

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 15 January – Edition 5



## Mobile Recovery Service

### Open 10am to 4pm

Representatives from Council and other organisations are travelling to remote fire-affected communities to deliver emergency relief and recovery information from Council and various other agencies.

Launched on Monday, this week the Mobile Recovery Services van has already visited Buchan and Tambo Crossing. This week's remaining visits are:

Ensay, Wednesday at Ensay Hall  
Bruthen, Thursday at Bruthen Mechanics Hall  
Cobungra, Friday at Cobungra Fire Station

### *Bushfire Recovery Centre*

### **24 Service Street Bairnsdale. Open daily from 9am to 5pm**

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.

**At either centre, please bring some identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments and donation distribution (if applicable).**

## Emergency information

Fire warnings: Vic Emergency app or website, [www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/)

Road closures: Vic Traffic app or website, <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

## What we know

### Agricultural fencing

Council is assessing the extent of agricultural fencing damage/loss.

Landholders are asked to stockpile their fencing waste. Details of a broadscale clean-up will be announced when the Victorian Government enacts a municipality recovery plan. Damaged fencing materials will be collected as part of that program. Please do not use Council's waste facilities, including rubbish trailers and skip bins, to dispose of this material.

Where fire has damaged or destroyed fences between private land and national/state parks or state forests, the Victorian Government will meet 50 per cent of the cost of materials.

For further details, please see Repair of Fences Damaged by Bushfire and Fire Control Line Rehabilitation Policy – Forest Fire Management: [https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0/016/21283/Repair-of-fences-damaged-by-bushfire-and-fire-control-line-rehabilitation-policy-2015.pdf](https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0/016/21283/Repair-of-fences-damaged-by-bushfire-and-fire-control-line-rehabilitation-policy-2015.pdf)

### Donations to GERF

If you or someone you know is considering making a donation to the bushfire emergency, to help those most in need, please consider the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

In 14 days, GERF has distributed more than \$1.3 million to fire affected Gippslanders.

100% of donations to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund go to Gippslanders.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Find out how to donate here: [www.gerf.org.au](http://www.gerf.org.au)

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 15 January – Edition 5



*A drop of fuel into one of our north-eastern communities.*

#### **Supplies to isolated communities**

Council continues to service many isolated communities by supplying essential supplies (food, water, hygiene as a priority). This work is in conjunction with needs within communities, the Australian Defence Force and Incident Control Centres.

Some communities now have road access (full or via permit) and we encourage residents and businesses in those communities to engage their usual suppliers for goods and services.

#### **Trusted sources of information**

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 water assistance**

Anyone seeking emergency water assistance from the bushfire affected areas should contact South East Water on 131 851.

South East Water will be a 'one-stop-shop' as the initial contact point for affected residents who need emergency relief water, as well as coordinating the delivery of water across affected areas.

Eligible permanent residents in the declared bushfire affected areas of East Gippsland and some parts of the Wellington Shire will be provided a tank water flush and top-up of 5,000 litres.

For information on ash and tank water contamination see

<https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about-epa/what-we-do/emergency-information-and-support#factsheets>

#### **Community bores**

Southern Rural Water is working with Council and others who manage community bores in the East Gippsland region to check whether they are still operational and accessible.

We will provide updates when more information is known.

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve now has a connection point for people to fill up a water 'cube' for transport for emergency livestock relief. Please limit use to 1,000 litres each so resources are not depleted.

#### **Bushfire affected trees**

Bushfire affected trees are extremely dangerous and can be fatal. Safety assessments are being undertaken by other agencies and the Australian Defence Force.

As a result of this hazard tree assessment, Council

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 15 January – Edition 5



is not able to advise on when roads will be re-opened.

When road responsibility returns to normal, the highways and main arterial roads are looked after by Regional Roads Victoria, while Council looks after local roads and those in towns.



*Essential supplies loaded and ready to be flown out to one of our isolated Far East communities.*

## What you can do

### Your health

All fact sheets from the Department of Health and Human Services are available on the Better Health Channel,

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/bushfire-emergency-information>

It has information on:

- Before a bushfire
- During a bushfire
- Clean up after a bushfire
- Financial assistance
- Mental health and recovery

Please check in at the Recovery Centre to find out about the services available to help you and your family.

Australian Psychological Society Referral Service:  
Call 1800 333 497

### Practical health tips

#### Air quality/smoke and masks

- Minimise time spent in smoky conditions.
- When air quality is at hazardous levels, consider relocating to an area not affected or stay indoors.
- Keep activity levels as low as possible. Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Masks are available for those in the fire affected areas for those who are more sensitive to smoke. Please follow the guidelines for using face masks.
- Sensitive groups include those with a heart or lung condition (including asthma), are pregnant, over 65 and children up to 14 years.

#### Water tanks – drinking water source

- If time permits before leaving/evacuating your property, disconnect the downpipes to prevent potential contamination from the catchment area.
- Before reconnecting, clean the catchment area or wait for good flush of rain.

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 15 January – Edition 5



- Smoke taint alone is unlikely to be a health concern.
- If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink, use for food preparation, brushing teeth or give to animals (pets or livestock).
- Fire affected water in your tank can still be used for irrigation, toilet flushing and firefighting purposes. Water testing is not necessary.
- Boiling water doesn't remove fire retardants or other chemicals from water.
- Water should never be drawn from a creek or river for drinking purposes.

#### **Food safety – power outage**

- If in doubt throw it out.

#### **Septic tanks**

- Heat and fire will affect the integrity of the septic system, especially irrigation lines.
- Tanks should be assessed for damage when returning to your property.

#### **Hazardous material**

- Personal protective equipment should be worn if cleaning fire damaged structures containing hazardous materials – asbestos, copper chromium arsenic timber.
- 'Return to home kits' will be available and include overalls, mask, gloves etc.

#### **General hygiene**

- Remember to keep up personal hygiene practices to prevent gastro illness (vomiting and diarrhoea).
- Regularly wash hands with soap and warm water or use hand gels.

#### **Financial assistance**

##### ***DHHS Personal Hardship Assistance Program***

Call the Personal Hardship Assistance Program information line on **1800 961 054** to discuss eligibility and where to go for assessment. The information line is open 9am to 5pm daily. This hotline will support affected Victorians by providing information on Personal Hardship Assistance Program, including eligibility criteria and guidance as to where individuals and families can go for assessment.

##### ***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, or the interior has sustained major damage.

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>

##### ***Australian Government Disaster Recovery Allowance***

Support for people who can show they have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires.

If you're in East Gippsland, you have until 30 June 2020 to make a claim.

For more information, visit the Department of Human Services website or contact the Australian Government Information Hotline on 180 22 66.

[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)

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 15 January – Edition 5



## What we are doing

### Council services

#### Rates

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

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

#### *Direct debit arrangements*

If you are on the 10 direct debit instalment payment option, the latest instalment was deducted from bank accounts on Wednesday 15 January.

If you need to cancel future instalments, please call us on 03 5153 9500 or send an email to [feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au).

#### Valuations

All fire-impacted properties will be re-valued so the rates 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.

When this process is complete, affected ratepayers will be sent updated rates and valuation notices. All affected ratepayers' accounts will be included in this process, including people who have already paid.

#### Waste

**No fire damaged waste will be accepted. We will let you know of arrangements for this waste as soon as possible.**

General household waste is free to drop off if you are in a bushfire affected area. These are items that would generally go in your red lid general waste bin.

Food waste is free to drop off for people affected by power outages. To access this free service, please show staff at the transfer stations your paperwork



*Council staff delivered and connected generators to standpipe bore pumps in Wulgulmerang and Gelantipy yesterday following a request from the bush nurse.*

from an Emergency Relief Centre or your driver's licence with your residential address if you did not access a relief centre.

Large items will still be charged, for example mattresses, ewaste, furniture and tyres.

*The following sites will be charging as normal:* Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Lindenow, Marlo and Metung.

For daily opening hours see Council's website.

**Sites are closed until further notice:** Wairewa, Genoa, Bendoc, Bonang

# Bushfires 2019-20

## Community Newsletter

### 15 January – Edition 5



## 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 is 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](mailto:feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au)), phone or using the Snap Send Solve app. It's free and you can include photos.

### Business and economic recovery

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, together with Council, is working to identify impacted businesses and the supply chains.

They have created a register to store information that will help them to understand the economic impacts of the fires as well as opportunities to support business and community to recover.

Regional Development Victoria will coordinate the register, through the Bushfire Recovery Centre in Bairnsdale.

### Rapid Impacts Business Survey

Council's Economic Development and Tourism Unit yesterday issued a 'Rapid Impacts Business Survey' to all business and tourism operators. This survey takes just a few minutes to complete

and will provide comprehensive data of immediate business impacts and needs to help inform key decision making and recovery program development at State and Commonwealth Government level.

You can access the survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GJQFK3C>

### Tourism recovery strategy

Destination Gippsland is collaborating with Tourism Australia, Visit Victoria, East Gippsland Marketing and Council to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to immediate and long-term recovery.

Timing is critical and getting the balance right to support those areas 'open' but indirectly affected by the fires is challenging.

Connect with your local business and tourism associations, who are working with Council on behalf of the business community as well as share updates on recovery planning.

Information on your local business and tourism association/ chamber of commerce can be found here: <https://bteq.com.au/>

### Primary Producer Recovery Package

\$75,000 cash grants were announced by the Commonwealth yesterday for farming, forestry and fishing businesses.

More information:

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/initial-100-million-bushfire-emergency-support-primary-producers>

### Prime Minister's round table discussions

A small business round table forum with representatives from across Australia's fire impacted areas was held in Canberra yesterday. Council was instrumental in nominating several key industry stakeholders who attended and provide direct input into shaping the

# Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 15 January – Edition 5



corresponding business recovery package. A tourism industry round table forum is scheduled for Friday. Locals representing local industry will provide direct input.

## **It's my shout**

This new initiative launched last week for East Gippsland and enables businesses to register 'product' for sale. These items are purchased online with proceeds going direct to local businesses. The business then donates the "purchased goods" locally to the community. More information: <https://www.itsmyshout.com.au/>

## **Destination Gippsland**

For tourism operators seeking business resources regarding planning, preparing, responding and recovery from an incident visit <https://www.visitgippsland.com.au/destination-gippsland/industry-development/crisis-preparedness>

Destination Gippsland is conducting research on the economic impact of the fires to see how widespread the effect is. Email <mailto:janinehayes@destinationgippsland.com>.

## **Small Business Mentoring**

Business mentors experienced in recovery management can bring an outside and fresh perspective to the issues and aid in the decision process. For more information contact Council's Economic Development Unit: 03 5153 9500 or [economic.development@egipps.gov.au](mailto:economic.development@egipps.gov.au)

## **Australian Taxation Office**

The ATO will automatically grant deferrals for lodgements and payments due if your postcode is listed in the Identified postcode action list:

[www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/?anchor=Victoria#Victoria](http://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/?anchor=Victoria#Victoria)

## **Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

For information about the bushfire support package contact the Victorian Chamber on 03 8662 5333 or [disaster@victorianchamber.com.au](mailto:disaster@victorianchamber.com.au)

## **Australian Banking Association:**

If you are dealing with the impact of the bushfires, there are practical ways your bank can help, Australian banks have hardship teams ready to assist you with your financial arrangements, depending on your circumstances.

See more information at [www.ausbanking.org.au/policy/customers/financial-hardship](http://www.ausbanking.org.au/policy/customers/financial-hardship)

## **Stay in touch with us**

We are producing this newsletter on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To subscribe, email [media@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:media@egipps.vic.gov.au)

Keep up to date with our services and activities:

*Phone:* 03 5153 9500

*Website:* [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au)

*Facebook:* @EastGippyShire

*Twitter:* @egsc