

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



#### Dangerous trees and road mapping

Council's Works Department has commenced marking up and felling dangerous trees on council roads with the assistance of Australian Defence Force, and additional external arborists have been brought in to assist with this task.

Work was completed on Thursday by Council's geographic information officer on road hierarchy maps for each fire effected community. This work included overlaying maps of the affected fireground across the municipality with all of council's rural link, collector, access, fire access and limited access roads 43 locality maps in total.

This mapping will assist in prioritising roads for clearing and restoration. The work is in addition to clearing and access restoration works on the major roads not managed by Council, such as the Great Alpine Road and Princes Highway.

The road hierarchy maps were issued to the Incident Control Centre on Thursday (yesterday) and will aid in the allocation of additional resources to speed up the clearing and road opening process.

#### Emergency information

Fire warnings: Vic Emergency app or website, [www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/)

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



*Local, state and federal government working together: Council's General Manager Place and Community Stuart McConnell, Head of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency Andrew Colvin, Mayor Cr John White and Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay met on Thursday evening in Bairnsdale to discuss a coordinated approach to bushfire recovery in East Gippsland.*

#### What we know

##### Mobile Recovery Service

###### Open 10am to 4pm

Representatives from Council and other organisations are travelling to remote fire-affected communities to deliver emergency relief and recovery information from Council and various other agencies.

- Friday 17 January: Cobungra – Fire Station
- Monday 20 January: Benambra
- Tuesday 21 January: Swifts Creek
- Wednesday 22 January: Buchan
- Thursday 23 January: Bemm River
- Friday 24 January: Marlo

##### Bushfire Recovery Centre

**24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open daily from 9am to 5pm**

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, Ag Victoria and others.

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



*Please bring some identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments and donation distribution (if applicable).*

#### **Leave clean-up to the experts**

Residents keen to return to their fire damaged or destroyed homes to begin the clean-up process are being urged to wait for the experts.

Council is awaiting an announcement from the Victorian Government and Bushfire Response and Recovery Taskforce as to how the large-scale clean-up of public and private property will be coordinated. The clean-up following the Black Saturday fires of 2009 was coordinated and funded by the State.

Mayor Cr John White said he was aware of residents wanting to get started on the clean-up and start the recovery process.

“This clean up will be the start of the recovery for many people and I appreciate the urge to get things started, especially cleaning up damaged homes,” Cr White said.

“We want this done right and without residents putting themselves in danger of being exposed to risks. Buildings and other structures damaged or burned in a bushfire represent a series of potential hazards, including asbestos and chemicals. Also, if contaminated waste is presented unknowingly to our waste sites it also puts council staff and assets at risk.”

Over the past week crews from the emergency services have been undertaking an initial assessment of property damage in fire affected areas.

#### **Agricultural fencing**

Council is assessing the extent of agricultural fencing damage/loss.

Landholders are asked to stockpile their fencing waste. Details of a broadscale clean-up will be announced when the Victorian Government enacts a municipality recovery plan. Damaged fencing materials will be collected as part of that program. Please do not use Council’s waste facilities, including rubbish trailers and skip bins, to dispose of this material.

Where fire has damaged or destroyed fences between private land and national/state parks or state forests, the Victorian Government will meet 50 per cent of the cost of materials.

For further details, please see

[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](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)

#### **Preparing fire affected farms for storms**

Fire affected landholders in hilly and mountainous areas are warned to prepare for flash flooding, soil erosion and possible landslides ahead of forecasted thunderstorms.

The combination of bare ground, water repellent soils, steep slopes and high intensity rainfall can result in significant flooding, soil erosion, landslides and move large quantities of ash, sand, gravel and woody debris downstream.

Sediment traps can be made fairly quickly using wire netting, straw bales or silt fencing material, and should be in place as soon as possible after the fire to prepare properties ahead of the forecasted thunderstorms.

For more information visit

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery/farm-and-land-recovery-after-bushfire#building-sediment-fence>

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 17 January – Edition 6



## Donations to GERF

If you or someone you know is considering making a donation to the bushfire emergency, to help those most in need, please consider the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

In 14 days, GERF has distributed more than \$1.3 million to fire affected Gippslanders.

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.gerf.org.au](http://www.gerf.org.au)

## Supplies to isolated communities

Council continues to service many isolated communities by supplying essential supplies (food, water, hygiene as a priority). This work is in conjunction with needs within communities, the Australian Defence Force and Incident Control Centres.

Some communities now have road access (full or via permit) and we encourage residents and businesses in those communities to engage their usual suppliers for goods and services.



*Deliveries of hay were made into Cann River on Wednesday under Army escort, thanks to the efforts of Need for Feed and Orbost district farmers and transport operators.*

## 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.

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 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 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>

## Community bores

Southern Rural Water is working with Council and others who manage community bores in the East Gippsland region to check whether they are still operational and accessible. We will provide updates when more information is known.

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve has a connection point for people to fill up a water 'cube' for transport for emergency livestock relief. Please limit use to 1,000 litres each so resources are not depleted.

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 17 January – Edition 6



## Electricity

AusNet Services are responsible for the electricity networks throughout Eastern Victoria. You can contact them if you are trying to reconnect, understand outage lengths and to keep up to date with changing issues around electricity:

- Bushfire Support line: 1300 561 171
- Website with bushfire specific information: [www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support](http://www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support)
- Outage Tracker featuring estimated times of restoration and reasons for delays in areas of bushfire: [www.outagetracker.com.au](http://www.outagetracker.com.au)



*Council attended the Bruthen community meeting on Wednesday night. More than 130 people packed into the Bruthen Mechanics Hall for a fire update and information session from Blaze Aid about its planned fencing effort when access is granted by the bushfire Incident Controller. A community barbecue is being held from 11am-2.30pm this Saturday at the Bruthen Recreation Reserve.*

## Bushfire affected trees

Bushfire affected trees are extremely dangerous and can be fatal. Safety assessments are being undertaken and as a result of this hazard tree assessment, Council is not able to advise on when roads will be re-opened. The highways and main arterial roads are looked after by Regional Roads

Victoria, while Council looks after local roads and those in towns.

## Hearing Australia

Hearing Australia buses will be available in Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance to assist with hearing aid batteries, repair items, loan aids and on the spot repairs. The service is open to everyone.

## Bairnsdale Library

Saturday 18 January, 10am to 4pm

Sunday 19 January, 9.30am to 4pm

## Lakes Entrance Library

Monday 20 January, 8.30am to 4pm

## The Hub, Bairnsdale

Tuesday 21 January, 9am to 5pm

Wednesday 22 January, 9am to 5pm

## Kmart Bairnsdale

Thursday 23 January, 8.30am to 3pm

## 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>

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

Australian Psychological Society Referral Service:  
Call 1800 333 497

### Practical health tips

#### Air quality/smoke and masks

- Minimise time spent in smoky conditions and try to stay indoors.

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



- Keep activity levels as low as possible. Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Masks are available from community health organisations for those in the fire affected areas for those who are more sensitive to smoke. Please follow the guidelines for using face masks.
- Sensitive groups include those with a heart or lung condition (including asthma), are pregnant, over 65 and children up to 14 years.

#### Water tanks – drinking water source

- If time permits before leaving/evacuating your property, disconnect the downpipes to prevent potential contamination from the catchment area.
- Before reconnecting, clean the catchment area or wait for good flush of rain.
- Smoke taint alone is unlikely to be a health concern.
- If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink, use for food preparation, brushing teeth or give to animals (pets or livestock).
- Fire affected water in your tank can still be used for irrigation, toilet flushing and firefighting purposes. Water testing is not necessary.
- Boiling water doesn't remove fire retardants or other chemicals from water.
- Water should never be drawn from a creek or river for drinking purposes.

#### Septic tanks

- Heat and fire will affect the integrity of the septic system, especially irrigation lines.

- Tanks should be assessed for damage when returning to your property.

#### Hazardous material

- If you're considering returning to fire damaged property personal protective equipment should be worn as there are potentially hazardous materials around including asbestos, copper chromium arsenic timber

#### General hygiene

- Remember to keep up personal hygiene practices such as regularly washing your hands with soap and warm water

#### Case Support Program

The State Government has announced a Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program that is immediately available for people in fire affected areas.

Support coordinators will be a single point of contact for those who need it, working with locals to link them directly with vital support – such as information and advice, mental health support or financial counselling.

They will also help with practical things like filling out paperwork, accessing grants and financial claims, and navigating all the services available through the local council, state and commonwealth governments.

- Affected Victorians can access a support coordinator by contacting their council, visiting a recovery centre or **call 1800 560 760**.

#### Financial assistance

##### *DHHS Personal Hardship Assistance Program*

Call the Personal Hardship Assistance Program information line on **1800 961 054** to discuss eligibility and where to go for assessment. The information line is open 9am to 5pm daily.

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



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.

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

If you're eligible, you will get \$1,000 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:

[www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-australian-government-disaster-recovery-payment#a4](http://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.

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](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance)

#### **Bushfire Recovery Victoria**

Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) is focused on the needs of Victorian communities, working closely with local residents to ensure that rehabilitation

projects are both locally-driven and locally-delivered.

BRV will be responsible for working closely with bushfire-impacted communities - including local Community Recovery Committees - in the development and delivery of local recovery projects.

For more information visit

[www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria](http://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria)

#### **What we are doing**

##### **Council services**

##### **House plan of destroyed properties**

Residents who have had their home damaged or destroyed by bushfire will be able to access copies of their house plans free of charge. Where possible, please provide photos of the damage when making the application.

##### **Orbost Pool re-opens**

Monday to Friday, 6am – 8am lap swimming

Monday to Sunday, 1pm – 5pm.

Opening hours are air quality dependent and are subject to change.

##### **Rates**

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

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

##### **Direct debit arrangements**

If you are on the 10 direct debit instalment payment option, the latest instalment was deducted from bank accounts on Wednesday 15 January.

If you need to cancel future instalments, please call us on 03 5153 9500 or send an email to [feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au).

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



#### Valuations

All fire-impacted properties will be re-valued so the rates 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.

When this process is complete, affected ratepayers will be sent updated rates and valuation notices. All affected ratepayers' accounts will be included in this process, including people who have already paid.

#### Waste

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

We are awaiting confirmation from Bushfire Recovery Victoria on how the disposal of bushfire debris will be managed.

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.

Normal daily opening hours apply to all sites. See Council's website.

**Sites closed until further notice:** Wairewa, Genoa, Bendoc (skip bin at CFA shed for residents with domestic waste only), Bonang.

**Mallacoota kerbside collection:** A contractor from NSW has been engaged to undertake both general household and recycling kerbside pick-up in the

Mallacoota township on the morning of Saturday 18 January.

This Saturday pick up will continue until normal services can resume, subject to opening of the Princes Highway between Genoa and Orbost.



*Council has been able to inspect 16 bridges to date, with nine timber bridges destroyed or damaged beyond repair. Three are heritage listed. Four have been damaged but will be able to be repaired. We are anticipating a further six timber bridges have been destroyed. Above: Murrindal River Bridge, Buchan. Below: Waterholes Bridge, Deptford.*



# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 17 January – Edition 6



## 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

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

### Stay in touch with us

We are producing this newsletter on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To subscribe, email [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au)

Keep up to date with our services and activities:

*Phone:* 03 5153 9500

*Website:* [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au)

*Facebook:* @EastGippyShire

*Twitter:* @egsc

### Business and 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.

### Rapid Impacts Business Survey

Council's Economic Development and Tourism Unit has issued a 'Rapid Impacts Business Survey' to all business and tourism operators.

This survey takes just a few minutes to complete and will provide comprehensive data of immediate business impacts and needs to help inform key decision making and recovery program development at State and Commonwealth Government level.

You can access the survey

here: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/GJQFK3C](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GJQFK3C)

### Tourism recovery strategy

Destination Gippsland is collaborating with Tourism Australia, Visit Victoria, East Gippsland Marketing and Council to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to immediate and long-term recovery.

Timing is critical and getting the balance right to support those areas 'open' but indirectly affected by the fires is challenging.

Connect with your local business and tourism associations, who are working with Council on behalf of the business community as well as share updates on recovery planning.

Information on your local business and tourism association/ chamber of commerce can be found here: <https://bteq.com.au/>

### Primary Producer Recovery Package

Cash grants of up to \$75,000 were announced by the federal government for farming, forestry and

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 17 January – Edition 6



fishing businesses. This fund is to allow producers to replace sheds, fences and farming equipment damaged by the fires. This program will be delivered by each state with details of how to apply still to come.

More information:

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/initial-100-million-bushfire-emergency-support-primary-producers>

#### **Prime Minister's round table discussions**

A small business round table forum with representatives from across Australia's fire impacted areas was held in Canberra yesterday. Council was instrumental in nominating several key industry stakeholders who attended and provide direct input into shaping the corresponding business recovery package.

A tourism industry round table forum is scheduled for Friday. Locals representing local industry will provide direct input.

#### **Destination Gippsland**

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

[www.visitgippsland.com.au/destination-gippsland/industry-development/crisis-preparedness](http://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 [janinehayes@destinationgippsland.com](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. For more information contact Council's Economic Development Unit:

03 5153 9500 or

[economic.development@egipps.gov.au](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.ausbanking.org.au/policy/customers/financial-hardship)