

04 May 2020

## SUMMARY:

- As a small regional local government our primary focus is to protect our community from the health effects of COVID-19 and to respond proportionally and responsibly to the economic hardships and recovery efforts within the community.
- Reallocation of Shire Funding and fast-tracking of projects that include high local contractor content, to increase spending into the local economy.
- Establishment of the 'Shire President COVID-19 Relief Fund' and development of Destination Marketing campaign to re-stimulate the local economy.

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## SHIRE OF EXMOUTH RESPONSE AND STIMULUS PACKAGES

The Shire of Exmouth Council has endorsed a series of financial support and relief measures to be made available at a special Council Meeting.

Shire President Matthew Niikkula said that he was pleased Council had taken an active response to assist the community of Exmouth during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Whilst the Shire of Exmouth is a small regional local government authority our focus is to alleviate some concerns and pressures that are being felt across the community; creating the best possible position for local businesses and individuals to cope with the effects of COVID-19.

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting the Shire operations significantly (@ \$1.5Million in loss income as at 30 June), Council endorsed the proposed measures by the Chief Executive Officer to be implemented immediately. The Council's priorities in addressing community and business hardship because of COVID-19 are:

1. Adopt the WALGA COVID-19 Hardship policy which provides temporary financial relief to community and debtors.
2. Provide financial relief to several commercial leaseholders.
3. Adopt a 0% increase in any rates in the dollar for the 2020/21 financial year.
4. Adopt a 0% increase in community fees and charges for 2020/21 budget.
5. Waive all administration charges and interest charges for the payment of rates in 2020/21.



6. Retain permanent Shire employees on contractual entitlements and use redeployment options and staff leave liability rather than standing down employees. This ensures that the Shire as a large employer in the town is not further adding to the economic downturn within the Exmouth community and ensuring we can respond quickly during recovery.
7. Alter the capital works program and reallocate Shire Funding to support local contractors and fund community projects, such as the Federation Park upgrades, new footpaths and undertaking a large solar energy project at the Ningaloo Centre which will reduce ongoing expenditures annually.
8. Working closely with our local Chamber of Commerce and Industry to obtain grants to assist local business to apply for the available funding.
9. Develop a Destination Marketing Campaign to re-stimulate visitation to the Ningaloo Region and support the local economy as soon as travel restrictions are lifted.
10. Establish the 'Shire President COVID-19 Relief Fund' to be used to support the community in dealing with the financial impacts of COVID-19 and contributing \$25,000 to this fund immediately.

The 'Shire President COVID-19 Relief Fund' will be available for those experiencing hardship and to aid in the recovery phase post the pandemic. A committee of Council with delegated authority has been established to address the needs in our community and to determine the appropriate use of the Relief Fund.

The Shire President continues: "We understand this is a stressful time for the community and want to ease the financial hardship where possible. We also need to respond appropriately and within our limited financial means particularly in light of the fact of the reduced income from our aviation operations due to COVID-19 are significant now and will be post 30 June 2020. Aviation income is not likely to return to normal until early 2021, and the Shire as an organisation has not qualified for any economic stimulus from the state or federal government to date.

I take this opportunity to thank the staff for preparing timely and accurate reports so that Council could make informed, responsible decisions. The ten recommendations endorsed at the Special Council Meeting are both responsible and appropriate at this time.

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Contact 9949 3000

