

State government details flood funding

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THE Victorian government has announced a \$73.5 million package of support for farmers and small businesses impacted by floods, with applications opening today.

The funding, which includes grants to assist in the clean-up of properties, as well as business mentoring, concessional loans and transport subsidies, was announced yesterday.

The package provides for primary producers directly affected by the floods to claim for a one-off \$10,000 payment - administered by Rural Finance - to help

them clean up, re-establish their properties and get their businesses up and running again under the \$19.5 million primary producer flood relief component.

The grants will cover activities like the removal and disposal of debris and injured or dead livestock, repairing essential equipment, fixing and replacing fencing, buying fodder, water and water storage, salvaging damaged crops, grain or feed, and hiring or purchasing materials to clean up a property or equipment.

Farmers whose properties

have been directly hit are also eligible for concessional loans of up to \$250,000 to restore or replace damaged assets and meet general expenses while the clean-up is under way.

Flood-affected farmers can also claim up to 50 per cent of transport costs - up to \$15,000 - for the transport of emergency fodder or stock drinking water, and moving stock to agistment, sale or slaughter.

Directly impacted small businesses will be eligible for a one-off \$5000 payment to support clean-up, safety

inspections, repairs, equipment hire and stock purchase under the \$54 million small business immediate flood relief program.

The government said a business relief service would also be available under the small business program, with dedicated mentors to guide business owners through the available commonwealth, state and local supports, manage insurance and landlord issues, and build a recovery strategy.

Also announced was a \$4.4 million "initial package" to meet extra demand for

mental health help, with \$1.5 million dedicated for "surge funding" to government-run mental health and wellbeing hubs in the worst-affected areas in regional Victoria and Melbourne's western suburbs.

A further \$2 million will be going to community mental health organisations "to deliver care when it's needed most", and neighbourhood houses and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in affected areas receiving \$400,000 to run local events.

The government said

\$500,000 for specialist agriculture organisations including the National Centre for Farmer Health would see affected primary producers get access to the mental health support they needed.

It said its school mental health fund was now available from every government school in regional Victoria, "offering an evidence-based menu of wellbeing options for schools to choose from" and children and their families affected by the floods should contact school leaders, who could help them access the care quickly.