

Bushfires 2019-20

Community Newsletter

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East Gippsland relief agencies and communities were overwhelmed with generous offers of support and donations during and after the bushfires.

An online charity is now managing all offers of donated goods, services and funds. This includes corporate offers of assistance.

GIVIT matches the offers with people who need assistance – ensuring those most in need get exactly what they need, where and when they need it most.

GIVIT has a virtual warehouse and encourages donors to pledge their donations. This removes the need for frontline services to receive, sort, and store items. It also means unwanted items won't create a disposal headache in the future.

The way it works is:

Charities and organisations registered with GIVIT can search through the list of donated items and accept donations needed by the people they are supporting.

Donors then get an email with the organisation's contact details and they can connect with each other to organise delivery or pick up of the donation.

GIVIT also accepts cash donations. 100% of funds received are used to purchase essential items as requested by local charities and services. GIVIT is committed to purchasing locally wherever possible to aid economic recovery of affected communities.

For more information, go to givit.org.au

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 online, safely, as soon as possible," Ms Weigall said.

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

"Some of the resource support includes the collection of evidence and development of detailed estimates to demonstrate post-disaster damage."

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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 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'. It needs to be wrapped and the landfill needs 24 hours' advance notice before taking the items to the landfill. If you have a contractor intending to deposit such waste, please ensure that they call Bairnsdale Landfill on 5152 6535 before removing it from your property. Other landfills are being prepared to accept this waste shortly.

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 prescribed waste free (clothes lines, trampolines etc).

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

All these arrangements will be advertised.

Update on Grocon clean-up

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

Follow these 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 inspect your property where you'll complete a consent form.
- 4) Grocon will be in touch with a timeline for anticipated works.

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

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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, contact Grocon on 03 9631 8833 or via 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 crews.

Grocon will contact contractors who've registered as they mobilise in each locality. If you wish to confirm your registration, 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.

Construction industry information session

The Master Builders Association is holding a bushfire rebuilding information session on Thursday 5 March at Bairnsdale RSL.

The session is for all construction industry professionals. Doors open 4pm; information session from 4.30 to 6pm.

Stay in touch with us

Ph: 03 5153 9500. *Facebook:* @EastGippyShire

Website: eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

Push for roads of strategic importance

The extended road closures of key transport routes following the bushfires caused issues for communities and response and recovery agencies.

At its February 4 meeting, Council agreed to call on the federal government to have the region's main highways classified as Roads of Strategic Importance.

Roads of Strategic Importance are noted as roads that connect regional businesses to local and international markets, and better connect communities.

The Australian Government provides funding to the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative for works such as sealing, flood immunity, strengthening and widening, road realignments and bridge upgrades.

Bega Valley Shire Council is also writing to Minister McCormack seeking for the Princes Highway be classified as a Road of Strategic Importance as it is an important cross border link for southern NSW and far eastern Victoria communities and businesses.

Council also resolved that Mayor White write to Minister McCormack in support of Bega Valley Shire Council's request.

The Mayor will also write to the Gippsland Local Government Network and the Canberra Region Joint Organisation seeking their support. Victorian and NSW Cross Border Commissioners will be asked to support the move in relation to Princes and Snowy Monaro highways.

The topic was on the agenda at last week's Canberra Region Joint Organisation meeting with various Ministers.

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Newsletter – change to schedule

This newsletter is now being published twice a week on Tuesday and Friday. It was previously published on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

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

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

For details on venues, etc and other opportunities to have input, go to www.igem.vic.gov.au

Bushfire Recovery Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Monday-Friday 8.30am to 5pm, Saturday 8.30am to 1pm. Phone: 03 5153 9500 – please dial '1' for bushfire recovery assistance.

A place for all your bushfire-related enquiries. Please bring identification and bank details for assistance payments, if applicable.

Note: The recovery centre is closed on public holidays.

The mobile service is taking a break this week. We will advise of a new schedule soon.



Ready for the long weekend

Businesses and communities are ready for visitors this Labour Day long weekend.

Following its re-opening in late February, the number of visitors at Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park (above) has been steadily growing.

There is plenty on offer this long weekend, in our coastal and country towns and the High Country. Check out what's on near you at www.eastvicevents.com.au/

Tonia Todman workshops

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

Seminar topics include pets and bushfires, preparing your property, recovery and rebuilding, managing your mental health, and biophilic design important.

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

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Minister for Fishing and Boating Jaala Pulford MP and Talking Fishing's David Kramer at the launch of the Golden Tag Competition, which aims to get visitors to return to East Gippsland.

Golden Tag fishing competition begins

Minister for Fishing and Boating Jaala Pulford MP launched the Golden Tag Competition at Lakes Entrance on Friday. The competition began on Sunday 1 March and a couple lucky anglers have already caught a prized fish.

The first 10 fishers to catch and report a tagged fish with VFA WINNER printed on the tag will win \$10,000. Subsequent tag captures beyond the first 10 will win \$2,000.

Fish have been tagged throughout East Gippsland and North East Victoria to boost tourism in bushfire affected areas. Species to look out for include black bream, dusky flathead, estuary perch, brown and rainbow trout, Murray cod, tailor and King George whiting to name a few.

To find out where to head with your rods and skills, go to www.vfa.vic.gov.au/goldentag

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.

Financial assistance

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.

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- \$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 tax free funding.

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