

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 27 January – Edition 10



## Moving from relief to recovery

Council continues to service many isolated communities by supplying essential supplies (food, water, hygiene as a priority).

These supplies are determined in conjunction with needs within communities, the Australian Defence Force and Incident Control Centres.

Council is keen to work with communities to understand the key factors needed for a community to no longer be reliant on material and other relief.

It is recognised that every community is different and that this may not look the same for every community.

Council will use community meetings to understand how each community will transition from the relief stage to recovery.

## What we know

### 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.

### Mobile Recovery Service

Representatives from Council and other organisations are travelling to remote fire-affected communities to deliver recovery information from Council and various other agencies at 'pop-up' sites. This week's schedule is:

- Monday 27 January: Gelantipy, 2pm to 6pm at CFA shed
- Tuesday 28 January: Orbost, 10am to 2pm at senior citizens' rooms

- Wednesday 29 January: Tambo Crossing, 10am to 12pm at 'The Rock'
- Wednesday 29 January: Swifts Creek, 1pm to 3pm at the community hall
- Thursday 30 January: Cabbage Tree Creek, 10am to 11am at the store
- Thursday 30 January: Bemm River, 1pm to 4pm at the CFA shed

When attending the recovery or mobile recovery services, please bring identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments and donation distribution (if applicable).

### Register for clean-up

Homes destroyed by bushfires will be cleaned up under a state and federal program that prioritises local contractors.

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

The \$75 million Victorian bushfire clean-up program will be led by Grocon and local contractors are to be prioritised.

We encourage all contractors and other interested parties who wish to collaborate with Grocon to register their details at [victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au](mailto:victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au), by phoning 03 9631 8833.

Property owners are encouraged to register for the 2020 Clean-Up program at <http://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria> or by phoning 1800 560 760

### 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/>

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## Livestock losses

Current indications from Agriculture Victoria are that stock losses are about 982 in East Gippsland.

There has also been significant fencing and farm infrastructure losses. These numbers may increase in the days ahead.

In East Gippsland, as at 23 January 2020, agricultural impacts include losses of hay and silage (1,911 tonne), pasture (14,831 hectares), softwood plantation (10 hectares), wool sheds (12), dairy sheds (2), hay sheds (59), machinery sheds (126) and irrigation pumps (24).

Livestock loss: dairy (16), beef (311), sheep (515), horses (9), pigs (3), poultry (86), beehives (42).

## Saleyards in full swing

The East Gippsland Livestock Exchange (Bairnsdale) has played a key role in the relief effort and at one stage during the height of the bushfires was home to more than 300 evacuated horses. In the past fortnight, the saleyards have returned to business as usual (plus a coordination point for many loads of donated fodder).

At Friday's (24 January) store cattle market (pictured right), many East Gippsland-bred steers fetched more than \$4 a kilogram (top was \$4.49/kg) and included cattle that would normally be sold at the annual Ensay mountain calf sale. With the addition of these cattle, plus the usual drafts sold in January, the sale attracted one of the largest crowds for some time and included buyers from South Gippsland, northern Victoria and interstate, and King Island.

Local stock agents and saleyards staff put in a power of work to ensure the cattle were well presented and there was strong buying support to local farmers at this sale and those impacted by the bushfires, either directly or indirectly.



## Agricultural fencing

Different processes apply to fencing that requires replacing, depending on where the fence is and how it was destroyed.

### Farm fencing burnt by bushfire

Your insurer, or organisations such as BlazeAid, can help cover the cost of these fences either financially or with in-kind assistance.

Recovery grants of up to \$75,000 per farmer are available to:

- Help primary producers who have lost most of their farm business assets
- Help remote primary producers with transportation costs

To register your interest in one of these grants, visit [ruralfinance.com.au](http://ruralfinance.com.au) or call **1800 260 425**. Applications must be submitted by 31 July 2020.

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#### **Farm fencing destroyed by firefighting**

The Victorian Government will pay the full cost of fences damaged on private land as a result of machinery used by fire agencies to control bushfires or fire agency staff cutting through fences to allow access for suppression efforts.

If you believe your fencing was damaged by firefighting activities, please call 136 186. The operator will ask a series of questions about your claim before it is processed. Verification will be required.

#### **Farm fencing adjoining state or national parks**

The Victorian Government will meet 50 per cent of the cost of materials to replace or repair fencing between private land and all national parks, state parks and state forests destroyed or damaged by bushfires.

To lodge a claim for fencing that adjoins state or national parks or state forests please call **136 186**. The operator will ask questions about your claim.

#### **Back to school**

It's back to school this week and all government schools will be open. Clifton Creek Primary School staff and students will be temporarily relocating to Nicholson Primary School while their own new modular building (already on site) is finalised.

If bus routes are likely to be impacted, schools will work with families to make sure children are still able to access their education.

#### **Additional support available**

Families, children, students and teachers affected by the ongoing bushfires can receive additional support as they head back to school and kindergarten.

Minister for Education James Merlino on Friday 24 January announced a \$13.45 million package to support communities most impacted by the bushfires.

The package for government and non-government students includes:

- \$5 million to extend the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to all eligible primary and secondary school students
- \$4 million to boost mental health support for government and non-government schools, including additional psychologists and social workers
- \$3.8 million to establish a Trauma Recovery Team to provide the trauma response support to affected schools and kindergarten services

The package also includes \$650,000 in kindergarten fee subsidies to help families access free or low-cost Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program. This will apply to families of children who are residents of or attending a funded kindergarten service in the East Gippsland, Alpine or Towong areas.

These initiatives are in addition to a \$2.5 million support package already announced to help school students from bushfire-affected areas with the cost of items such as uniforms, books and stationery.

For more information on these initiatives, visit [education.vic.gov.au](http://education.vic.gov.au).

#### **Victorian Bushfire Appeal money available**

More than \$5 million raised through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal is being made available immediately to those most affected by the bushfires that have devastated East Gippsland and North-East Victoria.

The support includes immediate payments of \$50,000 to each of the families of the five people who have tragically died during Victoria's recent bushfires.

\$1 million – provided through BlazeAid – is being made available to help farmers replace boundary fences destroyed by the bushfires on their private property, helping to secure livestock and livelihoods.

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Another \$4 million is being released to support residents in bushfire affected areas who have experienced loss of, or damage to, their primary residence.

Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund (GERF) will receive \$2.5 million to continue its distribution to people most in need.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal already raising \$24 million.



### Spreading the tourism message

East Gippsland is certainly on the radar of state and federal politicians and ministers, and Council welcomed Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula (pictured above) to the region on Friday.

On the agenda at the Lakes Entrance meeting between Minister Pakula, local MP Tim Bull, Regional Development Victoria, Destination Gippsland and Council was driving a sustained visit East Gippsland tourism message.

East Gippsland received considerable media (traditional and social) coverage over the past week, encouraging people to support East Gippsland for the Australia Day long weekend and beyond. This included newspaper campaigns, outside broadcasts for statewide radio programs, and MPs of all persuasions being very active on their social media accounts promoting the holiday opportunities around the Gippsland Lakes for Australia Day.

### Emergency water assistance

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

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>

### Electricity

AusNet Services is responsible for local electricity networks. 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)

### Local roads

Council's Works Department is felling dangerous trees on fire-affected council roads with the help of Australian Defence Force and arborists.

Roads have been prioritised to get frequently used roads open as soon as possible. The work is in addition to those occurring on non-Council roads such as the Great Alpine Road, Bonang Road and Princes Highway.

All road closure information is available from the Vic Traffic app or website, <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

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## Princes Highway (Orbost to Cann River)

As conditions allow, residents and permit holders will be able to travel daily between 8am and 8pm from Tuesday 28 January until further notice.

## Bonang Road

Work continues from both ends of the road - south from Goongerah and north from Orbost. The road remains closed.

Hazardous tree assessments are being undertaken and a steep terrain harvester has been brought in due to the severe impact on trees.

## Mallacoota access

Yesterday and today (26 and 27 January), visitors who had to leave vehicles and property in Mallacoota, Genoa or Gipsy Point when evacuating as a result of the bushfires were able to access Mallacoota by road and air, gather their belongings and return home.

Given the scale of the impact of the fire to this area, only registered owners of vehicles left at Mallacoota were asked return to collect belongings and travel home.

On Sunday, about 365 people were brought in by air, 80-90 presented to Orbost ICC for permit, 20 presented to Bairnsdale ICC and 15 at Genoa.

A pop-up Visitor Information Centre was be available in Cann River on Sunday 26 January from 9.30am to 2.30pm. Council staff provide information on accommodation options and \$10 vouchers to travellers to purchase coffee from cafes between Cann River and Bairnsdale.

Tomorrow (Tuesday 28 January), the Princes Highway from Cann River to Genoa will return to a Category B, essential services only, and will be closed to public use. This to allow for the continued clearing of the highway.



*A steady stream of people (including those who had registered and flown back into Mallacoota) collecting their keys from the Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park on Sunday, and leaving with their cars, caravans and boats. The registration and convoy out of Mallacoota was a great example of cooperation between agencies and all our visitors who had returned to collect their vehicles; we look forward to their return visit under better circumstances. There were a couple of flat batteries, but the RACV was on hand!*

## What you can do

### Red Cross assistance

Australian Red Cross is reuniting people who have registered through Register.Find.Reunite. It also helps deliver food, water and other essential items to vulnerable communities.

Through its Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund, Red Cross can provide emergency grants of \$10,000 for people whose primary place of

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residence has been destroyed or is uninhabitable as a result of bushfires.

Emergency Services Resources:  
[www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources#recover-from-disasters](http://www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources#recover-from-disasters)

Customer Care Team: 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276)

Register.Find.Reunite: 1800 727 077 or  
<https://register.redcross.org.au/>

### Bushfire Case Support Program

The free Bushfire Case Support Program provides practical support for bushfire affected people.

Case support coordinators can help you with:

- Discussing your needs and the next steps you could take
- Information and support to access recovery and mental health services
- Completing paperwork
- Community information
- Financial counselling and assistance with insurance
- Advice for business owners
- Small amount of financial support to help with immediate needs.

Support can be provided face to face, over the phone or at a location that suits you.

To access this program or find out more:

Call: 1800 560 760 - 8am to 6pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm on weekends

Email: [bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au](mailto:bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au)

### Tips for talking with insurance companies

If you need to make a claim with your insurance company the first step is to get in contact with your insurer so they can begin to process your claim. You

can do this even if you haven't returned to your property and don't yet know the extent of the damage.

If you can't remember who your insurer is, you can contact the Insurance Council of Australia on 1800 734 621. This is a 24-hour hotline to help anyone affected by the fires with their insurance.

Remember, homes destroyed by bushfires will be cleaned up under a state and federal program that prioritises local contractors. The clean-up applies to insured and uninsured residents and there will be no cost to property owners.

### 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

#### 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).

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- 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.

#### Financial assistance

##### **Emergency re-establishment payments**

Emergency re-establishment assistance is available if your home is uninhabitable for more than seven days because of an emergency.

It provides up to \$42,250 per eligible household experiencing financial hardship, who have been affected by fire at their primary place of residence. The grants will be available for clean-up, emergency accommodation, repairs, rebuilding (a principal place of residence), and replacing some damaged contents.

Re-establishment assistance is available to individuals or families who do not have building (home) insurance or contents insurance.

If you think you may be eligible for a re-establishment payment, you can speak to the payment assistance helpline 1800 961 054.

They will take your details and the department will be in contact soon. Assistance is being provided through the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

##### **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.

##### **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.

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)

##### *Disaster Recovery Allowance:*

Support for people who can show they have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires.

You have until 30 June 2020 to make a claim. For more information, visit the DHS website or contact the 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)

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## What we are doing

### Council services

#### Secondary assessments

Secondary assessments have started in some communities.

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.

Council is being assisted by specialised officers from other shires across Victoria, so the faces you see may not be East Gippsland staff you are familiar with.

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### 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 at Council landfills or transfer stations.

#### Bairnsdale Library

The library is closed Monday 27 January for the Australia Day public holiday.

As of Tuesday 28 January, the Bairnsdale Library will be returning to standard opening hours: Monday to Friday 9.30am to 6pm, and Saturday 9.30am to 12pm.

#### Legal assistance is available

Call Disaster Legal Help on 1800 113 432, 8am to 6pm weekdays, or speak with one of their lawyers at the Bushfire Recovery Centre, 24 Service Street, Bairnsdale.

Disaster Legal Help Victoria provides free help with bushfire-related issues such as:

- Problems with insurance claims
- Difficulty paying your mortgage, rent, bills or loans
- Disputes with your landlord
- Lost or destroyed documents, including wills, titles and ID documents
- Difficulty getting payments from Centrelink
- Existing legal issues that have been impacted by bushfires, such as custody arrangements and child support

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If your small business or farm has been affected and you're struggling financially or your assets have been destroyed, Disaster Legal Help can assist you.

## Small business relief package

To build on the Disaster Recovery Grants put in place by the Victorian Government, the Federal Government will provide top-up grants to eligible small businesses and non-profit organisations under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

This program is uncapped and means that businesses and organisations that have sustained damage as a result of the fires can access up to \$50,000 in grant funding (tax free). To provide maximum flexibility for eligible businesses, loans of up to \$500,000 will be offered for businesses that have suffered significant asset loss or a significant loss of revenue.

The loan would be for up to 10 years and used for the purposes of restoring or replacing damaged assets and for working capital. The loans will be available with a repayment holiday of up to two years, with no interest accruing during this period. The Government will establish a Small Business Bushfire Financial Support Line.

While the specialist Support Line is being established, businesses can visit [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au) or call 13 28 46.

## 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)

We also produce daily video updates, highlighting the various aspects of the bushfire relief and recovery, which are available on our Facebook page or YouTube channel 'EastGippyTV'.

Our website contains links to various fact sheets and other useful bushfire information.

Phone: 03 5153 9500; Website: [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au); Facebook @EastGippyShire; Twitter: @egsc



*A great day was had at Lochiel Park, Orbost, on Sunday with a community event for Orbost residents hosted by the Australian Defence Force and Fijian Army. Adults and children alike were able to inspect the large range of military vehicles and equipment, try on packs, look through day kits, and inspect sleeping quarters etc. There were some friendly games of cricket and rugby, and some face paint too!*

