



CENTRAL DARLING SHIRE COUNCIL

8 April 2024

Council calling for rethink about Natural Disaster storm assistance rejection

A storm that occurred early this year causing \$1.3 million in damages has been deemed not eligible for Natural Disaster assistance. The storm on 5-6 February impacted the northern areas of the shire, including White Cliffs.

Following the storm Council has already spent \$465,000 on remedial repair works. Exceeding the \$250,000 Natural Disaster assessment threshold. While most damage impacted unsealed roads White Cliffs Golf Course is unusable because of significant soil erosion.

At the Council's Local Emergency Management Committee meeting on 12 February all combat agencies within the group supported Council's application for Natural Disaster assistance to repair damage sustained to infrastructure in the northern part of the Shire from the storm event.

It appears that Central Darling Shire Council is at a disadvantage when applying the Natural Disaster assistance because of the assessment criteria, which takes into account emergency services involvement. Central Darling Shire has low volunteer participation rates for emergency services. Furthermore, calling out emergency services for storm events where nothing can be done is a waste of volunteers' time and potential loss of income to them. On the occasion in February remote station properties owners, dealt with storm damage themselves because access for responding emergency services was not practical until unsealed roads and creek crossings were made accessible and ground conditions dried out. There was also very little private property damage because most houses in White Cliffs are underground (dug outs) and on high ground.

Central Darling Shire covers an area which is about the size of Tasmania with a low population of 1,700 residents. It is a low socio economic and disadvantaged Shire. Council only generates approximately \$2.5m in rates, fees, and charges from the community, not enough to cover the operational functions of Council. The Council is solely reliant on funding support from Federal and State governments, and any severe impact on Council infrastructure needs funding assistance to repair damage caused by disasters.

The Central Darling Shire Council General Manager, Greg Hill, has written to the NSW Reconstruction Authority asking that the rejection of the application for Natural Disaster Declaration assistance be reversed. Council is asking for the funding to be made available for vital storm repairs and reimbursement of costs already incurred. Ends

Media Contact: Gabrielle Johnston 0472 787 022

Administration Centre – 21 Reid Street Wilcannia

Mailing Address – PO Box 165 Wilcannia 2836

Email council@centraldarling.nsw.gov.au

Phone 08 8083 8900