human services

After the flood: Growers Newsletter – issue 2

This newsletter is intended for primary producers affected by the Sunraysia floods and is produced by Department of Human Services (DHS).

Financial support for affected businesses

Grants of up to $25,000 for clean up and restoration are now available for primary producers, small businesses and not for profit organisations who meet eligibility criteria. For factsheets and application forms please visit www.ruralfinance.com.au or please contact the Rural Finance Corporation on (03) 5448 2600.

Low interest loans of up to $200,000 will also be available from the Rural Finance Corporation.

Mosquitoes

Murray Valley encephalitis has been detected in mosquito populations in the North of the state. There has also been a number of cases of Ross River Fever and Barmah Forest Virus detected in humans.

Because of this, it is imperative that people working outside take precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes.

Some things you can do to avoid mosquitoes are wear long, loose fitting clothes preferably in light colors, use an effective mosquito repellent, limit outdoor activity especially at dawn and dusk, and sleep under mosquito nets.

If you are feeling unwell contact your general practitioner or consult Nurse On Call on 1300 606 024.

Mildura Rural City Council has a mosquito monitoring program in place which includes prioritising and treating high risk sites throughout the region.

Emergency grants

DHS emergency grants of up to $1067 per household are available for immediate needs such as food, clothing, personal items and shelter for those impacted by the floods.

You can apply for an emergency grant by attending the Mildura DHS office at 253 Eleventh St Mildura. Phone enquiries can be made to (03) 5022-3111.

Everyone who has applied for an emergency grant will be assessed in the coming weeks for eligibility for major grants of up to $25,950.

Major grants

Major grants of up to $8,650 each are available to cover temporary living expenses, re-establishment costs and to replace essential household items.

Temporary living expenses grant:
Up to $865 a week for up to 10 weeks for those whose main home is unliveable for more than a week. It is income tested and varies depending on household size. It is intended to help pay for temporary accommodation and transport costs not covered by insurance.

Re-establishment grants:
Up to $8,650 to cover necessary structural repairs. The property must be your primary place of residence and is available to owner-occupiers. It is income tested and doesn't include items covered by insurance.

Essential household items grants:
Up to $8,650 to cover essential household items lost or damaged by floods. The property must be your primary place of residence and is available to owner-occupiers and tenants. It is income tested and doesn't include items covered by insurance.

Anyone who makes contact with DHS about emergency grants will be subsequently contacted to discuss their eligibility for major grants.

Australian Government Assistance

Centrelink is delivering emergency assistance payments on behalf of the Australian Government.

The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment comprises payments of $1,000 for each adult and $400 for each child for those who have been adversely affected by the floods.

To claim, call the Australian Government Emergency Information Line on 180 2266, between 8 am and 8 pm local time, visit your local Centrelink (158-164 Langtree Avenue, Mildura) or Medicare Office, or visit www.centrelink.gov.au

Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service

Rural Financial Counsellors are available immediately to assist and support primary producers affected by flood and other issues. They can provide free and confidential financial counselling services to farmers and rural small businesses in financial difficulty. Contact 03 5022 0799.

Small Business Mentoring Service

There is free, confidential and professional advice for small businesses recovering from the impact of floods such as:

- working with business owners to assess the overall impact of the floods
- support for dealing with insurance issues
- investigating other forms of assistance
- support in handling communication with employees, customers and suppliers
- reviewing the business's financial position and
- working with owners to plan the re-opening of their business

If you're interested call the Victorian Business Line on 13 22 15 or can register online at www.business.vic.gov.au/floods, or visit the Victorian Business Centre at 131 Langtree Avenue, Mildura.

Further advice

Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry is providing a range of assistance and advice to businesses affected by the floods. For more information visit http://www.vecci.org.au/floods/Pages/Victorian_flood_crisis.aspx

Flood Recovery Committees

Representatives of a number of government agencies are developing a flood recovery plan for the area. The plan will identify the impacts of the floods on the social, economic, built and natural environments in Mildura and will develop strategies to rebuild and recover after the affects of the flood.

As part of the plan, a number of flood recovery committees are being established which will help local individuals, businesses and communities provide input into the recovery process.

Individual committees representing Greater Mildura, Irymple, Cardross and Red Cliffs as well as industry groups and small businesses will provide advice to the Mildura Rural City Council Flood Executive.

Issues to be considered include movement of flood water, agricultural production and restoration support, community building and business support, road and rail restoration and repairs, housing assistance, psychosocial support, public health and clean up coordination.

Mildura Recovery Centre

The Mildura Recovery Centre is located at the Rural Ambulance Victoria Building in Irymple (opposite the swimming pool) on Calder Hwy.

Opening hours (as at 28 February):
Mon – Fri: 9 am to 5 pm
Sat: 10 am to 3 pm

If you are in the Irymple area and have been affected by the floods we urge you to come to the recovery centre and get the help you may need.

Several services are now operating on a referral basis, including DHS and Centrelink.

If you cannot get to a recovery centre you are encouraged to call the SES Flood Information Line on **1300 842 737** for information about help that is available.

Don't forget to take a break

Cleaning up after the floods, when added to the stress of the flood itself can lead you to tiredness and fatigue.
Fatigue can affect you in different ways, like physical tiredness, moodiness, headache, appetite loss, short-term memory problems and poor concentration.
To avoid burning out, take regular breaks, sleep properly, limit alcohol and tobacco, drink plenty of water and eat properly.

Insurance

If your property or business has been damaged by the flood, contact your insurance company as soon as possible to register your intention to claim and seek advice about the claim process under your policy. All insurance policies vary.

If you don't know who your insurer is, contact the Insurance Council of Australia on **1300 728 228.** They are open 24 hours a day. They will be able to help identify your insurer for you.

Safety around flood water

There have been reports of sewerage overflow in Sunraysia due to flooding and it is important you avoid contact with floodwater.

Flood water contains sewerage, farm or industrial waste and could cause serious health problems if you come into contact with it.

Playing in or driving through flood water is hazardous due to the risk of contamination or drowning.

We urge everyone to be extremely careful and use common sense around flood waters and avoid contact where you can.

Dealing with stress

If you've been affected by the floods you are likely to personally feel the impact. This might include shock, difficulty making it feel real, distress, continuing alarm and a feeling of being let-down after the immediate crisis is over.

Dealing with the effects of stress can be difficult to discuss, but these are perfectly normal reactions.

People who are able use the help of others recover better than those who try to do it alone.

There are many free services available for people to seek assistance from.

Support services that are free and confidential include:
Lifeline: 131 114
A 24 hour telephone service that offers confidential support and advice to deal with stress and personal challenges.
Mensline: 1300 789 978
Telephone support, information and referral service, helping men to deal with relationship problems in a practical and effective way.
Mental Health Assistance Line: 1300 280 737
A 24 hour telephone service to provide expert advice, information and referral on any mental health issue.
Beyondblue information line: 1300 224 636
An information line that offers expert information on depression, how to recognize it, how to get help, how to help someone else and how to stay well.

Suicide Helpline Victoria: 1300 651 251
A 24 hour telephone service that offers anonymous counselling and information to anyone affected by suicide.

Pumping flood water

Authorities have been working around the clock to remove water in the area worst affected by the flood, however a number of sites remain inundated.

As the flood clean up effort continues, State Emergency Service, Victoria Police Mildura Rural City Council, Lower Murray Water, Victoria Police, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Transport, Department of Health and Department of Human Services are committed to ensuring flood water is managed efficiently.

Flooded sites have been assessed by relevant authorities and removal of water is based on a number of factors. These include the amount of water to be removed, resources required to do this, availability of resources, accessibility to flooded sites and the public, health and economic factors associated with each site.

This process has been developed in consultation with relevant authorities and approved by the SES as control authority for overseeing the flood response effort.

The wellbeing and health of our community is the key focus of the flood clean up and authorities remain committed to recovery.

Property owners wishing to pump water from rural land using private equipment should contact Lower Murray Water on 5051 3400 for approval to do so.

Thank you

Thank you to Department of Primary Industries, Mildura Rural City Council, Lower Murray Water, Almond Board of Australia, Australian Table Grape Association, Australian Dried Fruits Association, Murray Valley Citrus Board and Murray Valley Winegrowers Inc. who have provided input to this newsletter and helped with its distribution.