

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

3 February – Edition 13



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:

Omeo, 12pm to 3pm, community hall
Cobungra, 3pm to 4pm, CFA shed

Tuesday:

Buchan, 10am to 12pm, community hall
Sarsfield, 7pm to 8.30pm, community hall

Wednesday:

Bonang, 12.30pm to 3.30pm, community hall

Thursday:

Cann River, 11am to 2pm, community hall

Friday:

Genoa, 10.30am to 12.30pm, community hall
Mallacoota: 2pm to 4pm, community hall

Grocon at Sarsfield

Grocon, the contractors leading the building clean-up, will be at the Sarsfield community meeting on Tuesday to answer your questions.

The clean-up program covers the demolition and disposal of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the bushfires. This includes:

- Homes
- Sheds and other out-buildings
- Commercial buildings
- Public buildings

It may also include the removal of fencing, trees and vehicles, but only where it is necessary for the safe clean-up of destroyed buildings.

The Victorian Government has contracted Grocon to conduct the clean-up.

After you register, Grocon will contact you to discuss arrangements for the clean-up process and obtain a signed consent form.

This program is voluntary and free for eligible property owners. You do not need to be insured.

Contractors can register for work

Where possible, Grocon will engage local contractors in the clean-up effort to support jobs in fire-affected regions. If you're a qualified contractor who wants to work with Grocon on the clean-up, register at victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au or phone 03 9631 8833.

Personal protective equipment kits

Personal protective equipment kits are available for residents returning to inspect their property when it is safe to do so. The kits include:

- disposable coveralls
- A disposable P2 mask
- Sturdy gloves
- A plastic garbage bag to dispose of the used protective equipment
- Information sheets about returning home safely and using your personal protective kit

Extra P2 masks will be available to go with each kit as it is likely more than one mask will be needed.

The kits are to be used strictly for fossicking for keepsakes, they are **not** for asbestos removal or for asbestos clean-up.

Kits will be available at community meetings and from the Bushfire Recovery Centre.

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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.

Ongoing fire activity

Last weekend's fires and infrastructure losses, particularly around Cape Conran, are a timely reminder the fire season is far from over.

While many areas are open to visitors, and we welcome everyone returning to support our communities and businesses, it's important to remain vigilant, and check travel and fire plans.

Please follow all road and park closures. All East Gippsland parks and forests are closed until further notice. Full list here:

www.ffm.vic.gov.au/media-releases/

Local roads

Council's works crew 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/>



Some of the team at Mallacoota are Bev Forshaw, Eva Grunden, and Sandra Raaymakers.

Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park

Council's Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park and Customer Service Centre teams have played a key role in helping residents and visitors through the response, relief and recovery. At this stage, the park is closed until Sunday 1 March. Customers can choose between a credit transfer for a future booking, or a refund.

For more information, 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.

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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
- 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: 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.

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If you think you may be eligible, call 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.

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

Note: funding for these programs cannot be provided retrospectively.

The Victorian Government will help upgrade fences to be more fire resistant for landholders repairing 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 \$5,000 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. You can call DELWP on 136 186, weekdays from 8am to 6pm.

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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 is rebuilding fences. BlazeAid is expected to meet with other communities this week.

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.

People with vehicles, boats, caravans at Mallacoota

Anyone wanting to return to Mallacoota to pick up items needs to obtain a permit to travel the Princes Highway. Permits can be accessed at the Orbost Incident Control Centre, (DELWP building, Nicholson St), or if you are unable to visit the centre in person, you can obtain one over the

phone by calling 5161 1222 and a permit will be issued via email. More information:

https://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/#residents_and_permit_holders_returning_to_mallacoota

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.

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.

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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. 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.

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.

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



3AW Breakfast show in Lakes Entrance

It was great to have 3AW's Ross and John in Lakes Entrance on Friday morning promoting that East Gippsland is open for business (*see photo above*).

Mayor Cr John White spoke to the popular pair about the impact of the bushfires on the region, including the direct impact on community members, and businesses across the municipality. He acknowledged the support for Lakes Entrance and Paynesville and Metung, but Cr White particularly highlighted areas including Orbost, Marlo, the Alpine region into Bemm River.

The message today was to ask Melbourne listeners to plan ahead for any long weekends, and to come and support the entire Shire when there is so much to see and do. Thanks to 3AW for the support.

Victorian Government funding

Council welcomes the Victorian Government's announcement made last 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 Victorian Government, including fast-tracking payroll tax relief, stamp duty concessions, waive water rates and grants for industry groups.

Rates

At its meeting tomorrow evening, Council will consider rate payment options to help ratepayers affected by the bushfires.

Council recognises many properties have suffered significant property loss and many other ratepayers who will be financially impacted as a result of the fires.

Many impacted ratepayers will receive various forms of government and community assistance over the coming months; however, Council recognises it can also provide some direct assistance by allowing additional time for the 2019-20 rates and charges to be paid.

It is expected more information will be available before the March Council meeting for Council to assess the direct and indirect impacts of the bushfires on ratepayers and consider additional assistance.

Council will tomorrow night consider:

- Exempting all ratepayers from penalty interest on unpaid 2019-20 rates and charges (due 15 February) until 31 May 2020.

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- Deferring payments for all 2019-20 rates and charges for all properties identified as being in the bushfire impacted areas, until 30 June 2021 with no penalty interest for that period.
- Adopting a Financial Hardship Policy.
- Endorsing a simplified Financial Hardship process for all properties in identified bushfire affected areas, as well as any ratepayer whose primary source of income has been directly impacted by the bushfires.

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.

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

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