

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

31 January – Edition 12



Property assessments and clean-up

Council is currently assessing damage to properties and determining any safety or other hazards.

So far, we have completed about 250 assessments. We will be in touch with property owners as assessments continue.

Grocon has been appointed by the Victorian Government to manage the clean-up.

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.

In past events, the state government has introduced streamlined arrangements for any planning approval required for rebuilding.

What we do not know

- Details of the Grocon program, but expect it will be announced soon
- Exactly what the Victorian Government will put in place for planning and building approval or the timing for any decision on this.

What we are doing

We are meeting with Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Grocon this week about the clean-up programs, from Council's perspective, and to find out more about the likely timing and arrangements. We will pass information on when we are in a position to do so.

We are working with the Victorian Government to advocate for the streamlined planning arrangements and other changes that would facilitate rebuilding.

We are also looking at the best way to ensure landholders will not need to pay government fees

for planning and building approvals – private building surveyors may still have charges.

As soon as we have more information, we will provide a briefing for the building industry and will make information available for the community.

What we need you to do

Let qualified people deal with building waste and keep an eye on future newsletters for updates.

Mobile Recovery Service

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

- Monday 3 February: Omeo, 12pm to 2pm at the community hall; Cobungra, 3pm to 4pm at the CFA shed
- Tuesday 4 February: Buchan, 10am to 12pm at the community hall
- Wednesday 5 February: Bonang, 12.30pm to 3.30pm at the community hall
- Thursday 6 February: Cann River, 11am to 2pm at the community hall
- Friday 7 February: Genoa, 10.30am to 12.30pm at the community hall; Mallacoota: 2pm to 4pm at the community hall

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.

Please bring identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments, if applicable, to the mobile recovery service and the Bushfire Recovery Centre.

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Contractors can register for work

Contractors and interested parties who wish to register to collaborate on the clean-up program with the lead company, Grocon, can register at:

www.grocon.com/bushfire-recovery-2020/

or by phoning 03 9631 8833.

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

www.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

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 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, 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

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- 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

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.

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

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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.

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.

Agricultural properties

New announcement - fencing: The Victorian Government will help landholders repair damaged or destroyed fences between private land and National Parks, State Parks and State forests.

This will allow farmers flexibility to upgrade fences to make them fire-resistant with concrete posts and better able to exclude pests such as wild dogs.

The government will pay half the cost of these boundary fencing upgrades up to \$5000 per kilometre.

An assessment of the property and the fence damage must be completed before works are undertaken or any payments can be made, and landholders will continue to pay labour costs and half the cost of materials. Landholders can call the DELWP Contact Centre Team on 136 186, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

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.

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GERF reaches initial target

If you or someone you know is considering donating to the bushfire emergency, please consider the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

GERF yesterday announced it had reached its initial \$5 million target, with the tally currently sitting at \$5,340,075.66.

The GERF team, supported by Council, is continuing to receive and process referrals daily.

As of Wednesday morning, 1,123 referrals from fire-affected East Gippslanders had been approved and \$2.545 million dispersed - about 48 per cent of funds raised to date.

Secondly, the Victorian Government, through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal, will be partnering with GERF to distribute an additional \$2.5 million raised to support fire affected East Gippslanders.

100 per cent 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

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Council continues to coordinate teams to undertake secondary impact assessments of fire affected properties.

This week, teams of building surveyors, environmental health officers, and OHS and support officers headed out to Sarsfield and Wairewa.

We are very fortunate to have the help and support of staff from municipalities from across the state and the Victorian Council of Churches who continue to put their hands up to assist with this important task.



Staff from other Victorian councils including Mornington Peninsula, Mount Alexander, Central Goldfields, Glen Eira, Melton, Ballarat, Manningham, Maroondah, Knox and Yarra, and the Victorian Council of Churches have joined our secondary assessment team.

These in-depth assessments look 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.

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.

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Stay in touch with us

In addition to this newsletter, we also produce daily video updates, which are available on Facebook @EastGippyShire or our YouTube channel, EastGippyTV.

Ph: 03 5153 9500; Web: eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

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
- Tenancy issues and questions
- Lost or destroyed documents, including wills, titles and ID documents
- Family Violence and Intervention Orders (including changes as a result of bushfires)
- 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.



Sharon Fisher (Bushfire Recovery Victoria), Dr Graeme Emonson (Executive Director Local Government Victoria), Anthony Basford (East Gippsland Shire CEO), Minister Local Government and Small Business Adem Somyurek, Cr Natalie O'Connell and Judy O'Connell (Victorian Small Business Commissioner). See page 7.

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.

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This week at East Gippsland Shire Council

Local Government Minister visits

Minister for Local Government and Small Business the Hon. Adem Somyurek (pictured previous page) visited on Wednesday to hear firsthand about the short- and longer-term challenges our communities face in bushfire recovery.

We were pleased to welcome the Minister for some excellent discussions around the support needed for not only local government but small business across the shire.

Canberra roundtable

Mayor John White and Manager Economic Development and Tourism Sharon Raguse attended a special community roundtable meeting on Wednesday 29 January at Parliament House, Canberra.

Chaired by Sir Peter Cosgrove (pictured with Mayor Cr John White right), in the room were more than 60 local government and business representatives from fire affected communities across Australia.

The Community Rebuilding Initiative, backed by the Business Council of Australia and supported by BizRebuild, is unique because it has been specifically designed to help local businesses get back on their feet, provide jobs, re-establish key industries such as tourism and agriculture and rebuild community facilities.

The focus was on economic recovery so locals can stay and work in their hometowns and communities can rebound from bushfire. There was a desire to understand exactly what bushfire effected communities needed on the ground so that funds and in-kind assistance can be paired.

Cr White's delivery of the East Gippsland economic impact and representation of the community was so well received that he was singled out in Sir Cosgrove's closing remarks: "Listening to you



John, all here have heard the drum-beat of this disaster and we could not have had any better example".

Victorian Government funding

Council welcomes the Victorian Government's announcement made earlier this week of \$10 million for bushfire-affected councils. This funding will be shared between six councils.

Council will look at the detail of the package and allocate funding in a way that best supports those impacted and our region's recovery.

Some options as outlined by the Government are waiving fees for permits to rebuild, providing support to businesses with annual charges or permits, and rate relief.

These will all be considered by Council.

We also welcome the other measures announced by the State, including fast-tracking payroll tax relief, stamp duty concessions, waive water rates and grants for industry groups.