

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 20 January – Edition 7



Clean-up announced

Homes destroyed by bushfires will be cleaned up under a state and federal program that prioritises local contractors. East Gippsland Shire Council has welcomed yesterday's announcement.

The clean-up applies to insured and uninsured residents and there will be no cost to property owners.

Council has a key role in leading recovery with our communities and Mayor Cr John White said the clean-up program was what the community and Council had been advocating for, so recovery could start progressing.

"This clean-up will give our communities, and most importantly impacted residents, some certainty on this vital stage of recovery," Cr White said.

The \$75 million Victorian bushfire clean-up program will be led by Grocon, appointed by the Victorian Government. Local contractors prioritised to demolish, remove and safely dispose of building materials either destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

Local contractors can register their interest with Grocon at www.grocon.com.au.

Anyone whose home, shop or shed was destroyed in the fires can apply to have their properties cleared through the already-established case management hotline 1800 560 760 or www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria.

The Insurance Council of Australia has assured the Victorian Government that insurers will not profit from the clean-up program. All savings accrued from not having to pay those with damaged property will be directly passed on to bushfire-affected policy holders, as part of the assurance made to the government.

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

Mobile Recovery Service

Open 10am to 4pm with representatives from Council and other organisations are travelling to remote fire-affected communities:

- 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 include Council, Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Finance, Ag Victoria and others.

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

Community meetings

- **Clifton Creek:** Monday 20 January, 10am at Clifton Creek Hall
- **Bruthen:** Monday 20 January, 3pm at Bruthen Community Hall
- **Wairewa:** Tuesday 21 January, 10am at Nowa Nowa Community Meeting Room
- **Buchan:** Tuesday 21 January at 3pm Buchan Recreation Reserve

Meetings were held in Sarsfield, Marlo and Cann River over the weekend.

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The Cann River community liaison team of Alison Rainey, Jenett Young, Tracey Turner, Christine Brownlie and Jill Filmer (not pictured), who will lead the distribution of information from Council and other agencies into the Cann River community.

Australian Department of Human Services (DHS) Mobile Service

- Lakes Entrance: Opposite Lakes Toys
The Esplanade, 8.30 am to 4.30 pm
- Swan Reach: Opposite General Store
- Sarsfield
- Dargo
- Cann River (pending access)
- Omeo Service Centre

Register for return

A registration service has been set up for people from the Mallacoota, Genoa and Gipsy Point communities who wish to return to their homes.

These areas will have minimal road access from Western Gippsland and Melbourne along the Princes Highway for an extended period of time.

When it is safe to do so emergency services, working with Australian Defence Force, will begin flights and/or escorted road transport into Mallacoota and surrounds for residents.

To register from Victoria, call the Police Assistance Line on 131 444 or from interstate call 03 8667 5444.

Cann River access

The Princes Highway will be accessible from Orbost to Cann River today (Monday 20 January) between 10am until 8pm. The road is open only to residents and permit holders.

Residents returning to their homes must have proof of residency ie: drivers' licence, rate or utility notice. Permits are available from the Orbost Incident Control Centre, 171 Nicholson Street, between 8am and 6pm.

Local roads

Council's Works Department has begun felling dangerous trees on fire-affected council roads with the assistance of Australian Defence Force and additional arborists.

Roads have been prioritised by use to get those most frequently used open as soon as possible. The work is in addition to clearing and access works on the major roads not managed by Council, such as the Great Alpine Road and Princes Highway.

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

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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

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

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.

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.

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



Mayor Cr John White chatting with Miles O'Brien from the PBS News Hour (United States) from the Bairnsdale Library on Saturday morning. The Mayor explained to the international audience the resilience of our communities, the challenges we have faced with drought and industry and now the bushfires. He encouraged international visitors to help via donations to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund and to consider planning a visit to East Gippsland, the Gippsland Lakes and Buchan Caves.

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>

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Community bores

Southern Rural Water is working with Council and others who manage community bores in East Gippsland 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.

For more information visit www.srw.com.au/east-gippsland-fires/ or phone (03) 5139 3100

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
- Outage Tracker featuring estimated times of restoration and reasons for delays in areas of bushfire: www.outagetracker.com.au

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.



Council's Megan Dennett and Anthony Nelson were among many staff at the Sarsfield community event yesterday. The community-led day had croquet, tennis, a jumping castle, live music, lunch, information from various agencies, and most importantly a chance to have a chat.

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.

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

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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.
- 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

- Disconnect 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.
- 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 including asbestos.

General hygiene

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

Case Support Program

Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program 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.

Access a support coordinator by contacting council, visiting a recovery centre or **call 1800 560 760**.

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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. 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

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



Some of the damage off the Yalmy Road on the northern fringe of Orbost.

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

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Officers have been planning for the secondary assessment stage, and this work will start later in the week in communities cleared by the Incident Controller.

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A secondary assessment is an in-depth assessment of how a property has been impacted and includes assessing the safety of sites and/or partly damaged buildings, if septic tank systems have been compromised, emergency orders, and identifying hazards such as asbestos. This work will also potentially assist property owners' insurance claims.

We will liaise with homeowners wherever possible, and all staff will be required to enter private property. They will carry identification indicating their need to be on site. There may be instances where notices are attached to fence/structures (where possible), notifying there are hazards present on site.

House plans 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-opened

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.

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.

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 most 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.

To subscribe to our community newsletter please email media@egipps.vic.gov.au.

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Mallacoota kerbside collection: A contractor from NSW has been engaged to pick-up both general household and recycling kerbside bins in the Mallacoota township on the Saturday mornings.

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

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) 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

Phone: 03 5153 9500; Website: 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

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 fishing businesses. This fund is to allow producers to replace sheds, fences and farming equipment

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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>

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

Destination Gippsland is conducting research on the economic impact of the fires to see how widespread the effect is. Email

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

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