

Rural Land Management Program Policy

Preamble

The unique natural environment of Bass Coast is one of the area's most valuable assets and why so many people live in the area. The region is made up of beaches, bushland and rolling hills with 90 per cent of this landscape being agricultural land.

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed to protecting and enhancing its natural environment and encouraging sustainable agriculture. This commitment is reflected in its Council Plan 2017 -2021, Planning Scheme and Natural Environment Strategy 2016 - 2026 which set out key strategies and objectives that provide directions for improving land management within the municipality.

The Council Plan 2017-2021 vision is "Bass Coast will be known as a region that supports a sustainable and healthy community, and values and protects its natural assets". The Environment strategic indicators include:

- Restore coastal and inland vegetation corridors in partnership with land owners, land managers and land care groups;
- Increase coverage of native vegetation in the Shire.

The Bass Coast Planning Scheme Clause 21.03-5 states "Agricultural activities, particularly dairy and beef cattle farming are a significant contributor to the local and regional economies and a major source of local employment. Agriculture is the main land use of the Shire's hinterland and as such creates an attractive landscape backdrop to the coastal areas.

The relevant objectives and strategies in the Planning Scheme are:

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| Objective 1 | To establish a strong and vibrant rural agricultural community comprising a range of diversified enterprises that is efficiently managed and ecologically sustainable. |
| Strategy 1.1 | Diversification of agricultural practices including introduction of new crops and animals, use of energy efficient technology, and ecologically sustainable farming techniques will be encouraged. |
| Strategy 1.2 | Strongly encourage farmers to prepare and implement Farm Management Plans for their properties, particularly as part of a planning permit application for a change in land use or development. |
| Strategy 1.3 | Encourage the planting of locally indigenous vegetation to provide shelter for livestock, minimise soil erosion and salinity, enhance landscape quality, and provide further opportunities for wildlife corridors. |

The Bass Coast Shire Council Natural Environment Strategy 2016-2026 strategic direction is :

3. Improve health of the landscape through increased biodiversity and indigenous vegetation.

3.14 *Continue Council's Land Management Biodiversity and Incentive Scheme and Land Management Rebate.*

The Rural Land Management Program (RLMP) is a component of the Land Management Biodiversity Incentive Program (LMBIS). The RLMP is focused on providing an incentive to better target land management works being carried out on ground. The program aims to recognise and reward landholders who adopt principles that enrich the natural environment and improve sustainable agriculture. Some of these improvements include:

- weed control and eradication
- protection/enhancement of remnant vegetation
- control and reversal of soil erosion
- protection of waterways and revegetation
- pest animal control
- control and reversal of soil salinity

Policy objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- provide the operational and legal framework within which Council can recognise and reward landholders that adopt land management principles to improve sustainable agricultural opportunities and protect and enrich the natural environment.
- establish the eligibility criteria for payment of the RLMP.
- set out clear accountability processes for the payment of any rebate.
- establish mechanisms for community input into the setting of priorities for land management works each year.

Legislative framework

The Rural Land Management Rebate is in accordance with Section 169 of the *Local Government Act 1989* where Bass Coast Shire Council will grant a rebate to ratepayers occupying properties greater than four hectares where those ratepayers are effectively contributing to the well-being of the land and water resources.

The program is governed by the *Rural Land Management Program Policy and Rural Land Management Program Guidelines for Implementation*.

Policy framework

Council has a RLMP that provides financial incentives for rural land owners to undertake specific works that will improve sustainable agricultural opportunities and protect and enrich the natural environment.

The rebate is based on an amount per hectare determined by Council on an annual basis (through its annual budget process) multiplied by the area of the agricultural land. The rebate will be available to all eligible ratepayers who carry out land management works on their property in accordance with this Policy and the Guidelines for Implementation.

Application Criteria

An application for the RLMP scheme can only be made in accordance with this Policy and Guidelines for Implementation.

Land management works that qualify for the rebate

An application for the RLMP 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 four hectares or more and zoned 'Farming' or 'Rural Living' under the Bass Coast Planning Scheme; or
- four hectares or more and satisfying paragraphs (b) and (c) of the definition of 'Farmland' in Section 2 (l) of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*.

Application and Works Completed Forms

To receive the RLMP an electronic application and Works Completed Form must be completed and submitted each year. Contingencies will be in place for property owners unable to access online resources.

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.

Criteria for granting of Rebate

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

- the landowner/ratepayer as completed an online application by the due date; and
- council has approved the application; and
- the landowner/ratepayer has completed the online Works Completed Form (or equivalent) by the due date; and
- has given council entry into the subject property in the case where an inspection is required by council.

Land Management Advisory Committee

Council will appoint a Rural Land Management Advisory Committee to provide advice on:

- periodic reviews of the implementation of the Land Management Rebate scheme;
- periodic reviews of this Policy;
- the setting of annual priorities for land management works; and
- any other matter that council considers it needs advice on in relation to the program.

The Rural Land Management Advisory Committee will consist of the following representatives:

- Bass Coast Landcare Network Committee Member
- Bass Coast Landcare Network Coordinator
- Bass Coast Shire Council - Representatives from Property and Rates, Corporate Services and Sustainable Environment Departments

- A member of Council's Rural Engagement Group

Additional documents

Guidelines for Implementation appear in Appendix A. They are incorporated into and should be read as forming part of this Rural Land Management Program Policy.

Reference to other documents

Adopted Council budget for the relevant financial year.


Review process

This Policy will be reviewed by Council no later than four years from the date it is adopted **or** concurrent with any review of Council's rating system. The review will specifically assess the results of the monitoring inspections for compliance and effectiveness and any changes to the Council rating system for rural properties.

Accountability process

The outcomes of the RLMP will be reported to Council through the Natural Environment Strategy annual snapshot report. The report will be presented to Council by the Sustainable Environment Manager or department delegate.

Approval

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| Approved by Council at its meeting held on | Date 17/08/2016 |
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| Signed by the Mayor, Cr Pamela Rothfield | Date 03/10/2017 |