

MEDIA RELEASE

24 March 2020

COVID-19 support package approved by Gladstone Regional Council

Gladstone Regional Council (GRC) has approved a \$1million Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) support package to assist residents, business, sporting and community groups in the Gladstone Region.

The support package was approved at a special Council meeting held this morning.

The COVID-19 support package will contain:

- Rent concessions for Council-leased commercial facilities
- Extension of time for food licensing by six months
- Extension of time on trade waste licensing by six months
- Effective freezing of interest on outstanding rates and charges
- Financial support for sporting and community organisations.

GRC Chief Executive Officer Leisa Dowling said the decision will help provide stability and support to the Gladstone Region during a time of economic uncertainty.

“These support package measures are designed to assist the individuals, businesses, sporting and community organisations impacted by COVID-19,” Ms Dowling said.

“It’s hoped this support package will reduce the burden on the community during this challenging time.

“This unprecedented event is only in its early stages of impact and the support initiatives approved today are initial avenues available to Council to provide assistance to the community.

“Among the measures to be implement are an extension of Water Consumption levies issued by Council in rates notices issued on 18 February 2020, bringing the due date to 30 June 2020.

“Effective from 1 March 2020, a concession equivalent to the Interest on Overdue Rates or Charges will be granted until 30 June 2020.

“The support package also allows all existing permits for regulated uses and premises including, but not limited to, Environmentally Relevant Activities, Personal Appearance Services, Food Businesses, Roadside Vending and Street Marketing and Commercial Activities on Council-owned land, be extended for a period of six-months from the relevant expiry date.

“Refunds will also be provided for all Council event applications, booking and ticketing fees, permits and associated licenses for events that have been cancelled as a direct result of COVID-19.

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“Further to this, commercial rents on Council owned or managed land will be waived from 1 March 2020 until 30 June 2020, subject to relevant lessees not having the appropriate business interruption insurance in place.

“Council is also encouraging landlords to contact tenants who may be affected during this time.”

The support package will also allow the CEO to report back to Council before 30 June 2020 with recommendations for further rates concessions for the 2020/21 financial year.

It would also allow the CEO to update the current Rating Financial Hardship Policy and develop and implement a grants program for eligible sporting and community groups that have been adversely affected by COVID-19.

The grants program for eligible sporting and community groups is to be for a maximum of \$400,000 allocated from the 2019/20 Expenditure Budget.

Other recommendations include temporary delegation for the CEO to have power to approve all applications for commercial activities on Council land in accordance with the Commercial Activities on Council Land Policy.

The resolution will also allow the CEO to identify and report to Council on any other measures to be implemented that may reduce the financial impact on residents, businesses and the community as affected by COVID-19 before 30 June 2020.

Ms Dowling said Council’s COVID-19 support package was permissible during the current Caretaker period ahead of the Local Government Elections on Saturday 28 March.

“These measures are not considered as a major policy decision under the Local Government Act 2009 and do not require Ministerial approval,” she said.

“The COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving, and Council’s Incident Management Team is monitoring it closely, taking advice from Queensland Health, and the Queensland and Australian Governments.

“We have implemented measures to care for the safety of our employees and the community and have appropriate business continuity planning in place.

“These safety measures have included the closure of the Gladstone Entertainment Convention Centre, Customer Service Centres, Rural Transaction Centres, and Arts, Culture and Community facilities until further notice.

“Further to this, the Council-owned Gladstone Aquatic Centre and Mount Larcom Swimming Pool have been closed until further notice by managers BlueFit.”

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