

MEDIA RELEASE

RELIEF NOW AVAILABLE FOR MID MURRAY RATEPAYERS AFFECTED BY COVID-19

Mid Murray ratepayers who have lost their jobs, suffered business downturns or been financially impacted by the current COVID-19 pandemic can now access new relief measures.

The Mid Murray Council is offering assistance options for people affected through its new *Rates Hardship Policy* and *COVID-19 Extraordinary Hardship Relief Plan*, adopted at today's meeting in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The measures include:

- Waiving fines for late payment of rates for both the June and September 2020 installments on properties within the Mid Murray Council district;
- Offering repayment plans (by application) for affected eligible residential and business ratepayers for rates due in June and September 2020 that will include the waiving of interest on rates owed until mid-December 2020.

Mid Murray Mayor Dave Burgess said the measures aimed to provide direct relief for those affected by COVID-19 shut-downs and restrictions.

"We are all feeling the impact of this crisis and we understand the financial concerns many of our business and residential ratepayers have at this time," Mayor Burgess says.

"Many local businesses have taken a huge hit to their turnover and are facing ongoing uncertainty – some with limited trading options, and others completely shut down for now. Similarly, many of our residents have lost their jobs or are facing employment instability.

"These measures are a direct response to the current need for relief within our community, and we hope will provide much-needed assistance to those experiencing hardship as a result of COVID-19."

Council is also adopting other support opportunities including:

- Supporting local businesses by reducing payment terms for suppliers to fast-track payment to businesses;
- Providing commercial leasing relief in negotiation with its tenants in line with the Federal Government's new Mandatory Code of Conduct for Commercial leases;
- Giving consideration on application by community groups whose income has been reduced for assistance with ongoing expenses (ie. utility costs, repairs, etc);
- Providing alternative payment arrangements such as:
 - Switching to weekly, fortnightly or monthly rate payments via BPAY, phone, CentrePay, direct debit or online;
 - Rate postponement for seniors who are suffering hardship and meet the relevant criteria.

The Council is currently working through the budget process and is yet to make a decision on rates for the 2020/21 financial year.

However, Chief Executive Ben Scales said Council will be considering several factors through this process including the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Council, its own current financial position, the expectation of the community on the provision of services and projects and the need for relief among some sectors of the community.

“There is no doubt these are challenging times for Council financially,” Mr Scales says.

“Council is guided by its *Long Term Financial Plan*, which aims to significantly improve our financial sustainability and efficiency by 2028/29. However, the COVID-19 crisis has also had an impact on Council’s budget and this will only increase as restrictions continue.

“We are acutely aware of the need for financial assistance for those who are doing it really tough in our community. We are also mindful of the need to continue providing essential services to our residents – and fulfilling our infrastructure and project delivery goals so that we can provide work for local businesses who may also be struggling in this difficult economy.

“We need to strike a balance between helping those in our district who genuinely need assistance, and ensuring our Council remains financially sustainable so it can weather this crisis without serious financial implications that may impact future community services and infrastructure projects.”

For more information on the new hardship measures, visit the website: www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au.

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