

Rate Relief FAQ – January 2020 Bushfires

What is it and why?

Alpine Shire Council has received \$1.2m funding from the Victorian Government's Council Assistance Fund. These funds have been made available to the six local government areas in the declared State of Disaster area and can be used by Council to waive part of the 2019/20 rates raised in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Rate relief is intended to alleviate the financial hardship experienced by ratepayers who have lost property or significant business income due to the January 2020 bushfires.

Who will receive rate relief?

Council has approved the use of this funding to automatically waive one quarter of the rates levied for the 2019/20 financial year for properties covered by the following:

- Commercial / Industrial Differential Rate policy – non-vacant only
- Dinner Plan Special Rate
- Farming Differential Rate Policy – non-vacant, for commercial wineries / vineyards only

Council has also approved an automatic full waiver of annual rates levied for the 2019/20 financial year for all properties that have been directly impacted (burnt) during the bushfires (as identified in the "Bushfire 2020 – Fire Perimeter" map on Council's mapping system).

All ratepayers identified above have been notified of their rate relief by mail. Letters were posted during the first week of March 2020.

How will it be paid?

Rate relief amounts for eligible ratepayers listed above will be automatically applied as a credit against each ratepayer account. For accounts that have already been paid in full, refund cheques can be issued upon request.

What if my business experienced financial hardship but I do not qualify as above?

Council acknowledges that other businesses who do not fit the above criteria may also have experienced significant financial hardship due to loss of income related to the bushfires. Businesses who have experienced such hardship but are not classified in one of the above categories can apply for a waiver of one quarter of rates levied for the 2019/20 financial year by completing an application form. Businesses are required to provide evidence of the financial impact experienced due to the bushfires and each application will be assessed on its merit.

Is there a deadline for applications?

Yes. As the total amount of funding available for applicants is capped, applications will be assessed as they are received so applicants are encouraged to submit their applications as soon as possible, but no later than 5pm on 30 April 2020. Late applications will not be processed.

What evidence will be required if I decide to apply?

Businesses applying for rate relief will need to supply their ABN, BAS statements from last year and BAS or other financial statements from this year demonstrating significant loss of income due to the bushfires. Additionally, it must be demonstrated that the business serves as the primary source of income for the individual applying.

If I run an Airbnb rental from my property that is also my primary residence, will I be eligible to receive this rate relief?

No. Primary residences that earn income from Airbnb rentals already receive a benefit in the form of paying only the residential rate rather than the commercial rate. Applications of this nature will not be granted.

If I am a resident that does not qualify as above but has experienced significant financial hardship, am I eligible for any relief?

No. Council recognises that there are many residents who may have experienced financial hardship as a result of the bushfires. However due to the nature of the funding received, Council is unable to expand the relief available to residents beyond those ratepayers who meet the criteria listed above and those who lost property in the bushfires. Council does offer support to residents suffering financial hardship through the provision of payment plans. To access this support please contact our offices at 03 5755 0555.

Are there any other resources or funding available?

Yes. Bushfire Recovery Victoria maintains the most up-to-date website of resources available for bushfire affected individuals and businesses. It can be found at <https://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria> or 1800 560 760.