

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 28 February – Edition 24



The Far East Gippsland fires (Snowy 16 Complex) were declared contained yesterday.

Lightning strikes started fires in the region on 21 November. Further lightning and spot fires then started fires in the Snowy District on 25 November. More than 660,000 hectares of land has been burnt.

The peat fires near Cape Conran and Marlo Plains will continue to put up smoke for some weeks.

Emergency services crews have been digging up and mixing hot peat with water to extinguish. Up to 1.6 million litres of water a day has been applied to the fireground so far. Sprinkler systems are also being set up to assist.

At the height of the fires in the Far East, more than 500 people were working in the area, including 400 firefighters, contractors and aircraft from fire and land management agencies, Victoria Police, Council, Australian Defence Force, emergency services, utilities and other agencies from across Australia, North America and Fiji.

Hazard tree assessment and clearing continues on roads and tracks within the fire area. Crews are also working on emergency stabilisation works in and around key visitor sites.

On the Princes Highway, timber removal and mulching continues.

About 4,000 kilometres of DELWP and private roads still need to be assessed and treated.



We've completed, in partnership with our contractor, the upgrade of a fire damaged bridge on Timbarra River, Timbarra. The pre-cast concrete deck is 26 metres long and 4.6m wide. These bridge works were brought forward in our works program by about six months.

Planning for waste influx

A significant amount of waste has been generated from the bushfires and includes hazardous material, metal and wire, burnt green waste, damaged vehicles and trailers, melted plastics etc.

As such, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to how this waste is collected, transported and disposed of.

Fire-damaged and destroyed house waste can only be removed by licensed asbestos removalists, such as Grocon or private contractors, and the disposal comes with a range of EPA requirements.

At this point in time the Bairnsdale Landfill is the only landfill accepting bushfire waste from destroyed and damaged dwellings and sheds. This waste is defined by EPA as 'prescribed waste' and is required to be wrapped and the landfill provided with 24 hours' notice prior to disposal. If you have a contractor intending to deposit such waste, please ensure that they call the Bairnsdale landfill on 5153 9500 prior to removing it from your property. Other landfills are being prepared to also accept this waste shortly.

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Council is preparing a range of other bushfire waste disposal options for properties and waste not collected under the Grocon contract. These details will be announced next week and include how and where to dispose of green waste and garden waste that may have been burnt and how you can dispose of other burnt items that are not considered 'prescribed waste' free of charge (clothes lines, trampolines etc).

Council has also negotiated with a private contractor to collect stockpiled fencing wire. Locations have been confirmed at Wairewa and Buchan however Council is waiting on the confirmation of more sites from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

All these arrangements are expected to be in place by next week and will be advertised.

Grocon clean-up update

Grocon is undertaking Bushfire Clean-Up Program works in East Gippsland and across Victoria on behalf of the Government. The Bushfire Clean-Up Program is free of charge for all property owners, regardless of whether they are insured, and is jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.

As of 26 February, in East Gippsland:

- 548 properties registered for clean-up
- 161 property inspections completed

Site inspections are an important step in clean-up – 161 inspections have been conducted so far across the shire.

Grocon offices will be opening at 15 Hosie Street, Bairnsdale, and 57A Maurice Avenue, Mallacoota, and community meetings have been held in Omeo, Cobungra, Buchan, Bonang, Cann River, Genoa and Mallacoota.

Property owners:

Property owners are advised to follow the below steps to participate in the program:

- 1) Register with Bushfire Recovery Victoria by calling 1800 560 760 or online at vic.gov.au/bushfire-clean-up-program
- 2) Receive confirmation of your registration from Grocon via telephone or email.
- 3) Grocon will undertake an inspection of your property where you'll complete a consent form.
- 4) Grocon will then be in touch with a timeline for anticipated works.

Grocon is currently working with Bushfire Recovery Victoria, Council, Worksafe, EPA Victoria and local sub-contractors to ensure works can be safely undertaken and bushfire waste will be responsibly disposed of.

If you have registered, your property's clean-up is being planned and you will be contacted when an update is available.

If you wish to confirm your registration, or have queries about the clean-up program, you're welcome to call Grocon on 03 9631 8833 or via email at victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com

Sub-contractors:

A large workforce is required for the bushfire clean-up and Grocon is engaging local subcontractors with local knowledge to deliver the clean-up.

As the clean-up program is jointly funded by Commonwealth and State governments, there are a range of qualifications and compliance requirements to ensure the safety of contractors, property owners and the environment. Grocon is providing advice and support to non-compliant subcontractors to up-skill local work crews for the program.

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Grocon will contact contractors who've registered their interest as they mobilise in each locality. If you wish to confirm your registration, you can follow-up with Grocon.

Contractors are encouraged to register their interest by visiting grocon.com/bushfire-recovery-2020, emailing victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au or calling 03 9631 8833.

Secondary assessments

A secondary assessment is an in-depth assessment of how a property has been impacted by bushfire.

The assessment, led by Council, includes checking the safety of partially or completely damaged buildings and issuing building orders, the condition of septic tank systems, water tanks, and identifying hazards such as asbestos.

This work will also potentially assist property owners' insurance claims and clean-up.

Secondary assessments undertaken by teams of environmental health officers, building surveyors, crisis care staff and OHS specialists have been underway for six weeks.

Councils and other agencies from around Victoria have been brought in to assist us get this work done.

Teams visiting properties in fire affected areas will liaise with homeowners, as best they can, to enter properties. All team members wear ID badges.

Over the next few weeks, teams will be working in the areas surrounding Cann River, Orbost, Bemm River, Cabbage Tree Creek, Nowa Nowa, Bruthen and Fairhope.



Mayor Cr John White and CEO Anthony Basford with Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack (left) in Canberra yesterday morning. East Gippsland Shire Council was in Canberra meeting with a range of Ministers as part of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation delegation. Regional and rural issues and bushfire recovery were all on the agenda.

Newsletter – change to schedule

The publication schedule for this newsletter is changing slightly.

From next week (3 March), the newsletter will be published on Tuesday and Friday (not Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

To subscribe, please email media@egipps.vic.gov.au

Our website is also a handy source of information, with fact sheets, support services and links. There's also an archive of all newsletters, community meeting videos, bushfire update videos and a webpage for the Mallacoota and Districts Recovery Association.

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Road impact assessment help

Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Regional Roads Victoria for RRV to complete rapid impact assessments on Council-managed, fire-affected roads, once they have been returned to Council (from the Incident Controller) following the fires.

Impact assessments document tree debris to be removed from roadside, damage to the road surface, damage to any road assets such as culverts, damaged roadside and damaged road furniture. They do not include assessment of roadside trees, but can refer a concern to Council's bushfire recovery arborist.

Once assessments are completed, Council's assessing authority will review the assessments and must approve the repairs prior to them being carried out.

All recovery works will be programmed in accordance with Council's Procurement Policy when engaging contractors.

General Manager Assets and Environment Fiona Weigall said Council collaborating with Regional Roads Victoria for local road network recovery would greatly assist with the reestablishment of the road network as soon as possible.

"The scale of the job at hand is significant. Council has been proactive since the impact of the bushfires started to become known in developing a program of works to get the local road network back on line, safely, as soon as possible," Ms Weigall said.

"The MoU between Council and RRV outlines a commitment coordinate work and support the recovery of the community through a substantial road recovery effort.

"Some of the resource support to Council in the collection of evidence and development of detailed

estimates to demonstrate post-disaster damage impacts in accordance with the Australian Government's Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

"We ask all roads users to remain patient and adhere to road closed or permit access only roads in the interest of public and contractor safety."

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.

Stay in touch with us

Phone: 03 5153 9500

Website: eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

Facebook: @EastGippyShire

Twitter: @egsc

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Victorian Government bushfire inquiry

The inquiry's local community sessions are:

Bonang: Tuesday 10 March, 2-4pm

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

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, and advertised in state and local media.

Wandering stock reminder

As a result of damaged fences, Council has 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.

Bushfire Recovery Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open Monday-Friday 8.30am to 5pm, Saturday 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.

Please note: The recovery centre will be closed on the Monday 9 March public holiday.

Mobile Recovery Service

The upcoming schedule is:

Today

Benambra – community hall, 11am to 1pm

The mobile is taking a break next week. We will advise of a new schedule for the following week.

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.

For more information see the 'help your community' page at www.brv.vic.gov.au

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Tonia Todman workshops

Australian author and radio and television personality, Tonia Todman will host bushfire workshops Bairnsdale, Tumbarumba and Bega.

Seminar topics:

- Pets and bushfires –CFA/RFS representative
- How to prepare your property – CFA/RFS representative
- Bushfire recovery and rebuilding – Nigel Bell, EcoDesign Architects
- Tonia Todman - her story about how she coped when a fire engulfed her home and bed and breakfast business
- Managing your mental health during and after a bushfire – psychologist experienced in community recovery
- Why is biophilic design important in designing a new home – David Rowlinson, Make It Wood - Planet Ark

The Bairnsdale workshops will be held on Tuesday 10 March, 9.30am to 12.30pm, at the Bairnsdale RSL.

The Tumbarumba workshop will be on 11 March and Bega 12 March.

Handy resources available

To help people and businesses in their recovery, there has been a lot of information shared amongst our community.

It can be overwhelming to keep track of it all.

Our Community is hoping to make it easier for everyone to be aware of the grants on offer for bushfire relief.

Their website lists both national and state-based grant programs.

The page has useful information for individuals, small businesses, firefighters, farmers and wildlife carers. Go to:

www.fundingcentre.com.au/bushfire-relief-grants

Likewise, the Committee for Gippsland has a Bushfire Recovery resource on its website.

The various links provide a snapshot of the important campaigns, resources and initiatives in place to help businesses get back on their feet.

Find information on support, business, tourism and more. Go to:

www.committeeforgippsland.com.au/bushfire-recovery-for-gippsland-businesses/

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.

Replacement passports

If your passport was lost or damaged in the bushfire, you may be eligible for a free replacement. No application form is required, only basic information to confirm passport holders' identity and that they were in an affected area.

Call the Australian Passport Information Service on 131 232.

Council can provide you with a letter to use as proof that your home was destroyed or damaged.

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 have a fee.

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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).

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.

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).

- A \$20,000 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.

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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).

Concessional loans: of up to \$500,000 are also available to support small business, primary producers and non-profit organisations who have suffered significant damage to assets or significant loss of income as a direct result of the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply. To apply, visit ruralfinance.com.au or go to brv.vic.gov.au for a direct link to the application page. Applications must be submitted by 31 July.

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

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

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>

Grants of up to \$75,000 per farmer are available to assist with activities needed to rebuild primary production enterprises. Grants can 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 or call 1800 260 425.

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.

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.

Farmers in this situation can choose to upgrade fences with concrete posts to better withstand fires 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.

Claims

To claim for fencing destroyed by firefighting, and/or for fencing that adjoins national or state parks or state forests call **136 186**.