emergency services personnel to respond to this natural disaster and how this has saved many lives and properties during these catastrophic events;
4. Note the General Manager is the Chair of Local Recovery Committee which includes NSW Government agencies and together will guide the recovery effort,
5. Note the resource implications of the recovery effort for Council and that efforts to recoup costs through the section 44 and NDRRA funding arrangements will be pursued,
6. Note that some minor fees have been waived by the General Manager to support ratepayers to have access to information to enable them to consider their recovery options,
7. Authorise that the General Manager negotiate suitable funding arrangements through the Local Recovery Committee to minimise the impact on Council and provide support to those impacted by the natural disaster, and
8. Council notes an update will be provided at the next Councillor Information Session.

**REPORT****Summary of the Busbys Flat Road/Long Gully Fire**

Significant impacts from fire on the Busbys Flat area across through Rappville and to Bungawalbin occurred from Tuesday 8 October onwards. Over 48,000 hectares has been burnt out. The fire is now being controlled.

The event has required large scale containment activities by RFS including mopping-up, blackout and control line development across 260+km of fire line.

Building Impact Assessments (BIA) are now completed. In total;

- 44 houses destroyed (including 14 (1/3) of Rappville residences)
- 7 facilities including Tarmac Sawmill destroyed
- 81 outbuildings destroyed
- Large scale stock, fencing & machinery losses

The Rappville Public Hall was destroyed in the fire. The building is insured, and the assessment process is underway. Other Council assets impacted were the associated septic tank and water tanks. Fencing was also damaged at the Rappville Showground. The town entry sign was also damaged and may need to be replaced.

Many roads including the Summerland Way were closed until the Friday evening due to fallen trees and power lines.

Power was restored at Rappville by Friday evening after significant Essential Energy repair works with all premises restored by Tuesday 15 October.

The Sydney – Brisbane Rail line re-opened on Monday 14 October after significant ARTC repair works.

Telstra landline services were disrupted due to the exchange being burnt out. Services were mostly restored by Friday 18 October. Optus mobile has returned to normal service.

A Disaster Welfare Assistance Point was established at the Rappville Public School with services including Disaster Welfare, Local Land Services, Red Cross, Chaplains and Counsellors available.

EOC Impact Assessment completed and handed to the Northern NSW Recovery Committee.

Local Recovery Committee activities commenced, led by Richmond Valley Council, assisted by OEM. Rappville and Casino Community Meetings conducted 17/10/19.

**Council's response**

Council has been involved in the response to the emergency through the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre which operated from Tuesday 8 October through to Monday 14 October. Council staff were involved in response activities including support for RFS administration, traffic control, water cart support for RFS operations, road clearing of trees and debris, waste management operations and communication support.

There are many challenges in responding to the devastation this fire has caused for our community, from Busbys Flat through to Rappville and east to Bungawalbin Creek. A Local Recovery Committee has been established with the General Manager being Chair and Council is working closely with a number of NSW Government agencies led by the Office of Emergency Management to respond to the impacts on our community.

The response will have resource impacts on Council and may cause some delays with planned projects due to the diversion of resources to assist the fire emergency response effort.

### ***Emergency Response and Natural Disaster funding***

I would like to acknowledge St Mary's Catholic College for making available the Relihan Centre as an emergency evacuation centre at very short notice on the evening of the fire, where affected residents were transported from Rappville Public School. This became an important hub for the affected community for the rest of that week.

The recent Busbys Flat/Long Gully Fire was declared a Section 44. A "Section 44" refers to the New South Wales Rural Fires Act 1997, specifically section 44, Commissioner's responsibility. Essentially it is used to describe when the Rural Fire Service Commissioner declares a localised "State of Emergency" for a specific district suffering severe fire conditions that cannot be managed without drawing in extensive resources from other areas. Once declared by the Commissioner, the district has access to any and all fire-fighting personnel/equipment from across the State at no cost to the district or RFS, with the State Government footing the bill of all related Section 44 declared operations. The Section 44 operations are still in place at the time of drafting of this report.

As a result of the significant impact of this fire, a Notice of Natural Disaster Declaration for Richmond Valley was issued on 9 October 2019. This declaration activates Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA). NDRRA is the Australian Government's response to natural disasters and includes the provision of relief and recovery assistance to disaster affected communities. Through the NDRRA, the Australian Government provides financial assistance directly to the states to assist them with costs associated with certain disaster relief and recovery assistance measures. The NDRRA makes provisions for state governments to activate relief and recovery assistance immediately following a disaster without seeking approval from the Australian Government.

Where the NDRRA is activated, the Australian Government may fund up to 75 per cent of the assistance available to individuals and communities. This contribution is delivered through a number of NDRRA measures and may include:

- personal hardship and distress assistance
- counter disaster operations
- concessional loans or interest subsidies for small businesses and primary producers
- transport freight subsidies for primary producers
- loans and grants to voluntary non-profit organisations
- the restoration or replacement of essential public assets
- community recovery funds.

A Disaster Welfare Assistance Point has been operating at the Rappville Public School since shortly after the fire and remains operating daily at the time of drafting this report.

The Natural Disaster has also been declared a catastrophe by the Insurance Council of Australia which means that insurance companies will prioritise claims and assessment from properties in the natural disaster area.

The Federal Government is providing one-off disaster payments to those worst affected by the devastating bushfires that have swept through Northern New South Wales and Southern Queensland. The Government has activated the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP) which provides a non-means tested payment of \$1000 for eligible adults and \$400 for eligible children.

### ***Support for affected Businesses***

Council's Economic Development team has been in contact with a number of large businesses that have been affected by the fire. This includes the Tarmac Sawmill which is located on Old Tenterfield Road which has been destroyed. It is the largest employer in the area employing 30 staff. Other businesses affected include O'Connor Sawmill, local logging contractors, Main Camp Natural Extracts, Rappville Pub, Rappville Post Office and many rural landholders who have had their properties burnt and suffered significant stock losses.

Council has been working with business support services including Business Connect, the Office of the Small Business Commissioner and Service NSW.

### ***Supporting local charity groups to support the community***

As Mayor, I am extremely proud of the response of the Richmond Valley and wider community to support those affected by this natural disaster. It will be critical that we continue to support this community to recover over the weeks and months ahead.

Council is also providing support to community led groups who are assisting with the recovery. The Casino Golf Club has led the way by coordinating the distribution of donated non-perishable goods from the Rappville Showground facilities. It has also promoted cash donations which have enabled fuel vouchers and funding at local rural suppliers to support the purchase of replacement items.

Blaze Aid has now been established their site at the Casino Showground, with 13 volunteers on Saturday and now 35 volunteers as of yesterday. On ground support commenced from Saturday and all 6 of their work trailers are now providing daily support to farmers with their fencing repairs. Local community groups are supporting the volunteers through daily catering.

There are a number of community-based organisations who have provided support and there are numerous fundraising events planned into the future to support the recovery process.

### **Potential relief options for residents and resource impacts for Council**

#### ***Rates relief***

Council officers are preparing a Draft Financial Hardship – Natural Disaster Policy which would enable a ratepayer who has been directly impacted by the fire to apply to enter into a payment arrangement with Council. It is proposed that a payment arrangement would allow the applicant to postpone payment of the current year's rates and charges.

At the commencement of the following financial year, after the levy and charges are raised, Council will notify the applicant of the payments required to have all rates for that year paid including half of the postponed years rates, Council will do the same for the following year. This allows the ratepayer the next two financial years to pay off the postponed rates, as well as the rates for those years. It is proposed to workshop this arrangement and consider other relief options that may need to be considered.

#### ***Water supply – emergency tank cleaning***

Due to the impacts of the fire and the risk of contamination to water tank supplies and given the urgency of enabling people to return to their homes, Council coordinated a local contractor to provide an emergency tank clean and supply of approximately 3,000L of water for those properties that request this assistance.

#### ***File requests***

Council has already had some requests to view files from property owners and insurance companies. Where this is directly related to the impacts of the natural disaster we have waived the \$30 fee.

#### ***Waste management***

The damage from the natural disaster is significant and has generated significant waste management challenges. Council is working closely with NSW Public Works and Services and the EPA to put a plan in place. Many of the affected properties are confirmed to have asbestos contamination which will need to be carefully managed and options for disposal are being investigated. Council is working hard to minimise the cost of this to Council and also advocating for NSW Government assistance where possible for this task. Where properties are insured, clean up should be covered by the insurers who are also in discussion with the Office of Emergency Management.

Council had to re-locate its transfer station operation from the Rappville Transfer Station site due to fire damage. A transfer station has been operating at the Rappville Showground and will continue to be available throughout the coming week. Future availability will be determined based on demand. Significant amounts of waste are coming in and Council will seek to recover the cost of this through recycling products and seeking assistance through the NSW Disaster Recovery arrangements.

The NSW EPA has advised that the Waste Levy is exempt on any waste from the declared Natural Disaster area. This is good news but still leaves the balance of the Gate Fee (estimated to be a minimum of \$250 per tonne) to either be paid by the property owner or for the NSW Govt and/or Council to subsidise the charge. Council is having discussions with OEM about any further support available especially for those with uninsured properties.

### ***Development Application requirements***

Council has started to receive calls from people wanting to understand the Development Application requirements for demolition and re-building.

There are many people who wish to return to their properties, and we will need to enable them to have somewhere to reside. An option for this may be Temporary Occupation and having a working Onsite Sewage Management System (OSMS) is onsite.

The temporary occupation could be limited to caravans and converting sheds to liveable spaces by adding wet areas. Temporary occupation permits are usually issued for a period of 12 months with the option of extending for a further 12 months if the applicant wishes to reapply. Council could offer temporary occupation permits for 2 years up front, to allow residents time and not having to reapply as some people may need longer than 12 months.

Some owners may wish to build a shed under the Exempt Provisions, however they will not be able to be approved as habitable for temporary purposes. Council will need to inspect and ensure a functioning OSMS is connected.

If Council were to waive fees to enable people to get back to how they were prior to the disaster, the following fees are what could be waived. It should be noted that the Long Service Levy will be applicable and will be calculated at the time of lodgement of any application as it is not a Council fee and therefore cannot be waived by Council. Based on an estimated assumed value of \$250,000 per property, the Long Service Levy would be \$875.00 per application.

The section 7.12 Levy is for increased demand on community infrastructure as per Council's adopted program and due to no increase in demand this fee could be waived.

The following fees are based on the rebuild of 44 dwellings with an average value of \$250,000.

Development Application Fees	Construction Certificate Fees	Temporary Occupation	OSMS	Section 68	7.12 Levy
\$1,268.00	\$1,927.00	\$250.00	\$400.00	\$150.00	1%
\$55,792.00	\$84,788.00	\$11,000.00	\$17,600.00	\$6,600.00	\$110,000.00

The total of the above fees if all fees were waived is \$285,780.00.

### ***Investing in the Rappville community***

It will be important that significant support is provided to support the Rappville community to rebuild and enhance its community facilities to support the recovery from the devastating impact of the fire.

The Rappville Public Hall was completely destroyed by the fire. The building is insured and Council is working through the insurance assessment process and will work with NSW Public Works to have the building demolished and waste removed. Council will commence planning for the rebuilding of the Rappville Public Hall and will ensure appropriate community input to the design of a new Hall.

Other options which Council and the NSW Government could consider providing funds for include:

- Refurbishing the tennis courts to be a multi-use facility and creating a youth space adjacent to it which could include more engaging playground equipment would enhance the community spaces and experiences.
- Rappville Showground is home to the annual Dog Show and Bull Ride with good crowds attending. Council held its Australia Day festivities at the Rappville Showground with good crowds attending. Improved facilities at the Showground which include some improved covered areas, camp kitchen, showers and a dump point could enable it to be established as a free camping area for Grey Nomads.
- A cycle way to connect the east half of town (includes Public School) to the western section which includes the Post Office would better connect the community and improve safety for people who current walk on the road to the Pub or the Post Office.

It is proposed to establish a community advisory group to inform the recovery process.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

**Nil**