

+ COVID-19 Loan supporting regional Qld RSL Clubs on ANZAC Day and in the future

A dawn service, the Last Post played on the bugle, a gunfire breakfast, an afternoon of two-up and the Diggers Cup race day in the central west town of Longreach has been an ANZAC day community tradition 'for ever'.

After years of tough conditions heavily impacting the remote town, it was COVID-19 which forced the Longreach RSL Club and the Longreach RSL Sub Branch to cancel the ANZAC day celebrations for the first time in the clubs' history.

While the community will honour the day at the end of their driveways at dawn and the town bagpiper will play alone at the front of the RSL Club on Saturday, the future of the Longreach RSL Club has been protected with a Queensland Government COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan.

The loan scheme administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), provides finance of up to \$250,000 for businesses and non-profit organisations impacted by COVID-19 to assist with carry-on expenses such as employee wages, rent and rates and other expenditure.

RSL Club treasurer Mark Yates said tough drought conditions and limited disposal cash in the community was already impacting the club but COVID-19 travel restrictions meant some of their biggest customers, tourists during the colder months, had not arrived in town.

He said without the assistance, the club would likely not have survived COVID-19.

"The funding we have got through the loan will enable us to continue to pay staff and some of the fixed costs like rates and insurance," he said.

"The loan is so important because in the long term the community recovery won't be instant. There will be a very gradual return to normality. Who knows what the long term impact will be on a small community, we won't know until we come out the other side."

Longreach RSL will be able to continue to employ and pay its staff during the COVID-19 crisis with the help of a COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan



Mr Yates said the loan allowed the club to continue supporting staff who were vital to not only the organisation but the town.

"It's next to impossible to attract people of their calibre to Longreach so some positions must be kept. To be able to employ them and pay them has been absolutely critical.

"If we lost these staff it would be hard for the club to continue in a form that makes it viable, it is so hard to get that quality of people to the central west" he said.

"Without the funding the club probably would have failed, it would have been quite hard to come out the other side. In all these small communities, it's business like the RSL that really make a community. We can't afford to lose any more people from the town."

Mr Yates said ANZAC Day had 'never not happened' in Longreach.

"ANZAC Day is important to Australia and to lose our celebrations, it takes another thing out of a small community calendar. That takes a lot away from what's going on in a local town of 2,750," he said.

"Without the funding the club probably would have failed, it would have been quite hard to come out the other side"

Longreach RSL Memorial Services Club president Danny Kennedy said, with this year's ANZAC Day ceremonies cancelled, the community could still hear the Last Post played at 6am and the town bagpiper in front of the RSL Club.

"Like everywhere people are encouraged to stand at the end of their driveway and they should be able to hear the sound of the bagpipes at 6am," Mr Kennedy said.

For more information see www.qrida.qld.gov.au/covid19jobssupportloans or **Freecall 1800 623 946**.

QRIDA is delivering the \$1 billion COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan Scheme on behalf of the Queensland Government.