Rate relief for farmers
Council has advocated strongly on behalf of East Gippsland farmers and drought-affected communities.

The rate relief will be applied to all properties classified as farm properties in Council’s rating system at 31 December 2019, on a proportional basis, based on the 2019/20 farm rates raised as at 31 December 2019, but not municipal or waste charges.

How much will farm rates be reduced?
The allocation of the funding would equate to approximately 32 per cent rate relief of the 2019/20 rates applied to all farm rate assessments as at 31 December 2019.

Who is eligible?
Any property that is classified in Council’s rating system as farm property is automatically eligible.

How do I receive the rate relief?
- In January 2020, Council will send a letter to each property owner detailing the rate relief amount that will be applied to their 2019/20 rates.
- This letter of advice will be followed with an amended rates notice showing the rate relief amount and the adjusted balance - including new instalment amounts for those paying by instalments.
- Any property that is in credit after applying the rate relief payment will have the credit, by default, allocated towards future rates payments. You can also seek a refund of the credit balance.

If any ratepayer is experiencing financial hardship regarding their rates payments they are encouraged to contact Council.

Why is rate relief as at 31 December?
To ensure any objections to the 2019 valuations have been processed and any farm rate assessment reclassifications have been adjusted.

Why is the municipal charge excluded?
The municipal charge is applied once to each single farm enterprise.

Is all the money going to farmers?
Yes, 100% of the Local Government Service Support Payment will go to ratepayers who have farm property rate assessments.

The Victorian Government had advised that five per cent (about $75,000) of the funding could be used by Council to cover administration. However, Council will absorb all administrative costs.

The Victorian Government announced a Local Government Service Support Payment in October 2019 as part of a $31 million package of support for drought-affected communities across Victoria, including East Gippsland.

The funding to Council was $1,510,000 and a decision on the allocation of funding to farm properties in East Gippsland was made at the Council Meeting in Orbost on 12 November.

Council’s advocacy for rate relief and decision to pass on the full allocation of funding, when received from the Government, is in response to the farming community’s call for rate relief.

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Who was consulted?
Council consulted the East Gippsland Drought Reference Group about the best way to allocate the funding. The group has representatives from Agriculture Victoria, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Rural Financial Counselling, Orbost Regional Health, Gippsland Farmer Relief, Member for Gippsland and Member for Gippsland East, Victorian Farmers Federation, CWA Victoria and Council.

Council's drought assistance
Council has previously allocated $500,000 for drought assistance in the 2019/20 Budget.
This funding has been allocated to:

**Individual support - $150,000:**
This funding will be allocated to volunteer agencies to provide direct assistance to individuals in East Gippsland.
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ARA) - $30,000
- Salvation Army - $30,000
- St Vincent de Paul - $30,000
- Lions Clubs Need for Feed Disaster Relief - $30,000
- Gippsland Farmer Relief - $30,000

While many of these groups service people outside East Gippsland, a condition of acceptance of the funds will be that Council’s funds are used to support East Gippsland residents.

**Support for household water - $100,000:**
Discussions with the East Gippsland Drought Reference Group and community members has highlighted the need for support for households outside East Gippsland Water supply districts to access water for household use.
Council officers are currently scoping the most effective way to deliver support and investigating the costs.

The proposed approach to support household water will be communicated once it is confirmed.

**Future focussed / Strategic - $150,000:**
To support future focussed / strategic initiatives identified in the Looking Ahead – Gippsland Drought Response Proposal 2019 developed with Wellington Shire Council.
- An initial allocation from this fund to Gippsland Agriculture Group $40,000 to help meet the capital set-up costs associated with the Bengworden research trial facility.

**Advocacy and awareness raising - $50,000**
The aim of this campaign is to ensure that the story of the East Gippsland drought is accurately portrayed.

**Contingency - $50,000:**
This will allow Council to respond to other issues or opportunities as they arise through Council, the East Gippsland Drought Reference Group or community directly.

**Additional Council support**
Council is also providing a range of other services and initiatives, all detailed on our website and include:
- Providing ongoing free silage wrap disposal at three waste sites.
- Coordinated drought information on our website.
- Appointed a Drought Assistance Officer to assist farmers accessing support and assistance.
- Assisted farmers with pest animals.
- Investing in emergency and static water supply infrastructure.
- Improving the East Gippsland Livestock Exchange.