

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 14 February – Edition 18



Clean up program

Residents are being encouraged not to clean up debris on their properties. Council and emergency response agencies are asking residents to wait for the rollout of the Victorian Government's clean up program, which is being coordinated by Grocon.

Personal protection kits are available for people who would like to look for keepsakes (see page 2 for more details).

VicRoads bushfire assistance in Mallacoota

VicRoads staff will be in Mallacoota next week to help with your registration and licencing enquiries.

No appointment is needed, just visit Council's Mallacoota Customer Service Centre as follows:

- Wednesday 19 February: 1pm to 5pm
- Thursday 20 February: 8.30am to 5pm
- Friday 21 February: 8.30am to 12pm

The staff will be able to answer questions such as:

- how to replace your registration documents;
- cancelling registration for fire damaged vehicles;
- claiming refunds;
- replacement licenses;
- damaged learner log book;
- and change of address.

Fire Fight Australia concert – live site at Sarsfield

This Sunday 16 February, from 1pm to 6pm, the Fire Fight Australia bushfire relief concert will be held in Sydney and broadcast live by Channel 7.

Channel 7 has organised a live site at Sarsfield Recreation Reserve for people to gather and watch the concert. It will be one of a number of live sites across Australia.

Acts performing at Fire Fight Australia include Queen with Adam Lambert, Amy Shark, Hilltop Hoods, 5 Seconds of Summer, Lee Kernaghan, Olivia Newton-John, Peking Duk, John Farnham and more.

Mayor Cr John White will do a live cross from Sarsfield to the Sydney event at around 2.40pm.

A barbecue is being put on by East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid.

If you are free this Sunday afternoon, drop by the Sarsfield Recreation Reserve, 10 School Road.

Freedom of Entry Ceremony at Omeo

On Saturday 15 February, the Townsville-based 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment will be conducting a freedom of entry ceremony at the Omeo Caravan Park. This group has been operating out of Omeo and providing essential support and aid to the East Gippsland community since 16 January.

Granting permission to a formed body of armed men and women is a centuries old tradition that signifies a mark of trust, friendship and confidence held between the regiment and the community.

Mayor Cr John White will attend for the ceremony at the invitation of the 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment.

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Canni Creek Picnic Races

Buchan and Gelantipy Racing Club will stage its annual Canni Creek Picnic Races this Saturday 15 February, complete with a fire-damaged, and now iconic, winning post.

The volunteer committee and community will stage the race meeting only weeks after fire. The first of six races is at 12.55pm.

Other attractions include the Footballers' Gift, Fashions on the Field and children's activities. Catering on site.

There is no camping this year due the recent bushfires.

Buses to and from the event are available.

Forge Theatre hosts free recovery concert

Council is holding a free bushfire recovery sing-along concert celebrating the sounds of the '60s and '70s early next month.

'Superstars Celebration' will be hosted by Lisa Budin Price. Audience members will be encouraged to sing their hearts out during this hour-long spectacular on Thursday 5 March from 11am. There will be a free morning tea beforehand from 10.30am.

The show is tipped to be packed with the music, stories and swagger of two of the most exciting decades in music.

Tickets are free but bookings are essential.

Book now by calling 5152 1482, visiting eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/forgetheatre or in person at Bairnsdale or Lakes Entrance Visitor Information Centres, Council's Customer Service Centres, or the Forge Theatre Box Office.

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.

Property clean up program

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 outbuildings, commercial buildings and 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.

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Victorian Land Registry Services

Victorian Land Registry Services will waive all property title and search related fees for properties damaged by bushfire.

If you have been affected by the recent bushfires and would benefit from access to land and property information from the land titles register, please call the registry on 03 9102 0402 or email VLRsbushfiresupport@victorianlrs.com.au to discuss how they can assist you.

Buchan Caves Reserve re-opens today

Buchan Caves Reserve is reopening to visitors today.

Although more severely fire-affected parts of the park will remain closed, visitors will be able to access the campground and enjoy a night under the stars. The Buchan Caves visitor centre will be operating.

Given the fire impacts throughout the park, walking tracks and other areas within the reserve will remain closed to visitors for safety reasons.

For the time being, Parks Victoria advises cave tours are not being offered pending assessment of cave air quality and safety checks of cave infrastructure.

Wildlife

DELWP will be working to find and assess koalas in burnt areas. Healthy koalas will be released into unburnt areas and injured wildlife will be transferred to specialised vets for treatment and recovery. DELWP wildlife teams are being supported by the Australian Defence Force, Zoos Victoria and the RSPCA in this process.

You should not try to catch injured wildlife. For information about what to do if you find injured wildlife, please call: 1300 322 060 if you are near

Bairnsdale or 1300 322 056 if you are near Orbost, or visit www.wildlife.vic.gov.au

Bushfire Recovery Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open daily from 8.30am to 5pm. Phone: 03 5153 9500.

A place for all your bushfire-related enquiries. Please bring identification such as a Medicare card or rates notice and bank details for assistance payments, if applicable. If you have general council enquiries, please go to our other Bairnsdale offices.

Note: from 17 February, the recovery centre's weekend hours will be Saturday: 8.30am to 1pm; Sunday: closed.

Mobile Recovery Service

Representatives from council and other organisations are travelling to fire-affected communities to provide recovery information. Please bring identification and bank account details. The upcoming schedule is:

Friday 14 February

Benambra – community hall, 10.30am to 1pm

Clifton Creek – community hall, 6pm to 7.30pm

Monday 17 February

Gelantipy – community hall (note venue is no longer CFA shed), 4pm to 6pm

Tuesday 18 February

Chandlers Creek – intersection of Buldah Road, 10.30am to 12pm

Cann River – community hall, 1.30pm to 4pm

Wednesday 19 February

Club Terrace – letterbox, 11am to 2pm

Thursday 20 February

Anglers Rest – Blue Duck Inn, 10.30am to 12.30pm

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Cassilis – next to Mt Markey Winery, 2.30pm to 4pm

Friday 21 February

Goongerah – public hall, 11am to 12pm

Bonang – community hall, 1.30pm to 3.30pm

Friday 21 February visits depend on road conditions and the fire situation.

Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park

The park is now taking bookings for visitors holidaying from 1 April onwards. We are aiming to re-open in late February.

While the park is still closed, we understand people are interested in booking for Wild Harvest (3-5 April), the school holidays and Easter.

Customers can choose between a credit transfer for a future booking or a refund.

We also encourage visitors to consider supporting private accommodation and holiday park operators.

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

- 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

Budget Direct: is offering grants of up to \$20,000 for community groups or organisations to repair or replace damaged facilities and or equipment that aren't covered by insurance.

To find out if your organisation or group is eligible and to apply, visit

www.budgetdirect.com.au/landingpages/bushfire-recovery-fund.html

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

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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
- \$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.

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 or contents insurance.

If you think you may be eligible call 1800 961 054.

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. Claims close 30 June 2020. For more information, visit the DHS website or call 180 22 66.

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance

Agricultural properties

Recovery grants of up to \$75,000 per farmer are available to assist with immediate recovery activities needed to rebuild primary production enterprises. Grants can be accessed to help primary producers who have lost most of their farm business assets, and help remote primary producers with transport costs.

To register your interest in one of these grants, visit ruralfinance.com.au or call 1800 260 425.

Looking after your dams

With rain and thunderstorms predicted this weekend, farmers are being encouraged to consider strategies to prevent organic pollution from entering farm dams.

Pasture covers have been left at critically low levels due to the recent bushfires and drought, making it easy for dung and other organic materials find its way into dams.

Tips to prevent organic pollution:

- Remove organic material from water ASAP by skimming the surface of the water.

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- Improve the palatability of the water by aeration and/or chemical treatments.
- Where possible, implement sediment control measures with sediment fences or barriers.
- Prioritise water storages and plan for contingencies should water become unavailable.
- Maintain an adequate vegetative cover around the dam or protect with netting, corrugated iron or earth banks.

Farm fencing

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.

Farmers can upgrade fences with concrete posts and be better able to exclude pests such as wild dogs. The government will pay half the cost of these fence upgrades up to \$5 per metre.

An assessment of the property and the fence damage must be completed before works are undertaken or payments can be made, and landholders will continue to pay labour costs and half the cost of materials. 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 help. Information on BlazeAid can be found on BlazeAid's Facebook page or their website, blazeaid.com.au

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.

Emergency water access

People affected by the bushfires can access emergency untreated water supplies at **Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve** and **Goose Gully, 90 Balfours Road, Lucknow**.

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

Important information on rates

We are mindful that with the recent fires there may be many ratepayers who have been impacted. There is important information below that may be relevant to you.

Full payment: People who have chosen to pay their rates in one lump sum are reminded that full payment is due by Saturday 15 February 2020.

Interest charges: We will not apply penalty interest to late payment of the 2019-20 rates as long as rates are paid in full by Sunday 31 May 2020. Interest penalties may be applied to rates that remain unpaid after this date. Interest will be applied to any previous year's rates still unpaid.

Quarterly instalments: The next payment is due by Friday 28 February 2020. Penalty interest to late payment of the third instalment will not be applied

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as long as the third instalment is paid by the final instalment's due date, Sunday 31 May 2020.

Direct debit option: The next instalment will be deducted on Monday 17 February 2020. If you want to cancel or defer this payment, contact us to discuss this option.

Payment arrangement: Anyone experiencing difficulties in making payment should contact us as early as possible to make a suitable payment arrangement.

Financial hardship: If you are experiencing financial hardship you may apply for assistance under our Hardship Policy.

Property valuations: If your property has been impacted by the recent fires, your property valuation may need to be adjusted. If your valuations are adjusted, you will be sent an amended valuation and rate notice before the end of May that can be used for payment purposes.

Original valuation and rate notice: Notices were issued in August 2019. If you did not receive, or have misplaced, your original notice, contact us for details of the rates due.

Anyone wishing to discuss property valuations, rates payments or financial hardship assistance is encouraged to contact us as soon as possible.

Bulk billed psychology sessions

Bushfires and trauma impact people in different ways. Children are particularly susceptible to stress. The toll of stress can often take a while to manifest.

If you or another member of your family, are feeling overly worried, irritable or having trouble sleeping, talking to a psychologist may help.

Early intervention can be the key to preventing more serious problems further down the line.

Rural Health Connect are providing bulk billed sessions with psychologists.

You will be able to talk to a psychologist through video conferencing from home.

Sessions can be done outside of business hours. Please visit www.ruralhealthconnect.com.au or call 0427 692 377 for more information.