

MEDIA RELEASE



Mayoral Drought Update

This week's regional ministerial visit is a direct result of Council taking a proactive stance in response to drought conditions in Buloke. Whilst in Buloke, Premier Daniel Andrews, Minister for Water, Lisa Neville, and Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford, made a variety of announcements in Donald, Birchip, Teddywaddy and Charlton. The State Government has devised a \$27million drought package. This funding is targeted to assist those feeling the strain at the hands of seasonal conditions. Buloke is one of ten local governments currently affected by drought which will share in the package.

Premier Andrews said it himself, "Locals know best". As part of the announced package to be spent across Victoria we will see \$400,000 spent on drought support activities, more money for rural financial counsellors, water put into recreational lakes, an extra \$220,000 for mental health first aid training, \$1 million for drought employment through the CMAs, additional funds spent to employ farmers on environmental projects and assistance for families to ensure kids can get to camps and excursions over the holidays. These suggestions had been put forward by Buloke during discussions with Minister Pulford in Melbourne and Birchip last month.

Not only has Council advocated strongly but the Buloke community itself has led the way; involving itself in talks and meetings with ministers to push for this funding and also getting a focus onto stock containment areas and fire fighting tanks.

Council has been providing support to farming residents through the Managing Now Planning Ahead program since 2008. This program's aim is to bring neighbours together and provide information regarding available assistance and services in times of drought and floods. Council does this by conducting fire shed gatherings. The program has also been used to assist families to prepare for potential climatic threats.

Council has been receiving enquiries regarding fire shed gatherings prior to the end of the year. Following feedback regarding the likelihood of harvest being finished prior to December the need for keeping families connected continues to be a priority for Council in the current conditions. Council is investigating further funding support to continue this work.

Council is proposing to intensify the effort on the fire shed gatherings over the latter half of November and the first half of December. The Donald community is also taking a lead in this important area. The Donald event is being driven by the Donald business community in response to concerns regarding their farming customers. Council supports this effort as these events, driven by the community, are most effective in getting people together.

Consideration is also being given to events and activities specifically focusing on rural women and assisting the development of a rural women's network. Council will keep you informed as it moves forward with this.

The immediate fire shed schedule is:

- Donald (Community initiated event in Memorial Park) 20 November
- Corack and Corack East 23 November

- Warmur and Reedy Dam 30 November
- Litchfield 7 December
- Laen 14 December

Supporting community and family wellbeing will be critical over the coming months, with harvest finishing well prior to Christmas and little prospect of much celebration for many. Ensuring that people remain connected will be important and Council encourages all in the community to be aware of the need to support each other through this period.

Council will continue to advocate on behalf of communities in the face of the ongoing threat posed to our farmers and our rural businesses by the current seasonal conditions and it is keen to hear your feedback on the work underway and how it can be improved.

End release

For further information contact Travis Fitzgibbon on 1300 520 520