



South Gippsland COVID-19 Support Package

At its meeting yesterday, South Gippsland Shire Council adopted the first phase of a \$2M COVID-19 Support Package.

Phase one includes 10 initiatives with a combined value of \$1M.

Highlights include:

- new COVID-19 Business, Community Support and Community Group grants
- refunded and reduced business registration fees
- a waiver of the fee increase for garbage charges related to the Victorian Landfill Levy and
- distribution of Community Restarter Packs containing personal protective equipment and sanitiser to local community groups to help with reopening requirements.

The different components that make up the support package have a combined aim: to support the community and business to respond to and recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

South Gippsland Shire Council's Chair Administrator, Julie Eisenbise expects that the support package will help the community and stimulate the local economy.

"In light of Tuesday's announcement regarding the reinstatement of Stage 3 restrictions across metropolitan Melbourne, the release of the COVID-19 Support package is particularly timely.

"Although the restrictions do not directly apply to residents in South Gippsland, the indirect impacts of the Melbourne restrictions will be felt across the state through reduced regional visitation.

"We know that many people, businesses and community groups have experienced – and continue to experience – hardship as a result of COVID-19. The support package is a way for us to provide an economic stimulus for South Gippsland through the allocation of business and community grants and to remove some of the fees that may limit regional recovery.

"We are also determined to assist community groups where we can. Boosting our economy is important but it is also important that we help people to safely get back to the groups, sports and clubs that they enjoy. Returning to regular hobbies and activities – when safe to do so – is good for the community and good for people's mental health," said Ms. Eisenbise.

As part of the package, \$300,000 in funding will be made available through COVID-19 Business Grants. The grants are open to any business with a shop front in South Gippsland that has turnover of up to \$250,000, less than 20 employees and has experienced a financial downturn as a result of COVID-19.

One hundred thousand dollars in funding will also be available to community groups via the COVID-19 Community Grants. The COVID-19 Community Grants are open to all community and not-for-profit groups in South Gippsland. These will be run concurrently with the annual Community Grants program but have a more dedicated recovery focus. Both the COVID-19 business grants and the community grants have a \$1,000 maximum allocation per business or group.

As well as the business and community grants, \$100,000 of funding is available to service providers in the local community via a dedicated Community Support Program. The program is designed to help them deliver projects that encourage social connection or community adaptation.

In addition to the grant funding, local businesses will benefit from refunded and reduced business and registration permits and fees, such as Prescribed Accommodation fees and Food Registration. The refunds will be applied to all eligible businesses.

Many local residents will also benefit from the decision by Council to waive a garbage charge increase linked to the State Government's Victorian Landfill Levy. The fee increase – which is being applied by the State Government to assist with the reduction of waste – would have been reflected in rates notices in 2020/21.

“The phase one initiatives might well be considered logical steps to recovery. We are reducing fees where we can and providing local business and groups with funding that can then be used in other local business which helps to keep our economy moving. Council is committed to helping our region recover from COVID-19 by working alongside communities and by supporting and building the capacity of individuals, communities, businesses and organisations.

“We are conscious that there are many other grants and initiatives that are available through State and Federal Governments. Our aim is not to replicate these initiatives but to identify areas that have not been supported. We want to fill in the gaps, so to speak,” said Ms. Eisenbise.

For more information on the COVID-19 Support Package, please visit www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/covidsupport