

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

13 January - Edition 4



Community recovery a priority

Council has set the wheels in motion for bushfire recovery across the municipality, while continuing to balance its bushfire response and relief efforts.

Chief Executive Officer Anthony Basford said the bushfire event, and Council's response and relief effort, in conjunction with the emergency services and other agencies, is significant for East Gippsland.

"To everyone who has been directly or indirectly impacted by these bushfires I would like to acknowledge how difficult this time must be. Your community and people around the world are thinking of you. I would also like to thank everyone for their can-do attitude, community spirit, patience and resilience," Mr Basford said.

"We are going to need much more of that resilience, patience and community spirit as the recovery stages unfold. The recovery for our shire will be an unprecedented effort by everyone.

"Every community is at a different stage and has different priorities. We will continue to respond to the active bushfire situation, but rest assured our coordination of the recovery effort has begun," he said.

Emergency information

Fire warnings: Vic Emergency app or website, www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/

Road closures: Vic Traffic app or website, <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

What we know

Agricultural fencing

Through our impact assessments Council will establish the extent of agricultural fencing damage/loss. Council is coordinating an approach to assist farmers with the clean-up and reinstatement of fencing. Farmers should consider temporary fencing for stock containment purposes.

Where fences between private land and national parks, state forests or state parks have been damaged or destroyed by bushfire, the Victorian Government will meet 50 per cent of the cost of materials to repair or replace these fences.

For further details, please see Repair of Fences Damaged by Bushfire and Fire Control Line Rehabilitation Policy – Forest Fire Management: https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0/016/21283/Repair-of-fences-damaged-by-bushfire-and-fire-control-line-rehabilitation-policy-2015.pdf

Offers of assistance

Many people are offering to supply goods, services, or resources to help our community in recovery.

All offers are being captured.

Council and other agencies involved in the recovery will follow up these offers and call on people when we need what they have offered.

Charity scams

Be wary of people seeking bushfire donations, many scams are starting to be identified. Do not donate to people phoning or door-knocking for bushfire donations.

Do not donate to online fundraising apps like Go Fund Me, etc, unless you personally know the person who set up the fund and are confident funds will be used correctly.

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100% of donations to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund go to Gippslanders.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Find out how to donate here: www.qerf.org.au



Deliveries by air have been a major component of our response to provide relief into isolated remote communities during the bushfires. Staff from across the organisation have chipped in to make sure the right supplies go to those who need it. In partnership with the Australian Defence Force it's become a well-oiled machine in sorting, checking and loading water, fresh food, long life milk, personal hygiene items, infant formula, bread, medical supplies etc onto aircraft at Council's Bairnsdale Aerodrome. Our staff are proud they can help their fellow East Gippslanders in their time of need.

Trusted sources of information

It is crucial to only listen to official sources for information on fire activity and the work of authorities – emergency agencies, DELWP, Council and others.

For social media posts – check when it was posted. Activity on old posts may push out-of-date content to the top of your newsfeed, causing confusion and anxiety.

Check the source of information. If it is not from an official source, go to the official source to verify.

You can be confident information published or shared by Council is accurate.

Emergency water assistance

Anyone seeking emergency water assistance from the bushfire affected areas should contact South East Water on 131 851.

South East Water is providing bushfire aid to residents in bushfire affected areas who are without drinking and domestic water supply due to tank contamination.

South East Water will be a 'one-stop-shop' as the initial contact point for affected residents who need emergency relief water, as well as coordinating the delivery of water across affected areas.

Eligible permanent residents in the declared bushfire affected areas of East Gippsland and some parts of the Wellington Shire will be provided a tank water flush and top-up of 5,000 litres.

For information on ash and tank water contamination see

<https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about-epa/what-we-do/emergency-information-and-support#factsheets>

Insurer claims staff in Bairnsdale

Insurance claims staff from the Suncorp Group which includes AAMI, GIO, Apia, Shannons, Terri Sheer and CIL are currently set up at the Bairnsdale RSL to offer assistance and advice to their bushfire affected customers. They'll be there Monday 13 January and Tuesday 14 January from 9am to 5pm.

Road closures

During the State of Disaster, all roads become the responsibility of the Victorian Government. Bushfire affected trees are extremely dangerous and can be fatal. Council is not able to advise on when roads will be re-opened. Safety assessments are being undertaken by other agencies and the Australian Defence Force.

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When road responsibility returns to normal, the highways and main arterial roads are looked after by Regional Roads Victoria, while Council looks after local roads and those in towns.



Thirty-six large gas bottles leaving East Sale RAAF Base on Saturday bound for Mallacoota, as organised by Council.

What you can do

Your health

All fact sheets from the Department of Health and Human Services are available on the Better Health Channel,

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/bushfire-emergency-information>

The Better Health home page has a pointer to this bushfire emergency page. It has information on:

- Before a bushfire
- During a bushfire
- Clean up after a bushfire
- Financial assistance
- Mental health and recovery

Mental health

Please check in at the Emergency Relief Centre to find out about the services available to help you and your family.

It is normal for a distressing or frightening event to affect you physically, mentally and emotionally. Look out for others and if you need help, seek help. It may be a good idea to see a counsellor or psychologist to help you process your experience.

Australian Psychological Society Referral Service:
Call 1800 333 497

Financial assistance

DHHS Personal Hardship Assistance Program

A Personal Hardship Assistance Program information line **1800 961 054** has now been set up for the Eastern Victoria bushfires.

This hotline will support affected Victorians by providing information on Personal Hardship Assistance Program, including eligibility criteria and guidance as to where individuals and families can go for assessment.

The hotline is available 9am-5pm (7 days per week).

A one-off payment (up to \$1800 for families/\$500 for individuals) is provided to help meet immediate needs, including emergency food, shelter, clothing, medication and accommodation.

A needs assessment is carried out by a Personal Hardship Assistance Officer at an Emergency Relief Centre to determine eligibility.

Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment

To receive this payment, you need to have been adversely affected by the fire. For example, your principal place of residence has been destroyed or

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must be demolished, or the interior has sustained major damage.

If you're eligible, you will get \$1000 per adult, \$400 for each child under 16 years of age.

The fastest way to claim is over the phone. Call 180 22 66, or go to this website:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-australian-government-disaster-recovery-payment#a4>

Australian Government Disaster Recovery Allowance

- Support for people who can show they have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires in Victoria in December 2019 and January 2020.
- If you're in East Gippsland, you have until 30 June 2020 to make a claim.
- For more information, visit the Department of Human Services website or contact the Australian Government Information Hotline on 180 22 66.

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance

What we are doing

Bushfire Recovery Centre

Open at 24 Service Street, Bairnsdale.
7 days a week from 9am to 5pm.

It's a one-stop-shop for bushfire-related enquiries.

Agencies on hand include Council, the Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Finance, Agriculture Victoria and others.

This information and support centre will be mobile to visit other communities, starting Monday 13 January.

The Mobile Recovery Centre will be visiting:

- Buchan – Monday, 13 January, Recreation Reserve in Buchan-Orbost Road
- Tambo Crossing – Tuesday, 14 January at "The Rock" in Great Alpine Road
- Ensay – Wednesday, 15 January at the Memorial Hall
- Bruthen – Thursday, 16 January – location TBC
- Cobungra – Friday, 17 January – location TBC

More locations will be added to the schedule for the following week.

You can also make fire-related enquiries by phone to 03 5153 9500 and our staff will help identify which services you may need to access.

General council enquiries: Corporate Centre, Bairnsdale

Prioritise locals in clean-up and recovery

Mayor John White will request both the State and Federal governments to prioritise local contractors and businesses as the region starts its recovery from the devastating bushfires.

Cr White said the major clean-up of the bushfire-affected properties is yet to start, due to a combination of persisting fire threat and limited road access.

"We have many resources, including the Australian Defence Force, on the ground making areas safe and accessible," Cr White said.

"As soon as a clean-up program is announced, I urge government to offer our local contractors and businesses the opportunity, in the first instance, to be part of local clean up and associated works.

"It is incredibly important for morale, families, communities and our economy that local contractors and businesses are a key part of the recovery and reconstruction process," Cr White said.

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“By prioritising local contractors and businesses in recovery works as instigated by government will ensure local employment opportunities. This will send a further strong message of support to bushfire affected communities,” Cr White said.

“It is important for all communities affected by bushfires that the recovery includes locals. The involvement of local communities is the best way to help ensure that what is provided by government is what is actually needed,” Cr White said.



On Saturday afternoon corporate philanthropist Andrew “Twiggy” Forrest had a flying visit to East Gippsland, which included Mallacoota and Bairnsdale, in response to the bushfire emergency. Mr Forrest this week announced \$70 million in Australian bushfire support and it was great chance to share our region’s story and discuss opportunities. Pictured: Andrew Forrest, Tim Bull MP, Sarsfield resident John Kinniburgh and Mayor Cr John White.

Council services

Just like many other residents, a high number of Council staff evacuated the area or have been fighting fires. There will be changes to some of our services as staff assist with emergency management and some areas are not yet accessible. See below for details:

Customer Service Centres

Open centres (open 8.30 am to 5.00 pm)

- Corporate Centre, 273 Main Street, Bairnsdale

- Orbost, Lakes Entrance, Omeo and Paynesville are open for fire-related enquiries and a limited range of usual services
- Omeo has additional opening hours of Saturdays and Sundays 10am to 2pm
- Mallacoota open Mondays and Tuesdays 10am to 2pm and Wednesdays to Fridays 2pm to 5pm

Residents are asked to direct fire-related enquiries to our general number: 03 5153 9500

Rates

Council is working through a range of options regarding rates and will keep the community informed as decisions are made.

Direct debit arrangements

If you have elected to pay rates by 10 instalments (direct debit), the next direct debit is due to be deducted from bank accounts on **15 January 2020** as per normal process.

If you need to cancel this arrangement, please tell Council in writing by either sending an email request to feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au or by completing the “Cancellation of a Direct Debit for Rates” form on Council’s website.

Contact Council on 03 5153 9500 if you have any concerns about any rate payments.

Contact details

If you’re in a position to provide changes to contact details or mail addresses, send this information to us by email, feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au, or use the Change contact details on our website, eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/forms

Valuations

Council is being updated with details of all fire affected areas. Council will arrange for the valuations of all impacted properties to be reassessed, to ensure that the rates for the

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2019-20 rating year reflect the property's current condition.

This means the value attached to improvements such as fencing and outbuildings, which unfortunately are no longer there, will be removed.

Once all impacted properties have been identified and assessed by the Valuer, supplementary rates and valuation notices, with adjusted charges for the 2019-20 rating year will be sent out to those property owners.

If you have already paid your 2019-20 rates or wish to continue to pay your rates (by payment arrangements, instalments etc) you will still have any rate adjustments applied to your account. You can choose to have the payments remain on your account as a credit or you can request a refund.

Waste disposal – fire affected regions

No fire damaged waste will be accepted. We will let you know of arrangements for this waste as soon as possible.

General household waste is free to drop off if you are in a bushfire affected area. These are items that would generally go in your red lid **general waste bin**.

Food waste is free to drop off for people affected by power outages. To access this free service, please show staff at the transfer stations your paperwork from an Emergency Relief Centre or your driver's licence with your residential address if you did not access a relief centre.

Large items will still be charged, for example mattresses, ewaste, furniture and tyres.

The following sites will be charging as normal:
Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Lindenow, Marlo and Metung.

This will be in place until further notice.

These sites are closed until further notice:

Wairewa, Genoa, Bendoc, Bonang

See eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/sites for regular opening days / hours of other sites.

Kerbside bin collection

Put your bin out as normal. Collections are sometimes confirmed late in the day with not much time to notify residents.

Safety and road closures will mean some collections won't occur.

Raymond Island Ferry

We have lifted the restriction on day visitors accessing the Raymond Island Ferry as of 7.30am Saturday 11 January.

East Gippsland Livestock Exchange

Sales will be held as scheduled from now on.

What we don't know

Road closures

For road closures, use the Vic Traffic app or website, <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Property specific information

Many parts of East Gippsland remain inaccessible. At this time, Council does not have access to property specific information and is unable respond directly in fire affected locations.

Damaged council infrastructure

Council is looking for your help to identify damaged or destroyed bridges. This will help staff plan the repairs and rebuilds.

You can report damaged bridges and other council assets by email to (feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au), phone or using the Snap Send Solve app. It's free and you can include photos.

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Economic recovery

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, together with Council, is working to identify impacted businesses and the supply chains.

They have created a register to store information that will help them to understand the economic impacts of the fires as well as opportunities to support business and community to recover.

Regional Development Victoria will coordinate the register, through the Bushfire Recovery Centre in Bairnsdale.

Destination Gippsland

For tourism operators seeking business resources regarding planning, preparing, responding and recovery from an incident visit

<https://www.visitgippsland.com.au/destination-gippsland/industry-development/crisis-preparedness>

Destination Gippsland is conducting research on the economic impact of the fires to see how widespread the effect is. Email <mailto:janinehayes@destinationgippsland.com>.

Small Business Mentoring

Business mentors experienced in recovery management can bring an outside and fresh perspective to the issues and aid in the decision process. They also bring clarity and help you focus on the issues that matter. For more information contact Council's Economic Development Unit: 03 5153 9500 or economic.development@egipps.gov.au

Australian Taxation Office

The ATO will automatically grant deferrals for lodgements and payments due if your postcode is listed in the Identified postcode action list:

www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/?anchor=Victoria#Victoria

Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

For information about the bushfire support package contact the Victorian Chamber on 03 8662 5333 or disaster@victorianchamber.com.au

Australian Banking Association:

If you are dealing with the impact of the bushfires, there are practical ways your bank can help, Australian banks have hardship teams ready to assist you with your financial arrangements, depending on your circumstances.

See more information at

www.ausbanking.org.au/policy/customers/financial-hardship

Stay in touch with us

We producing this newsletter on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To subscribe, email media@egipps.vic.gov.au

Keep up to date with our services and activities:

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