

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 8 January - Edition 2



You are receiving a lot of information about bushfire activity, meetings, services etc.

It is crucial to only listen to official sources for information on fire activity and the work of authorities – emergency agencies, DELWP, Council and others.

For social media posts – check when it was posted. Activity on old posts may push out-of-date content to the top of your newsfeed, causing confusion and anxiety.

Check the source of information. If it is not from an official source, go to the official source to verify.

You can be confident information published or shared by Council is accurate.

Emergency information

This newsletter does not have emergency information.

For fire warnings use the Vic Emergency app or website, www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/

What we know

Charity scams

Be wary of people seeking bushfire donations, many scams are starting to be 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 official charity and donate directly.

The preferred way for people to donate to those affected by the fires is by cash donations to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund. 100% of donations funds go to Gippslanders when they need it most – in the immediate aftermath of an emergency.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Find out how to donate here: www.gerf.org.au



Council is getting assistance from other shires to help support our staff and community, by maintaining services where possible. One of those working with us is Murrindindi Shire Council's Coordinator of Community Safety Casey Southurst. You will see other council's vehicles and uniforms, but rest assured they are legitimately working with East Gippsland Shire.

Community meetings/visits

Omeo Recreation Reserve: Wed 8 Jan- 3pm

Buchan Recreation Reserve: Thurs 9 Jan- 11am

Nowa Nowa Hall: Thur 9 Jan- 11am

Clifton Creek Hall (Deptford Rd): Thur 9 Jan- 6pm

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East Gippsland Livestock Exchange

Sales this week: prime cattle sale on Thursday 9 January; store cattle sale on Friday 10 January.

Sales will be held as scheduled from now on.

Works Crew and saleyards staff have worked tirelessly to have the yards up and running for these sales after the last of the evacuated horses moved to other facilities.

What you can do

Mental health

Please check in at the Emergency Relief Centre to find out about the services available to help you and your family, and to connect with others in your community.

It is normal for a distressing or frightening event to affect you physically, mentally and emotionally. Look out for others and if you need help, seek help. You might find talking to friends and family useful; or talk with your GP. It may be a good idea to see a counsellor or psychologist to help you process your experience.

Australian Psychological Society Referral Service:
Call 1800 333 497

Information on trauma reaction and recovery:
[Trauma - reaction and recovery - Better Health Channel](#)

Financial assistance

Current financial assistance grants are:

DHHS Emergency Relief Assistance Payment - Personal Hardship Assistance Program

Emergency relief assistance may be available for up to 7 days after the emergency event. A one-off payment (up to \$1800 for families/\$500 for individuals) is provided to help meet immediate needs, including emergency food, shelter, clothing, medication and accommodation.

A needs assessment is carried out by a Personal Hardship Assistance Officer at an Emergency Relief Centre to determine eligibility.

For more information on assistance, go to DHHS website: www.services.dhhs.vic.gov.au

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
- the interior of your principal place of residence has sustained major damage
- damage from the fire has exposed the interior of your principal place of residence to the elements
- your principal place of residence has been declared structurally unsound
- the interior of your residence has been affected by sewerage contamination.

If you're eligible, you will get \$1000 per adult, \$400 for each child under 16 years of age.

The fastest way to claim is over the phone. Call 180 22 66, or go to this website:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-australian-government-disaster-recovery-payment#a4>

We will let you know if other financial assistance programs are offered in the future.

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Mayor Cr John White visited Bruthen and Nowa Nowa general stores on Tuesday afternoon, and attended the Orbost community meeting. Cr White is pictured inspecting some of the large-scale damage at Sarsfield.

What we are doing

Bushfire Information and Support Centre

Open at 24 Service Street, Bairnsdale.
Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

It's a one-stop-shop for bushfire-related enquiries.

Agencies on hand include Council, the Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Finance, Agriculture Victoria and others.

As road access improves and the fire threat eases, we intend on making the information and support centre mobile to visit other communities.

You can also make fire-related enquiries by phone to 03 5153 9500 and our staff will help identify which services you may need to access.

General council enquiries: Corporate Centre, Bairnsdale

Council services

Just like many other residents, a high number of Council staff evacuated the area or have been fighting fires. There will be changes to some of our

services as staff assist with emergency management and some areas are not yet accessible. See below for details:

Customer Service Centres

Open centres (open 8.30 am to 5.00 pm)

Corporate Centre, 273 Main Street, Bairnsdale

Orbost and Lakes Entrance are open for fire-related enquiries and a limited range of their usual services.

All other centres are expected to reopen by Monday 13 January.

Residents are asked to direct fire-related enquiries to our general number: 03 5153 9500

Rates

Council is working through a range of options regarding rates and will keep the community informed as decisions are made.

Direct debit arrangements

If you have elected to pay rates by 10 instalments (direct debit), the next direct debit is due to be deducted from bank accounts on **15 January 2020** as per normal process.

If you need to cancel this arrangement, please tell Council in writing by either sending an email request to feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au or by completing the "Cancellation of a Direct Debit for Rates" form on Council's website.

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

Contact details

If you're in a position to provide changes to contact details or mail addresses, send this information to us by email, feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au, or use the Change contact details on our website, eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/forms

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Valuations

Council is being updated with details of all fire affected areas. Council will arrange for the valuations of all impacted properties to be reassessed, to ensure that the rates for the 2019-20 rating year 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.

Once all impacted properties have been identified and assessed by the Valuer, supplementary rates and valuation notices, with adjusted charges for the 2019-20 rating year will be sent out to those property owners.

If you have already paid your 2019-20 rates or wish to continue to pay your rates (by payment arrangements, instalments etc) you will still have any rate adjustments applied to your account. You can choose to have the payments remain on your account as a credit or you can request a refund.

Waste sites

No fire damaged waste accepted.

You need to wait for information on avoiding contamination and an announcement on how clean up will be managed

General household waste in fire-affected communities: If you're in a fire-affected area, your household waste can be dropped off free at waste sites on opening day.

We are working to open facilities and run kerbside collections when circumstances such as fire, weather, access, staff safety and resources allow.

These sites are closed until further notice:

Cann River, Wairewa, Genoa, Bendoc, Bonang

See eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/sites for regular opening days / hours of other sites. We are trying

to keep as close to this schedule as possible but it is subject to change due to weather or fire activity.

Food waste

If a power outage has spoiled food in your fridges/freezers, these transfer stations will accept this waste free:

Bairnsdale, Benambra, Bruthen, Buchan, Lakes Entrance; Marlo, Metung, Omeo, Orbost, Swifts Creek.

To access this free service, please show staff at the transfer stations your paperwork from an Emergency Relief Centre or your driver's licence with your residential address if you did not access a relief centre.

Kerbside bin collection

Put your bin out as normal. Collections are sometimes confirmed late in the day with not much time to notify residents.

Safety and road closures will mean some collections won't occur.

Raymond Island Ferry

Ferry travel is restricted to residents with ferry passes, people already staying on the island, and essential deliveries.

No visitors or day-trippers allowed.

This restriction will be reviewed next week.

Recreation centres and outdoor pools

Orbost and Bairnsdale outdoor pools - closed.

Bairnsdale Aquatic and Recreation Centre: operating as normal

Lakes Entrance Aquadome: Operating as normal except there is no creche.

The Aquadome will be running its holiday activities such as Aqua Run, inflatable day, kids triathlon and picnic day.

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Libraries

Bairnsdale Library: 9.30 am to 6.00 pm

With the exception of account items and inter-library loans, the due date on all items on loan has been extended to Monday 3 February. Items with a longer due date are unchanged.

No mobile library. An announcement on when mobile library services will resume will be made shortly.

What we don't know

Road closures

For road closures, use the Vic Traffic app or website, <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Property specific information

Many parts of East Gippsland remain inaccessible. At this time, Council does not have access to property specific information and is unable respond directly in fire affected locations.

Damaged council infrastructure

Council looking for your help to identify damaged or destroyed bridges. This will help staff plan the repairs and rebuilds.

You can report damaged bridges and other council assets by email to (feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au), phone or using the Snap Send Solve app. It's free and you can include photos.

Stay in touch with us

Keep up to date with our services and activities:

Website: eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

Facebook: @EastGippyShire

Twitter: @egsc



Councillors met for a briefing on Tuesday to discuss the bushfire response and recovery for communities. They received updates from DELWP Regional Director – Gippsland Darren McKenzie, Member for Eastern Victoria The Hon. Jane Garrett, DELWP's Jodie Simpson and Member for Gippsland Darren Chester.