

Subject 9.1 Mayoral Minute - Drought Initiative

To my fellow Councillors

Mayoral Minute

Summary

The purpose of this Mayoral Minute is to seek Council's support for works to produce hay on Council managed land. This hay which is currently available will be donated to local farmers and the Rural Aid, Buy a Bale initiative.

The production of further hay bales will be supplied to local farmers and Rural Aid on a cost recovery basis, above the initial commitment of \$5,000 whilst there is a demand due to the drought. The hay will be produced from Council owned and managed land where the impact to the community can be minimised and other community uses aren't impacted.

Background

Farmers in NSW and QLD are in the grip of one of Australia's worst droughts on record. NSW is currently 100% drought affected and figures from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) show almost one quarter of NSW classified as being in "intense drought".

Although the east coast of NSW is also in drought, it is likely coastal rainfall will produce growing conditions for grass ahead of other regions. Typically when substantial rainfall occurs in Shellharbour the region recovers from the drought faster than the inland areas as there is still grass cover.

The Shellharbour City Council (Council) has large parcels of land where mowing could be temporarily suspended. This would allow the grass to grow by reducing the current mowing schedules at suitable locations. If rainfall occurs prior to temperatures warming up in October it will produce satisfactory hay for baling.

Council also currently has parcels of land which are not regularly mown that are suitable for cutting for a small amount of hay production immediately.

Chair of the Australian Fodder Industry Association Frank McRae said NSW has practically run out of feed for its animals. Rural Aid are currently sourcing hay from as far away as Western Australia. Prices are becoming inflated as a result of supply and demand pressures. The cost of transport is greater than the cost of the hay.

Rural Aid is an Australian charity founded in 2015 to provide a holistic support program to rural Australia. Buy a Bale is one of its current focuses to address the immediate issue in rural Australia and was a starting point for the charity. Other programs include Farm Rescue, Weekend Warriors and the Farm Army.

Council has the ability to produce hay on land it manages at a reasonable cost by reducing transport costs and not placing a mark-up on the product. Local farmers have also shown an interest in accessing hay and Council will discuss options of supply within the region.

If further bales are produced above the proposed Council expenditure of \$5,000, it is proposed that local farmers and Buy a Bale be offered the bale for the same price as the rural contractor charges Council to produce it.

The volume of production of hay from Council owned sites will depend on several factors including weather, weed management and other factors which Council staff will consider in the management of the process.

This community initiative is aimed at providing some relief for farmers at a time of high need and it is recommended Council support the proposal.

Recommendation

That:

- 1. Council support the donation of works up to the value of \$5,000 to supply local farmers and Rural Aid's Buy a Bale initiative and approve the allocation.**
- 2. Council support the future production of hay on suitable Council managed land to be distributed through local farms or Buy a Bale on a cost recovery basis whilst there is a demand for hay due to severe drought.**

Approved for Council's consideration:



Date of Meeting: 4 September 2018

Attachments

1. Nil