

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

29 January – Edition 11



On behalf of East Gippsland Shire Council and our communities I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for its tremendous support over the past month.

About 6400 ADF personnel have been helping with Operation Bushfire Assist in fire-affected communities across the country, including about 2500 civilians – Reservists.

These Reservists are people who have been called away from their families, friends, their jobs and personal commitments to help ours and other bushfire affected communities helping to save lives and properties, and in relief and recovery efforts.

I would also like to acknowledge the families and employers who have let Reservists go offline to help our communities.

We look forward to continuing to work alongside the ADF personnel as they help us get back on our feet.

To the ADF, the Reservists, and visitors from afar you have not only provided much-needed physical and logistical support, but importantly helped lift community spirits.

We will be forever thankful.

- Mayor Cr John White

Emergency information

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

What we know

Bushfire Recovery Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open daily from 8.30am to 5pm

A one-stop-shop for bushfire-related enquiries. Agencies include Council, Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Agriculture Victoria and others.

Mobile Recovery Service

Representatives from Council and other organisations are travelling to fire-affected communities to provide recovery information. This week's schedule is:

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

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

Put your name down for property clean-up

The Victorian Government has a free property clean-up program to demolish, remove and safely dispose of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

If you want to use this service, you need to register. This free, opt-in program is available to insured and uninsured residents. Register at www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria or by phoning 1800 560 760.

Contractors and interested parties who wish to register to collaborate on this project with the lead company, Grocon, can register at: www.grocon.com/bushfire-recovery-2020/ or by phoning 03 9631 8833.

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 29 January – Edition 11



Mayor in Canberra for rebuild talks

Mayor Cr John White will today participate in a special roundtable at the invitation of Sir Peter Cosgrove, Chair of the Community Rebuilding Initiative.

Cr White will detail the type of help our community needs to assist with recovery at the Canberra meeting of mayors and chamber of commerce representatives from bushfire-affected areas.

The Community Rebuilding Initiative is unique because it has been specifically designed to help businesses get back on their feet, provide jobs, re-establish key industries such as tourism and agriculture, and rebuild community facilities.

The focus of today's roundtable will be economic recovery.

Cr White said the chance to explain the challenges and opportunities firsthand at Parliament House was much appreciated.

"This will continue to build on the already strong relationship we have established with the head of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency, Andrew Colvin, who will also be at the roundtable."

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.

Get the latest road closure information on the Vic Traffic app or website,
<https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park

At this stage, the park is closed until Sunday 1 March. The closure will continue to be reviewed and the community will be updated by Saturday 15 February. Customers with February bookings will receive an SMS or email with information on refunds or credits.

These customers will also be advised if the park re-opens earlier than expected.

For more information on refunds, visit eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/mfhp

What you can do

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
- Financial counselling and help 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

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 29 January – Edition 11



Financial assistance

This information is divided into support available for: individuals and property owners, businesses and agricultural properties.

Individuals/families and property owners

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. Register for the 2020 Clean-Up program at www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria or by phoning 1800 560 760

School student support: \$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.

Back to school help: for families, children, students and teachers; applicable to government and non-government students.

What's been announced:

- Support package to help school students from bushfire-affected areas with the cost of items such as uniforms, books and stationery
- Extension of the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to all eligible primary and secondary school students
- Additional psychologists and social workers
- Establishment a Trauma Recovery Team to provide the trauma response support to affected schools and kindergarten services

More information: education.vic.gov.au.

Kindergarten: fee subsidies have been announced to help families access free or low-cost four-year-old kindergarten. This will apply to families of children who are residents of or attending a funded

kindergarten service in East Gippsland, Alpine or Towong shires.

Emergency water assistance: if you need emergency water assistance 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.

Electricity: Contact AusNet Services 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
- www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support

Outage Tracker featuring reasons for delays, estimated restoration time:

www.outagetracker.com.au

Red Cross: Red Cross can provide emergency grants of \$10,000 for people whose primary place of residence has been destroyed or is uninhabitable as a result of bushfires.

More information:

www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources#recover-from-disasters

1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276)

Emergency re-establishment assistance: is available if your primary place of residence is uninhabitable for more than seven days because of an emergency. It provides up to \$42,250 per eligible household experiencing financial hardship. 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 insurance or contents insurance.

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

29 January – Edition 11



If you think you may be eligible, speak to the payment assistance helpline 1800 961 054.

Assistance is being provided through the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

DHHS Personal Hardship Assistance Program: call 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 visit

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

Businesses

Bushfire Case Support Program: A free program provides practical support for bushfire affected people. Case support coordinators can help with advice for business owners.



Gelantipy locals gathered for a community meeting and barbecue on Monday of the Australia Day long weekend.

Call: 1800 560 760 - 8am to 6pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm on weekends or email: bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au

Small business relief package: The Federal Government will provide top-up grants to eligible small businesses and non-profit organisations. The program is uncapped, so businesses and organisations that have sustained damage from the fires can access up to \$50,000 in funding (tax free).

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 also establish a Small Business Bushfire Financial Support Line. While the specialist Support Line is being established, businesses can visit www.business.gov.au or call 13 28 46.

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 29 January – Edition 11



Agricultural properties

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. BlazeAid has set up camp in Bruthen and has started striping / clearing fences in preparation for rebuilding.

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 or call **1800 260 425**.

Applications must be submitted by 31 July 2020.

Farm fencing destroyed by firefighting

The Victorian Government will pay the full cost of your fences damaged by fire agencies' machinery or activities.

Farm fencing next to state or national parks

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

To lodge a claim for fencing destroyed by firefighting, and/or for fencing that adjoins national or state parks or state forests call **136 186**. You will be asked some questions about your claim and verification will be required.

The mobile recovery service visited Nowa Nowa on Saturday 25 January.

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Secondary assessments have started in some communities.



Council's mobile service, including other agencies, was in Nowa Nowa last Saturday.

This in-depth assessment looks at how a property has been impacted and includes assessing the safety of sites and partly damaged buildings, if septic tank systems have been compromised, emergency orders, and identifying hazards such as asbestos. This work may also assist property owners' insurance claims.

Staff will need to enter private property and will carry identification. We will liaise with owners where possible. From this work, notices may be attached to fence/structures notifying of hazards on site.

We are being assisted by specialised officers from other shires, 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.

Legal assistance is available

Call Disaster Legal Help on 1800 113 432, 8am to 6pm weekdays, or speak with one of their lawyers

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

29 January – Edition 11



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

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.

Emergency water access

People affected by the bushfires can access emergency untreated water supplies at:

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve has a connection point for people to fill up a water cube. You need a male 50mm Camlock fitting and pump. Limit use to 1,000 litres each so resources are not depleted.

Goose Gully, 90 Balfours Road, Lucknow has a standpipe. Use is capped at 4,000 litres per person per day. 7am to 7pm daily.

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

Be wary of scams

Be wary of people seeking bushfire donations, many scams have been 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.

Some people have set up Go Fund Me pages, etc to raise donations for official charities – your donation is safer if you seek out the charity and donate directly.

Scams may also include organisations purporting to making assessments on behalf of insurance agencies. Please be careful about who you give our personal or business information to.

Stay in touch with us

We are producing this newsletter on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. To subscribe, email media@egipps.vic.gov.au

We also produce daily video updates, which are available on our Facebook page or YouTube channel, EastGippyTV.

Phone: 03 5153 9500; *Website:* eastgippsland.vic.gov.au; *Facebook:* @EastGippyShire; *Twitter:* @egsc



Council's Alanna Jones filming an interview for the Australia Defence Force, explaining how Council and the ADF has worked together. Alanna's role during the fires has been in logistics to ensure supplies get to isolated communities, a far cry from her usual role as coordinator at the Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre.