

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



Rates payment support

At its meeting last night, Council moved to provide some direct assistance to bushfire-affected ratepayers by allowing additional time for 2019-20 rates and charges to be paid.

Council approved:

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

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.

Valuations

All fire-impacted properties will be re-valued, so the rates reflect the property's current condition.

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.



A fire-ravaged West Cape Conran, including destroyed beach access infrastructure and smouldering seaweed as a result of last weekend's fires.

Grocon meeting with residents

Grocon, the contractor appointed by the Victorian Government to lead the clean-up, has started meeting with community members this week and was in Buchan and Sarsfield yesterday (Tuesday).

The Grocon representative/s will attend community meetings in Cann River and Mallacoota on Friday.

The focus this week is for residents to register with Grocon by calling 1800 560 760 or visiting www.br.vic.gov.au.

Next week's focus is for Grocon to visit properties, with clean-up work likely to start the week after.

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

Contractors who want to work with Grocon on the clean-up, register at victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au or phone 03 9631 8833.

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



Mobile Recovery Service

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

Thursday 6 February:

Cann River – community hall, 11am to 2pm

Friday 7 February:

Genoa, 10.30am to 12.30pm, community hall

Mallacoota – community hall, 2pm to 4pm

Monday 10 February:

Goongerah – community hall, 11am to 2pm

Tuesday 11 February:

Wairewa – community hall, 11am to 2pm

Wednesday 12 February

Ensay – community hall, 10am to 12pm

Swifts Creek – community hall, 1pm to 3pm

Thursday 13 February:

Wulgulmerang – recreation reserve, 11am to 2pm

Friday 14 February:

Clifton Creek – community hall, 6pm to 7.30pm

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.



Council's mobile recovery service van visiting Cabbage Tree.

Princes Highway open

The Princes Highway is now open all the way to the New South Wales border!

People travelling in the area should be aware that many roads off the Princes Highway remain closed and are unsafe for travel. This includes smaller local roads, and parks and forest tracks where hazardous tree assessments have not yet been completed.

The Genoa to Mallacoota Road remains open to residents and essential services only with a permit, as hazardous tree work continues as we work towards opening the road to the public soon. Permits are available from the DELWP Orbost office.

There is still smoke in the area, reducing visibility. Drivers should use their headlights on low-beam and keep a safe braking condition.

Works are still ongoing along some areas of the highway in East Gippsland and drivers are asked to obey traffic management and speed restrictions. Police will be patrolling and enforcing the speed restrictions. Also be aware of increased presence and movement of wildlife.

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

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



Australian Defence Force presentation

A Mallacoota and district community barbecue and Australian Defence Force presentation will be held on Saturday 8 February.

The Australian Defence Force will present a token of appreciation for the welcoming and support the Mallacoota, Genoa and district community has shown them.

Presentation to take place at 12.30pm at Croajingolong Centre garden, followed by a performance from the Australian Navy Band. Afterwards there will be a free community barbecue provided by the ADF and cooked by Mallacoota Lions Club.

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

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



Epicormic buds lie dormant beneath the bark, until under certain conditions they develop into active shoots. Photo taken near Clifton Creek this week.

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.

Bushfire Case Support Program

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

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



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
- 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: People can now apply for three kinds of immediate assistance at <https://www.redcross.org.au/grants> or 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276).

- An additional \$10,000 payment to support people whose homes were destroyed extending the total amount available to \$20,000 per household

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



- \$7,500 for people who were hospitalised for more than two days as a result of the fires, with grants helping to cover out of pocket medical and other related expenses
- \$5,000 for homeowners whose homes have been structurally damaged and require repairs to make them safe for people to live in.

Red Cross is also contacting the senior next of kin of people who have died in the fires to provide a bereavement payment of \$20,000.

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, 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.

Businesses can visit www.business.gov.au or call 13 28 46.

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



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.

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 has also met with agencies in Buchan this week to progress its move into that community.

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.

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Council continues 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.

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.

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



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.

Library loans renewal

Due to some roads still being closed and some communities still isolated, all library items on loan will automatically be renewed for a further month until 2 March.

Also, the Orbost Mobile Library is currently in use as the recovery vehicle for bushfire affected areas.

While the Orbost vehicle is unavailable as a mobile library, the Bairnsdale Mobile Library will provide a fortnightly service to Cann River, Marlo, Newmerella and Bemm River. This will be on every second Tuesday (yellow week on the mobile library schedule).

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

5 February – Edition 14



Boomers to visit schools

The Women's National Basketball League Melbourne Boomers will be visiting schools and affected communities on 5 and 6 February.

Starting their stay with us in Bruthen, the players will spend time with students from Bruthen, Tambo Upper, Orbost, Orbost North, St Joseph's, Newmerella, Marlo, Swan Reach and Nicholson primary schools.

The Boomers will be spending a night in Lakes Entrance, where they will play mini golf with the Lakes Entrance Basketball Association, and ride camels at Eastern Beach. Following this, selected players will head to Raymond Island to do the Koala Walk.

The players are also keen to spend up in local shops and cafes!

Mayor Cr John White said the community, particularly school children, will relish the chance to meet the basketballers.

"This is a great initiative from the Melbourne Boomers and Latrobe Valley Authority and will showcase much of our region is open for business and that a great time can be had by all in East Gippsland," Cr White said.

"We are very appreciative of the Boomers' visit, and the support they have already shown to our community through fundraising and free tickets for locals to a game earlier this month. We hope the Boomers enjoy their time with us in East Gippsland.

"We're sure this will be the first of many visitors by sporting organisations and businesses to East Gippsland to support us in our bushfire recovery."

Free family event Friday

Multiple Golden Guitar winner and horseman extraordinaire Tom Curtain will be performing his

'We're Still Here Tour', with his award-winning outback show Katherine Outback Experience Show, this Friday evening (7 February), to support our bushfire-affected communities.

Organised by local businesswoman Carlee Knight, with support of individuals, businesses and Council, the event will be held at the Bairnsdale Racecourse and has free entry.

The show is entertaining, engaging, interactive and family-friendly, and includes:

- One-hour Katherine Outback Experience Show with the horses and dogs
- Half-hour intermission with live music by special guests
- One-hour of live music by Tom Curtain and special guests

Held at the Bairnsdale Racecourse, gates open at 4.30pm for a 6pm start. Free entry, but please acquire a free ticket for space allocation and catering purposes.

Bring chairs and picnic blankets as well as some cash for food, drinks and merchandise (EFTPOS available for merchandise only).

More details at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/tom-curtains-were-still-here-tour-bairnsdale-vic-tickets-76392850071>

Stay in touch with us

In addition to this newsletter, we also produce daily video updates, which are available on:

- Facebook @EastGippyShire
- YouTube channel, EastGippyTV

Phone: 03 5153 9500

Website: www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au