

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 21 February – Edition 21



After 91 days of bushfire activity, fires that affected communities and areas around Wulgulmerang, Gelantipy, W Tree, Buchan, Wairewa, Bruthen, Sarsfield and the Tambo Valley were declared contained on Wednesday 19 February.

Incident Controller at Bairnsdale, Brett Mitchell, said after a very early start to the fire season, it is fantastic to be able to advise many of these communities that no further spread of these fires is expected.

“Residents will continue to see firefighters working in the fire areas removing hazardous trees and undertaking rehabilitation work, particularly around parks and forest tracks,” he said.

“There are still areas that firefighters have not been able to access due steep and inaccessible terrain. Crews will continue to extinguish identified hot spots and people may still see smoke occasionally.”

Over the past couple of weeks, areas around Omeo, Anglers Rest, Cobungra, Bindi, Hotham Heights, Glen Valley, Benambra, Swifts Creek, Omeo, Ensay, Tongio, the Blue Rag Range, Dargo and Tabberabbera, have also been declared contained.

The recent wet weather has assisted to self-extinguish fire edges in areas of Far East Gippsland, allowing crews to attack any identified hot spots with direct fire suppression.

Base camps at Swan Reach, Cann River and Benambra have been dismantled.

“Many of our affected communities can begin their journey to recovery,” he said.



*Battle Point on the Tambo River (between Tambo Crossing and Ensay) on Wednesday after the Tuesday afternoon storm event. A 30-kilometre stretch of the Great Alpine Road was impacted.*

### **Cape Conran peat fires**

The peat fires near Cape Conran continue to burn and are currently 71 hectares.

A community meeting will be held at the Marlo Fire Station on Sunday 23 February at 6pm.

Emergency services are working with EPA, government agencies and specialist firefighters to develop a long-term strategy to extinguish the peat fires.

Drones with infrared technology are being used to map the peat fires. Carbon monoxide monitoring is being conducted. Cape Conran Coastal Park remains closed.

### **Genoa and district community barbecue**

A community event will be held at the Genoa Community Hall on Thursday 27 February with a Lions Club barbecue from 5.30pm.

Some services will be available from 3.30pm at the hall, including council’s mobile recovery service (4pm to 5.30pm). A mobile children’s and youth van will also be available with fun activities.

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#### High Country waste collection

Omeo, Ensay and Swifts Creek residents, please be advised Tambo Waste will do an extra kerbside waste collection this Saturday 22 February as collection was not possible on Wednesday 19 February (normal collection day) due to the Great Alpine Road being closed following a landslip.

Collection will be back to the regular schedule next Wednesday 26 February.

#### Community-led recovery

Mallacoota and Districts Recovery Association is now up and running and membership of the association is steadily growing with approximately 500 members so far and is just one example of community-led recovery.

Membership will not close and all members will receive updates on the progress of the association and formation of the committee.

Currently the nomination form for committee is being prepared and will be available within the next few days. This form will be sent to all members and will be available at the chemist, the Council's customer service centre and both supermarkets. It will also be available, along with membership forms, at the community meeting to be held at Genoa on 27 February.

#### Fijian farewell ceremony

The Australian Defence Force will be hosting a final thank-you sausage sizzle with the Fijian Army at Lochiel Park, Orbost, this evening from 5pm to 7pm.

Festivities will include a traditional Fijian farewell ceremony (called an Itatau), a presentation by the Lake Tyers indigenous community and a Welcome to Country ceremony.

The ceremonies will start at 5.15pm followed by the sausage sizzle.



*The new barbecue shelter constructed by Mallacoota Lions Club and volunteers this week being put to great use with a community barbecue last night. The Today Show, broadcasting from Lakes Entrance this morning, was also crossing live to Mallacoota for an unveil of some new infrastructure.*

Task Group 646.2 is comprised of Fijians, Australian Army Reservists from Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, and full-time soldiers.

#### Clifton Creek event tonight

A Farms 'n' Fences community event will be held at the Clifton Creek Hall this evening from 5pm to 10pm.

The free event will include live music, raffles, prize giveaways, free face painting and jumping castle, and children's entertainment.

Raffle prizes include family holidays, tools and gift vouchers and money raised will assist in replacing farm fences in the community.

#### VicRoads in Mallacoota today

VicRoads staff will be in Mallacoota today from 8.30am to 12pm to help with your registration and licencing enquiries.

No appointment is needed, just visit Council's Mallacoota Customer Service Centre.

To subscribe to the newsletter email [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au). Hardcopies are available at our Customer Service Centres and a number of community centres. See our website for past editions.

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## Temporary structures for rebuild

Council recognises that people who have unfortunately lost their homes in the bushfires will need somewhere to store materials etc., as part of the rebuild process.

Council wants to make this as easy as possible and will provide an exemption for residents who have lost their home and wish to have a temporary structure on their land to assist with their rebuild.

We are working through how we can apply that permit exemption, and the period the exemption may be in place.

Council also recognises each situation is individual. It is important that we work with individuals in order to understand and best meet their needs.

For anyone who has not lost their home, relevant approvals are required for temporary buildings such as shipping containers. For land use suitability and amenity, it's important that temporary buildings, such as shipping containers, are not excluded from the need for relevant permits.

Council's land use planners can help in confirming whether a planning permit will be needed.

## Wandering stock reminder

We appreciate how the significant loss of agricultural fencing is presenting many challenges for farmers across East Gippsland, including containing livestock on private property.

As a result of damaged fences, Council has, expectedly, received an increase in wandering stock complaints.

Our rangers will do whatever they can to ensure the owners of stock can contain their stock without intervention. During this time, as farmers re-establish boundary fences, we are taking a lenient approach.

In most cases, we can contact the owners and have the wandering stock contained on private property. Impounding livestock is the absolute last resort for Community Laws officers.

With some major and local roads reopening, please be reminded that wandering stock onto roads is a public safety risk.

If anyone has any questions about wandering stock, please contact Council's Community Laws team.

## Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park re-opens

The Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park has re-opened to existing bookings in stages:

- Wednesday 19 February: Blocks 5 and 6
- Friday 21 February: Blocks 3 and 4
- Monday 24 February: Blocks 2 and 1

From Wednesday 26 February the whole park will re-open for new bookings.

Opening the park in stages allows us to meet caravan park regulation requirements, manage safety, and support the community.

We are accepting new bookings from March 1 2020. All existing bookings will be honoured.

For more information, visit [www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/mfhp](http://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/mfhp)

## Community Recovery Committees

Community Recovery Committees help individuals and communities get back on their feet.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria's website has information on the committees, including the role of the committees, how they will be supported and where they will be located.

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The website also has a form for people who want to express interest in joining a Community Recovery Committee.

For more details see the 'Help your community' page at [www.br.vic.gov.au](http://www.br.vic.gov.au)

## Community Recovery Hubs

Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) will set up Community Recovery Hubs in partnership with Council. BRV is looking for your feedback on the locations of the hubs, which are proposed to be in: Bairnsdale, Buchan, Cann River, Lakes Entrance, Mallacoota, Omeo and Orbost.

To give your feedback, call 1800 560 760 or email [connect@brv.vic.gov.au](mailto:connect@brv.vic.gov.au).

For more information on the Community Recovery Hubs, see the 'help your community' page at [www.br.vic.gov.au](http://www.br.vic.gov.au)

## Bushfire Recovery Centre

**24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open Mon-Fri 8.30am to 5pm, Sat 8.30am to 1pm.  
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.

## Mobile Recovery Service

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

**Today** (dependent on road/fire conditions)

Goongerah – public hall, 11am to 12pm

Bonang – community hall, 1.30pm to 3.30pm

## Monday 24 February

Marlo – adjacent to Marlo General Store, Argyle Parade, 10.30am to 12.30pm

Wairewa – community hall, 2pm to 3.30pm

## Tuesday 25 February

Combienbar – community hall, 11am to 1pm

## Thursday 27 February

Genoa – community hall, 4pm to 5.30pm

## Friday 28 February

Benambra – community hall, 11am to 1pm

## Replacement birth/marriage certificates

If your identity documents have been destroyed, the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria will replace them for free (Victorian certificates only). Call 1300 369 367.

## 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. The audience 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 from 10.30am.

Tickets are free but bookings are essential. Book now by calling 5152 1482, visiting [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/forgetheatre](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/forgetheatre) or at Bairnsdale or Lakes Entrance Visitor Information Centres, Council's Customer Service Centres, or at the box office.

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## Inquiry community sessions announced

The Victorian Government has asked the Inspector General for Emergency Management (IGEM), Tony Pearce, to lead an inquiry into Victoria's preparedness for and response to these recent fires, and to review relief and recovery efforts.

The inquiry will consider:

- Effectiveness of emergency management command and control and Victoria's operational response.
- Effectiveness of the declaration of a state of disaster.
- Timeliness and effectiveness of activation of Commonwealth assistance and resource availability.
- State evacuation planning and preparedness process and practices.
- Preparedness ahead of the 2019-20 fire season.
- Effectiveness of immediate relief and recovery work and arrangements, and the creation of Bushfire Recovery Victoria, the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and how they work together.

To ensure the Inquiry fully considers the views and experiences of the Victorian community before, during, and after the fires the Inspector-General Tony Pearce will be conducting community meetings in March and April across Victoria in 26 locations, 10 of which are in East Gippsland.

### East Gippsland sessions:

Bonang/Tubbut: Tuesday 10 March, (time TBC)

Bairnsdale: Tuesday 17 March, 6-8pm

Mallacoota: Wednesday 18 March, 6-8pm

Orbost: Thursday 19 March, 6-8pm

Cann River: Monday 30 March, 6-8pm

Bemm River: Tuesday 31 March, 11am-1pm

Lakes Entrance: Tuesday 31 March, 6-8pm

Buchan: Wednesday 1 April, 11am-1pm

Bruthen: Wednesday 1 April, 6-8pm

Omeo: Thursday 2 April, 6-8pm

Preliminary recommendations into Victoria's preparedness and response for the 2019-20 fire season are due to the Government by 31 July 2020.

IGEM's investigation into Victoria's relief and recovery arrangements is due to report back to the Government by 30 June 2021.

Further details on venues, registering to attend, and other opportunities to provide views and experiences to the independent Inquiry will be published on the IGEM website ([www.igem.vic.gov.au](http://www.igem.vic.gov.au)), and advertised in state and local media.



*Senior Red Cross officials met with Cr Joe Rettino yesterday while they were in the area visiting volunteers and some affected communities.*

*Pictured: Ross Pinney (President of the Board for the Australian Red Cross Society), Cr Joe Rettino and Red Cross's Kym Pfitzner, Kate Siebert, Sue Cunningham, Paul Daniel, Andrew Coghlan, and Anne Macarthur OAM.*

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#### 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.

Clean-up works are expected to start this week in some areas.

#### 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.

#### What's an insurance embargo?

An embargo is an underwriting restriction applied by an insurer with regard to accepting new insurance policies in certain geographic areas or for specific risks.

Insurers often place embargoes on insurance policies to restrict people buying insurance when the risks are viewed as highly elevated, or a disaster is already occurring, and then cancelling cover after the risk passes.

Embargoes on insurance are a normal and accepted practice, and usually apply to new policies. They typically take effect when events such as fires, floods and cyclones threaten to impact a certain area (or already are).

Not all insurers impose embargoes. Most insurers will renew existing insurance policies.

Embargoes can apply to many types of policy including, home, contents, motor, business and travel. Some insurers may still sell a policy in these circumstances but may stipulate a time period within which they will not accept a claim against the policy, for example 72 hours or 7 days.

If consumers are finding it difficult to obtain insurance, they can contact the Find an Insurer service on 1300 884 934 or alternatively contact the ICA catastrophe hotline if they wish to discuss their concerns further, on 1800 634 721.

#### Bulk billed psychology sessions

Trauma can 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 someone you know are feeling overly worried, irritable or having trouble sleeping, talking to a psychologist may help.

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

Rural Health Connect is providing bulk billed psychologist sessions. 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](http://www.ruralhealthconnect.com.au) or call 0427 692 377 for more information.

## **Mental health support forums**

Mental Health Foundation Australia is hosting three forums to support the mental health of people affected by the bushfires. The forums are free.

The first forum will be on Monday 24 February at Lakes Entrance Golf Club, 6.30pm to 8pm, featuring Professors Peter Barlis and Greg Murray.

The second forum will be on Monday 30 March at Bairnsdale Sporting and Convention Centre, 6.30pm to 8pm, featuring Emeritus Professor Bruce J. Tonge and Professor Jayashri Kulkarni.

The third forum will be on Monday 27 April at Bruthen Mechanics Hall, 6.30pm to 8pm, featuring the same speakers as at Bairnsdale.

More information: 1300 643 287. Book at [www.trybooking.com/BHYUF](http://www.trybooking.com/BHYUF)

## **Bushfire Case Support Program**

After a bushfire, sometimes people are unsure of what to do next. The Bushfire Case Support Program provides practical support for people who have been affected by the bushfires.

Positions in East Gippsland are now fully staffed so people who have provided their details through the call line will receive a call and a visit if they require that.

Gippsland Lakes Complete Health will provide services from Bairnsdale to Mallacoota and Windermere Family Support Services will provide services from Bruthen up the Great Alpine Road.

Case Support Workers can help you with:

- Discussing your needs and the next steps you could take
- Information and support to access recovery and mental health services
- Financial counselling and assistance with insurance
- Temporary accommodation
- Completing paperwork
- Advice for business owners
- A 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. People from bushfire impacted areas in East Gippsland can access this free service.

To access this program or find out more, call 1800 560 760 (8am to 6pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm on weekends).

## **Business grants scam alert**

There have been reports of people calling small businesses offering to help them submit applications for bushfire grants for a \$300 fee, advising this is the only way recovery grants can be accessed.

Bushfire support is not subject to a fee for service arrangement. Please be alert for scams.

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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](mailto:VLRsbushfiresupport@victorianlrs.com.au) to discuss how they can assist you.

## Stay in touch with us

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

Website: [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au)  
Phone: 03 5153 9500

## 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](http://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. Call their Bushfire support line: 1300 561 171 or visit the website, [www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support](http://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
- \$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.

Re-establishment assistance is available to people who do not have building or contents insurance.

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

**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

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organisations that have sustained damage from the fires can access up to \$50,000 in funding (tax free).

#### **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 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](http://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 details call 180 22 66 or visit the website, [www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance)

#### **Agricultural properties**

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 assets and help remote primary producers with transport costs.

To register your interest, visit [ruralfinance.com.au](http://ruralfinance.com.au) or call 1800 260 425.

#### **Farm fencing**

The Victorian Government will help upgrade fences 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. The government will pay half the cost, up to \$5 a metre.

An assessment of the property and the fence 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.

**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](http://blazeaid.com.au)

#### **Farm fencing destroyed by firefighting**

The Victorian Government will pay the full cost of your fences damaged by fire agencies.

#### **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 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 and verification is needed.