

Guidelines for implementation

1. *The Rural Land Management Program*

The Rural Land Management Program (RLMP) will be provided as a rebate on the Council rates for the property.

The rebate is based on an amount per hectare determined annually by Council multiplied by the area of the agricultural land and is governed by the Council budget allocation and eligible hectares applied for within the Shire.

The rebate is given in advance of works being carried out for those property owners who have applied, are eligible and have been approved the rebate.

The rebate will be available to all eligible ratepayers who carry out approved works on their property in accordance with the Rural Land Management Program Policy and these Guidelines for Implementation.

2. *Application Criteria*

An application for the Rural Land Management Program scheme can only be made in accordance with the following:

- by a landowner/ratepayer; and
- be for rural land located in the Bass Coast Shire of 4 hectares or more and zoned 'Farming' or 'Rural Living' under the Bass Coast Planning Scheme or of 4 hectares or more and satisfying paragraphs (b) and (c) of the definition of 'farmland' in section 2(1) of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*; and
- be on the prescribed Council electronic application forms (or equivalent with assistance from Council), including the Application Form and with a Works Completed Form where relevant; and
- for land management works which will be carried out in the upcoming rating year and are in accordance with these Guidelines.

3. *Land management works that qualify for the rebate*

The following land management works qualify the landowner for the Rural Land Management Program.

Control of noxious weeds

The management objectives for noxious weeds are to:

1. Prevent the growth and spread of weeds
2. Reduce the level of infestation
3. Prevent reinfestation

4. Work towards eradication

Control of pest animals

The management objectives for pest animals are:

- Reduce pest numbers
- Destroy burrows, dens and harbour
- Prevent reinvasion
- Work towards eradication

Soil Erosion Control

The management objectives for soil erosion are:

- Stabilise and prevent erosion processes
- Rehabilitate eroded sites
- Stabilise vulnerable sites
- Keep groundcover as close as possible to 100%

Remnant Vegetation Protection

The management objectives for remnant vegetation are:

- Fence to protect
- Encourage natural regeneration
- Enhance species diversity
- Create connectivity by linking to other remnant vegetation areas
- Control pest plants and animals

Revegetation

The management objectives for revegetation are:

- Species used must be locally indigenous i.e. represent the pre 1750 EVC that occurred in that location
- All plantings must include understorey and mid-storey species
- Fence to protect where required
- Create connectivity by linking to other remnant vegetation areas
- Control pest plants and animals

Control and Reversal of Salinity

The management objectives for the control and reversal of soil salinity are:

- Reverse the loss of pasture land from soil salinity
- Lower the water table to assist in control of soil salinity

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Waterway Protection

The management objectives for waterway protection are:

- Fence to restrict stock access
- Stabilise and rehabilitate eroded sites
- Create vegetated buffer zones to prevent nutrients, fertilisers, herbicides, effluent and sediment from entering waterways
- Reticulate stock water supplies
- Revegetate gullies, stream banks and degraded areas to minimise erosion and improve water quality

4. Online Application Form

An application for the RLMP must be completed online by the landowner and detail the proposed land management works that will be carried out over the rating year. Council can assist landowners with completing application forms who do not have access to the online system, or would like assistance.

A separate online application form is required to be completed each year for the property owner to receive the rebate.

The online application form must be completed and submitted to Council no later than the specified closing date each year.

The online application must include all the required information and be lodged by the landowner.

The description of the proposed works shown on the application must be substantiated with information so that the nature of the proposed works can be properly assessed by Council.

In the event that there is no significant land management issues on the land to receive the rebate landowners are still required to complete an online application that details the normal maintenance activities carried out to keep the land in that state.

Council will assess the appropriateness of works as described in the application and approve, refuse or request further information.

5. Works Completed Form

The Works Completed Form documents the results of the previous year's land management works after they have been carried out. The online Works Completed Form must be submitted by the landowner in accordance with the works detailed on the previous year's RLMP application no later than the specified date each year.

The Works Completed Form must include all the required information and be lodged and dated by the landowner.

The description of the completed works must be substantiated with information so that the nature of the proposed works can be properly assessed by Council. Other evidence of work completed such as diagrams, photos and receipts may be required by Council in order to substantiate if works were carried out.

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If a landowner has lodged a RLMP application and a Works Completion Form has not been received by the due date for the prescribed works the following years application may be refused.

In the event that insufficient action has been taken on the specified works, Council may withdraw the rebate and a supplementary rate notice will be issued.

6. Inspections

Council will inspect and audit a number of properties selected at random to check that the approved and agreed works shown on the Application and Works Completed Form have been completed to a satisfactory standard.

Landowners whose properties have been selected for inspection will be notified and an inspection arranged at a mutually agreed time.

Landowner will receive written advice as to whether or not they have satisfied the terms on which the rebate is granted.

In the event that insufficient action has been taken on the specified works, as stated on the Application and Works Completed Form Council will either allow a specified time to carry out the works or issue a supplementary rate notice for an amount equal to the rebate that has been given by the Council.

In the event that a landowner unreasonably refuses to permit Council entry for the purpose of inspection no future applications for the RLMP will be processed by Council, until Council is satisfied that all outstanding matters have been addressed.

Inspections may also occur to determine the most appropriate action to solve a particular land management problem where required. At the time of inspection, Council may require a new RLMP application, which incorporates changes to the proposed works to be completed by the landowner. The new application must be submitted to Council within 30 days of the date Council informs the landowner it is required, or Council will notify the landowner that the application is cancelled. Any landowner who does not have a RLMP application approved by Council by the date specified will not be eligible for the rebate in the following financial year.

7. Criteria for granting of rebate

The landowner will only be able to receive and retain the RLMP rebate if the landowner:

- has completed an online application by the due date; and
- the Council has approved the application; and
- the landowner has completed the works approved by Council for the previous year; and
- the landowner has completed and submitted a completed Works Completed Form by the due date; and
- has given Council staff entry into the subject property in the case where an inspection is required by Council.

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8. Property Sales

The RLMP will be provided as a rebate on the Council rates for the property. In the event that a property is sold:

- If the vendor has applied for a rebate then the new owner should be given a copy of the proposed works by the previous owner and offered the opportunity to re-apply. The rebate amount would have been subject to adjustment as part of the settlement process between the vendor and purchaser.
- If the vendor has not applied for the rebate then the new owner can only apply the following year.

9. Setting of Annual Priorities

Council may establish annual priorities for land management works that will be the subject of the rebate. Council may set these priorities after receiving recommendations from the Advisory Committee established for that purpose.

10. Late Applications and Assistance

Council will not consider late applications as the annual budget allocation for the RLMP will have been expended.

Landowners who require assistance to complete and/or submit the online application or Works Completed form can contact Council or the Bass Coast Landcare Network. Assistance will be provided where landowners do not have access to a computer or the internet, or are unsure who to fill out the online application and Works Complete forms.

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