

Richmond  
Valley  
Council



# **AGENDA**

## **Extraordinary Council Meeting**

**I hereby give notice that an Extraordinary Meeting of Council will be held on:**

**Date: Tuesday, 7 April 2020**

**Time: 5pm**

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

**Vaughan Macdonald  
General Manager**

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**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

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**1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

The Mayor will provide an Acknowledgement of Country by reading the following statement on behalf of Council:

*"Richmond Valley Council recognises the people of the Bundjalung Nations as Custodians and Traditional Owners of this land and we value and appreciate the continuing cultural connection to lands, their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region in the past, present and future."*

**2 PRAYER****3 APOLOGIES****4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

## **5 GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORTS**

### **5.1 RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE PACKAGE**

**Author:** Vaughan Macdonald, General Manager

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) crisis and subsequent public health orders implemented by the NSW Government are placing enormous strain on communities and businesses.

This report outlines Richmond Valley Council's COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Package which was developed to provide assistance to community and businesses while minimising the risk to Council's financial sustainability, leaving a significant burden for current and future ratepayers.

The package will be delivered in two phases, Initial Response and Strategic Recovery Actions and will cost Council approximately \$142,000 through a number of initiatives including a zero interest rate on fees and charges until 30 September 2020.

The package will be supported by a communications plan which will wrap all of these initiatives together and promote them to our local community ensuring the maximum benefit is achieved.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council: -

1. Adopts the Community and Economic Resilience Package, as set out in this report and in Annexure A, and authorises the General Manager to implement the necessary actions to deliver this package to our community.
2. Adopts a zero interest rate for overdue rates and charges for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

#### **DELIVERY PROGRAM LINKS**

Making Council Great

CS1: Leading and Advocating for our Community

CS1.1: Improve decision making by engaging stakeholders and taking community input into account

#### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

The Community and Economic Resilience Package has been developed with due consideration of Council's financial capacity and represents a prudent initial response to an evolving crisis.

The cost of the package will not detriment Council's longer-term financial sustainability nor create an unsustainable burden for current and future ratepayers. There remains scope for further measures if required without the potential for jeopardising Council's financial sustainability.

Staff resourcing associated with the Community and Economic Response Package will be met from existing operational budgets as staff defer non-essential, business-as-usual activities to focus on the economic and social wellbeing of our community.

The package listed in Attachment A will cost approximately \$142,000 for phase one. There may be indirect costs through changes to Council's procurement policies, which increases the emphasis on buying from local suppliers, which are yet to be measured. Phase one cost estimate includes:

Financial hardship support	\$ 85,000.00
Local procurement and purchasing	\$ -
Industry resilience taskforce	\$ -
Flexible Council support	\$ 39,000.00
Compliance assistance for business	\$ -
E-Library services	\$ -
Small business crisis training	\$ 7,500.00
NRLX vital operations	\$ 10,500.00
	\$ 142,000.00

A budget for phase two will be developed and incorporated into the revised 2020-2021 budget, which will be reported to Council at a future meeting.

## REPORT

The COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) crisis and subsequent public health orders implemented by the NSW Government are placing enormous strain on communities and businesses.

This report outlines Richmond Valley Council's COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Package which has been developed to provide assistance to community and businesses without risking Council's financial sustainability, or creating an unsuitable burden for current and future ratepayers.

Both the Australian and NSW governments have announced economic stimulus packages and welfare support in recent weeks. We are communicating these opportunities and encouraging business and the community to register and take advantage of this support.

The rapidly changing nature of this crisis, and the presently unmeasurable impacts on our community and economy, mean that Council will need to continue to adapt and investigate ways it can assist the community and businesses to be resilient through these challenging times. Council's COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Package sets a framework for this assistance.

### Guiding principles of the package

- Direct actions to support our community well-being.
- Timely responses which address cash flow for small business.
- Innovative programs which provide long-term strategic benefits.
- Collaboration with partners and contribution to existing initiatives.
- Financial responsibility for the long-term sustainability of the organisation.
- Keeping our people employed and productive to ensure essential services are delivered and we are ready to support recovery actions when governments advise it is time.

### Phases of delivery

The package has been designed to be delivered in two phases which deal with both the immediate crisis and also the strategic actions which can take place to ensure our businesses and community are in the best position to recover quickly.

All costs are estimates at this stage.

## Overview:

PHASE I – Immediate response	<p>Financial hardship support          Local procurement and purchasing          Industry resilience taskforce          Flexible Council support          Compliance assistance for business          E-Library services          Small business crisis training          NRLX vital operations</p>
PHASE II – Strategic recovery actions	<p>Infrastructure projects          Government advocacy          Sustainability programs          Events and tourism          Community Grants Program          Strategy</p>

## PHASE I: Immediate response:

Financial hardship support	<p>Council has identified that the payment of rates and water charges may become challenging for those who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The package proposes that zero interest on outstanding payments be charged during the COVID-19 Public Health Order restrictions. The time period for application of zero interest will be regularly assessed for effectiveness.</p> <p>Whilst interest charges will be waived, we strongly recommend that ratepayers continue to make scheduled repayments to avoid accumulation of debt. Our staff are able to assist ratepayers with the development of payment plans to put support structures around rates and water costs. It is important the Australian Government's stimulus packages are well directed by those who receive it.</p> <p>Estimated cost: The amount of interest Council collects on outstanding rates and charges differs year to year. In the last full financial year, being 2018-2019, Council collected \$165,987. Year to date the amount is \$93,484. Based on these figures an estimation on what this would cost Council is approximately \$85,000 for a six month period (1 April to 30 September 2020).</p>
Local procurement and purchasing	<p>Council's procurement team will issue an instruction notice to staff undertaking procurement activities that an additional 10% weighting in favour of local contractors and suppliers should be added when undertaking procurement during the COVID-19 crisis.</p> <p>Invoices from existing contracts with local suppliers will be processed within seven days following approval, and subject to available staff resourcing.</p> <p>Estimated cost: any additional cost will be minimal</p>
Industry resilience taskforce	<p>Establish a taskforce of regional representatives to develop ways to provide innovative and targeted support to heavily-impacted local industries.</p> <p>Estimated cost: no additional cost to council</p>
Flexible Council support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library services: extended loan period and put a hold on overdue notices and fines.</li> </ul>



	<p>Estimated cost: \$500</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting more flexible delivery times and truck movements at supermarkets. Estimated cost: no additional cost to Council</li> <li>• Support for doctors' surgeries to stay open longer and businesses to adapt to continue to operate under the requirements of public health orders. Estimated cost: no additional cost to Council</li> <li>• Restrictions on the way businesses use footpaths be eased for food premises to help patrons practice effective social distancing. Estimated cost: no additional cost to Council</li> <li>• Refund of booking fees to people and organisations who have booked Council venues and are now unable to proceed with their bookings Estimated cost: Bookable for period 1/4/20 to 30/6/20 are \$7,200. Seasonal sports bookings (some fees not yet raised) total \$18,800, however, partial renewals are anticipated in some cases which will reduce this cost.</li> <li>• Parking fines – focus to be on education and information for the period to 30 June 2020, with fines only issued for safety, health and disability access reasons. Estimated cost: Forgone revenue estimated at \$12,500</li> </ul>
Compliance assistance for business	<p>Some businesses may have to change the way they operate in order to comply with public health orders. Council's Environmental Health Officers will be undertaking educational inspections for food premises to assist businesses, and to help provide assurances to the community that safe food standards are still being achieved.</p> <p>Estimated cost: Nominal cost to Council</p>
E-Library services	<p>Council's library service is a powerful way of supporting vulnerable people in our community.</p> <p>With COVID-19 impacting more people, whether by illness or the need to stay at home, we are encouraging residents to make use of our extensive e-Library services.</p> <p>Estimated cost: Promotion of existing services, no additional cost to Council</p>
Small business crisis training	<p>Council has engaged online training experts Brand Local to provide a crisis training program for businesses.</p> <p>The course is specifically designed to give businesses a plan on how they can adapt to not only survive this crisis but to thrive. It also teaches businesses what they must do right now to ensure they have a quick recovery once this crisis ends.</p> <p>Estimated cost: \$7,500 plus GST</p>
NRLX vital operations	<p>Council acknowledges the essential role livestock sales have with producers as well as to maintain the food supply for consumers. Adaptions are being implemented to ensure operations continue at the NRLX for as long as possible. This includes fast tracking the</p>

	<p>implementation of the StockLive online sales/bidding streaming capability and operational adaptations to comply with social distancing measures to ensure the safety of both staff and stakeholders.</p> <p>Estimated cost: Costs for the establishment of StockLive include \$10,500 in infrastructure and equipment. A fee structure for the use of the online platform will be implemented in the 20/21 financial year.</p>
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## Phase II: Proposed programs July 2020 – June 2021

Budgets to be developed and proposed in May 2020 as part of the 2020/21 budget

Name	Detail	Benefit
<p>Infrastructure and bushfire recovery actions</p> <p>Bushfire projects</p>	<p>Roll out an infrastructure program and bushfire recovery actions in 2020-2021. Shovel-ready projects to be prioritised and funded at the earliest possible time.</p>	<p>Increased provision of local infrastructure and economic activity.</p>
Government advocacy	<p>Strategic advocacy campaign to the Australian and NSW governments to access increased funding in forthcoming budgets to assist in developing projects which create economic growth in the region.</p>	<p>Government commitment to the future of the Richmond Valley and the effective delivery of the significant regional projects.</p>
Sustainability Programs	<p>Investigation into the feasibility of implementation of renewable energy initiatives, including microgrids to encourage sustainable development in the region.</p>	<p>Sustainable growth which facilitates the creation of new employment opportunities and diversification of industries.</p>
Events promotion	<p>Provide assistance for rescheduled events from across autumn and winter to provide the Valley with an unprecedented level of activity and events (scheduled once safe). Provide marketing and promotional assistance and review events funding schemes.</p>	<p>Richmond Valley tourism has re-opened for business and opportunity. Events will drive local activity.</p> <p>To be included in 2020-2021 budget</p>
Community Grants Program	<p>A targeted round of Community Grants Program to assist the community through the recovery phase.</p>	<p>Applicants are provided with funds to support local-based recovery programs, noting the increased social challenges reflective of a higher</p>

		unemployment rate.
Tourism promotion	Tourism is a key regional industry and has been heavily impacted by the crisis. This strategy includes development of a destination management plan to set out the vision for the future of tourism in the Valley.	Tourism operators are given structure around recovery and future resilience.

## CONSULTATION

The package has been developed in consultation with internal stakeholders in the relevant areas of Council, each of whom have developed a good understanding of the community's needs and feedback through ongoing consultation and engagement.

In addition, Council has undertaken research on initiatives being undertaken in other local government organisations.

A communications plan will be developed to wrap all of these initiatives together and promote them to our local community.

## CONCLUSION

Richmond Valley Council's COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Package has been developed to represent a broad range of initiatives which will provide assistance to the community and businesses without risking Council's financial sustainability, or creating an unsuitable burden for current and future ratepayers.

The package has been designed to be delivered in two phases which deal with both the immediate crisis and also the strategic actions that can take place to ensure our businesses and community are in the best position to recover quickly.

## ATTACHMENT(S)

1. **COVID-19 Community and Economic Resilience Program (under separate cover)**

## 5.2 DROUGHT ASSISTANCE FUNDING

**Author:** Kelly Moroney, Recovery Manager

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The original drought communities' program was designed to deliver benefits in targeted drought affected regions of Australia. The Australian Government provided funding of \$35 million over four years, commencing in 2015-2016. The Government announced it would extend the program and renamed it the drought communities program extension. This has resulted in our local government area being added to the list of eligible councils and becoming eligible for funding in the amount of \$1 million dollars. The program is being administered through the business grants hub via the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development.

### RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. Approve the projects identified in the following table and outlined in this report in relation to funding provided under the Drought Communities Program extension;

	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Program of Works</b>
Water filling stations	\$100,000	Designated bulk water filling stations across the local government area to assist residents and bulk water carriers
Community Hall upgrades program	\$100,000	Provide a grant program for community halls across the Valley to enhance their facilities and improve their resilience
Casino Showground Upgrades	\$420,000	Day stall and sand warm up area to provide facilities to showground users including pony club, camping infrastructure including an RV short stay area
Paddock to Plate Project	\$95,000	Agritourism experience to showcase producers
Tourism Facilities Road Access Improvement	\$285,000	Improve rural road access for tourism venues to assist in stimulating economic growth
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	

2. That application be made in accordance with the drought community guidelines via the business grants hub.

### DELIVERY PROGRAM LINKS

Growing our Economy

EC1: Driving Economic Growth

EC1.3: Align tourism, economic development and events to deliver economic outcomes for the Region

### REPORT

Our local government area experienced one of the longest and driest periods in living memory resulting in severe drought across our region. The rural industry is one of the largest employers and financial contributors to our local economy and when a down turn is experienced the flow on impact to our local businesses is large impacting employment and the economic viability of the area. The Federal Government has provided \$1 million dollars in grant funding for our local

government area under the Drought Communities Program extension to support local infrastructure and other drought relief projects for communities who have been impacted by drought.

Council sought input from the community on how to allocate the grant funding, with submissions having closed on Friday 21 February 2020

Ideas from consultation are listed below:

- Public water access points
- Community hall upgrades
- Rural Education courses for drought impacted farmers to assist in future proofing
- Tourism facilities road access improvement
- Improvements to the Casino showground facilities
- Sporting Parks – water saving irrigation measures
- Free water play area installed in a park in the valley
- Assist owners of buildings in the Casino and Coraki township to carry out maintenance and conservation works to buildings of historical significance
- Roadworks to Coraki Woodburn Road
- Harvesting and reuse of stormwater
- Tourism events and attractions including a big bull statue and murals including the water tower

Listed below are the recommended projects identified as being of long-term benefit to the community in its drought recovery process supporting infrastructure, economic and tourism across the local government area:

- Water Filling Stations - \$100,000

Designated bulk water filling stations in locations across the local government area to assist residents and bulk water carriers in times of drought. It has been identified that community members were driving long distances to access potable water this has impacts both financially and in particular on people's time. If water filling stations are located throughout the local government area it will assist people in the community by saving on fuel costs and allowing them more time to undertake work/study and family activities.

- Community Hall upgrades - \$100,000

Provide a grant program for community halls across the Valley to enhance their facilities and improve their resilience for future drought and bushfire events. An example raised at community meetings was the opportunity to provide a generator at Halls in case of emergencies where power is lost, and Halls could be used as evacuation centres.

- Casino Showground Upgrades - \$420,000

The Casino showground and racecourse precinct master plan has identified necessary infrastructure to support the continuation of effective local use of the site as well as facilitating an increase in local participation and the range of sporting and community-based pursuits undertaken within the complex. It has been prioritised within this report for Day stalls and a sand warm up area to be of benefit to the showground users.

It has also been identified provision to be made for on-site camping that can be used during events and also for short RV stays. This would also create a revenue stream to assist in the upkeep of the facilities and keep people in the Richmond Valley rather than having them drive through to other LGAs who offer free camping areas.

- Paddock to Plate Project - \$95,000

A program to showcase our local producers providing economic and tourism benefits to the community. The project will provide a pathway for businesses and farmers to connect with

customers and visitors, as well as national and export markets. An outline of the proposed program and expenditure follows:

Project management and coordination - establish project governance group.	\$5000
Create a vision and local roadmap for the Richmond Valley and facilitate workshops to identify and explore regulatory and compliance barriers for diversification and value adding on farm, and create an action plan to identify change.	\$20,000
Deliver paddock-to-plate/agritourism innovation programs, including recruitment events.	\$30,000
Facilitate the development of local paddock-to-plate networks.	\$10,000
Establish a farmgate trail program for the region, which works with adjoining and cross border LGAs.	\$30,000

- Tourism Facilities Road Access Improvement - \$285,000

Within our rural road network roads have been identified that if they were to undergo works would assist tourism within the area. This also assists in creating an economic stimulus to the area. A suggestion in community meetings was to improve the Swan Bay New Italy Road access to the New Italy Mountain Bike Park in Doubleduke and Tabbimobile State Forests.

## CONCLUSION

Our local government area has experienced one of the longest droughts in living memory and the impacts on the community has been large. Grant funding has been provided to assist Council to provide long-lasting benefits to communities including infrastructure, economic and tourism benefits.

The projects subject of this report provide certainty to our community that stimulus is being granted to the community to aid its recovery.

## ATTACHMENT(S)

Nil