



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

## COVID-19 Update

The following statement is from South Gippsland Shire's Chair Administrator, Julie Eisenbise:

*It would certainly be an understatement to say that we are currently experiencing something quite extraordinary with the COVID-19 outbreak. Council is rising to the challenges this pandemic presents and we wish to provide the following update:*

- The Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have announced a growing set of restrictions designed at closing down many social spaces such as gyms, cinemas, places of worship and reducing restaurants and cafes to takeaway only.*
- We all have a responsibility to do what we can to slow the rate of infection. It is clear that we must put social distancing measures in place and stay at home when it is possible to do so. We also have a responsibility to assist others, whether that's by adhering to the directives of the Governments or by bringing in your elderly neighbour's bin. We are part of a community and we owe each other a duty of care.*
- Governments have an enduring responsibility to their citizens, a responsibility that is most conspicuous in times of crisis. Council has a responsibility to the community, a responsibility to support our residents, a responsibility to continue to provide the services that will help South Gippsland bounce back from this dire situation.*
- Council is adapting. Our Customer Service Centre is now closed for face-to-face meetings. Council is still very much here to serve, though. While working predominantly offsite now, our staff are still available via phone, email and online.*
- Be patient if we don't get to your call straight away – all our Customer Service Officers are working away from the office and doing their very best to keep up with the increased over-the-phone demand. Every person I have spoken to is doing their utmost to ensure that our community continues to get the services it requires at this time.*
- Over the past few days many Council-run facilities have been closed to help protect the community. This has meant the closure of Council's halls, Coal Creek Community Park and Museum, Splash, Long Jetty and Yanakie caravan parks and some recreation reserves.*
- We have quickly adapted the way we work to ensure that our services continue to be provided – from rubbish collection to roadside maintenance. Our Environmental Health Officers have rarely been more important.*
- We are working with community groups to ensure that they have the information they need to comply with the evolving directives.*
- We are working with businesses to ensure that as many of our local entrepreneurs as possible get through this crisis. We have already started a webpage to list hospitality businesses that are finding innovative ways to trade through these straightened times.*

- *Over the coming days we will start to use Facebook to share opportunities to stay connected to each other and the wider world while increasingly confined to our homes.*
- *During emergency situations various Government and non-Government agencies come together to plan for every contingency. In South Gippsland we have the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC), which includes representatives from Council, DHHS, Ambulance Victoria, Vic Police, CFA, Health Agencies and Parks Victoria, amongst others.*
- *The MEMPC works in the background to ensure our emergency plans are enacted smoothly. A plan addressing what should happen in a pandemic situation already exists and was recently activated by the committee. The plan outlines the steps that should be taken during and after the emergency and can be viewed on Council's website.*
- *Council also has an internal Business Recovery Team that is charged with the responsibility of enacting the Business Continuity Plan in the event of an emergency.*
- *The Recovery Team has been working an extraordinary number of hours over the past two weeks to ensure that staff and the community are supported and that services remain uninterrupted.*
- *I would like to thank all involved, particularly Bryan Sword for his work as Incident Controller. By making strategic decisions in relation to the crisis, Bryan has given our new CEO Kerryn Ellis the time and space to focus on managing the organisation and being Council's liaison point for various Government agencies. This splitting of responsibilities is planned for and is working very effectively.*
- *I would also like to thank Council staff who have been extraordinary. To have relocated almost the entire Council workforce while continuing to get your jobs done is something for which you should be enormously proud.*
- *When I rang the Council phone number yesterday I could hear young kids playing in the background, but the person on the phone was impeccably professional – in terms of service, I would not have known she was working from home. Kudos to you all.*
- *While all responses to the current situation are certainly needed to reduce the rate of infection, this will undoubtedly have an impact on our economy and local businesses. While our eateries may not be open for a sit-down meal I urge everyone to shop local – even if that is ordering a takeaway, home delivery or gift vouchers for the future. This goes for all our businesses: consider helping them if you are in a position to do so at this uncertain time.*
- *While it is important that we all take these measures seriously and do everything we can to keep ourselves healthy, please do not forget to keep an eye out for those around you. That could be a call, a video chat or an SMS with family, friends and those who are vulnerable. While this can feel overwhelming at times we aren't going through this alone and we can adapt how we support those around us.*

**PR2524 26/3/20**