

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 24 February – Edition 22



The Victorian Government is holding an inquiry into the 2019-20 bushfires.

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 resources.
- Evacuation planning and preparedness.
- Preparedness for the 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.

The inquiry's local community sessions are:

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

Bairnsdale: Tue 17 March, 6-8pm

Mallacoota: Wed 18 March, 6-8pm

Orbost: Thu 19 March: 6-8pm

Cann River: Mon 30 March, 6-8pm

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

Lakes Entrance: Tue 31 March, 6-8pm

Buchan: Wed 1 April, 11am-1pm

Bruthen: Wed 1 April, 6-8pm

Omeo: Thu 2 April, 6-8pm

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

## Melbourne Storm lends a hand



Over the weekend players from the Melbourne Storm visited the region. Storm players and staff held a training session at Bairnsdale Football Netball Club before heading to Metung on Friday night for a community thank-you event.

The Storm were among about 70 people, including tradespeople and people from other sporting clubs, rolling up their sleeves and helping with clean up tasks around Sarsfield on Saturday. Most of the helpers had travelled from Melbourne to pitch in.

Tradies from across the country have been visiting East Gippsland on their own time over recent weekends to help fire-affected communities including Buchan, Clifton Creek and now Sarsfield.



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#### Genoa and district community barbecue

A community event will be held at 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 from 4pm to 5.30pm. A mobile children's and youth van will also be available with fun activities.

#### Combienbar and Bonang roads re-open

Combienbar Road and Bonang Road are open. Council has been working hard to restore roads and provide access across the municipality. It is important to obey changes in speed and note access is still not allowed on many minor roads.

#### 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 it as easy as possible for people who have lost their homes to have storage to help with the 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 permits. Council's land use planners can help confirm whether a planning permit will be needed.

#### Wandering stock reminder

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

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

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

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

If anyone has any questions about wandering stock, please contact the Community Laws team.

#### 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.

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.brvc.vic.gov.au](http://www.brvc.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.

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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.brv.vic.gov.au](http://www.brv.vic.gov.au)

## Cape Conran fire



*This photo taken from Marlo-Cape Conran Road, looking towards the coast shows the impact of the fires in the area. The area is still being affected by a peat fire burning nearby.*

A community meeting was held on Sunday evening to provide an update on the peat fires near Cape Conran. Attendees heard from the Orbost Incident Control Centre, Parks Victoria, Marlo Fire Brigade and the EPA. No timelines were provided on the reopening of facilities or access to East Cape Conran or Salmon Rocks. The ocean access boat ramp at West Cape is open. Council attended and the stream of the meeting is available on our Facebook page.

Peat fires can take a long time to put out because they have a vast fuel source. Peat is a spongy material formed by partially decomposed organic matter, mostly plants, in wetland areas. Dried peat burns readily.

Peat smoke is often more visible and thicker than bushfire smoke. It can release larger volumes of carbon monoxide than wood smoke.

An EPA air monitoring station has been set up in Marlo to monitor the pollutants in the air. You can view up to 48 hours of past data and the current air quality.

## 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

Please bring identification and bank account details. The upcoming schedule is:

### Today

Wairewa – community hall, 2pm to 3.30pm

### Tuesday

Combienbar – community hall, 11am to 1pm

### Thursday

Genoa – community hall, 4pm to 5.30pm

### Friday

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.

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#### 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 get updates on the progress of the association and formation of the committee.

The nomination form for the committee is being prepared and will be sent to all members in the coming days. It will also be available at the chemist, Council's customer service centre, both supermarkets and at the Genoa community meeting on Thursday 27 February.

#### What is an insurance embargo?

Insurers often put embargoes on insurance policies to stop people buying insurance when the risks are high, or a disaster is already occurring, only to cancel the cover after the risk passes.

These embargoes are normal practice and usually apply to new policies. They are typically in place when events such as fires, floods and cyclones threaten certain areas.

Most insurers will renew existing insurance policies.

Some insurers may still sell a policy but may set out a time limit where they won't accept a claim against the policy.

If you are finding it difficult to get insurance, call the Find an Insurer on 1300 884 934. You can also call the Insurance Council of Australia catastrophe hotline on 1800 634 721 if you want to discuss your concerns further.

#### Bushfire Case Support Program

After a bushfire, sometimes people are unsure of what to do next. The Bushfires Case Support

Program provides practical support for people who have been affected by the bushfires.

If you have provided your details through the call line, you will receive a call, and a visit if needed.

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

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 does not attract a fee.

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## Crowds turn out for Today Show visits



Channel Nine's Today Show was live from Lakes Entrance last Friday.

The broadcast included live crosses to weather presenter Tim Davies in Mallacoota. Tim spoke to Mallacoota residents and showed viewers some projects the Today Show had worked on alongside the Mallacoota Lions Club.

A huge crowd converged on the Lakes Entrance foreshore to see Allison Langdon, Karl Stefanovic and fellow presenters showcase local produce, the Gippsland Lakes and beyond and spread the message for Australia to support our recovery by visiting East Gippsland.

## 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.

## Financial assistance

### 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.

**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).

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- An additional \$10,000 payment to support people whose homes were destroyed.
- \$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.

**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 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

A range of assistance is available for primary producers, including beekeepers and the wine grape industry. Visit Agriculture Victoria's bushfire recovery page for details:

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery/current-incidents#support-available>

## Council hosts Consuls

Senator David Van hosted a roundtable and tour of East Gippsland on 20 and 21 February with Consul Generals, Consuls and staff representing China, Croatia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, North Macedonia, Russia, Slovak Republic, and the United States.

The roundtable was also attended by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade State Director Andrew Cumpston, Mayor Cr John White and Council's General Manager Business Excellence Peter Cannizzaro.

The visit included a lunch and roundtable at Council's Palmers Road office, an opportunity to explore Lakes Entrance, a cruise aboard the Thunderbird, and on Friday a tour of the Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Co-Op.

