

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 22 January – Edition 8



Bushfire Recovery Vic appointment

East Gippsland resident Ewan Waller has been named Bushfire Recovery Victoria's Regional Manager – East Gippsland.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria will be responsible for working closely with impacted communities - including local Community Recovery Committees - in developing and delivering recovery projects.

Mr Waller is a former Victorian Government Chief Fire Officer. He retired as the state's chief fire officer in 2012.

For more information on Bushfire Recovery Victoria, visit

www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria

What we know

Register for clean-up

Homes destroyed by bushfires will be cleaned up under a state and federal program that prioritises local contractors.

The clean-up applies to insured and uninsured residents and there will be no cost to property owners.

The \$75 million Victorian bushfire clean-up program will be led by Grocon, appointed by the Victorian Government. Local contractors are to be prioritised to demolish, remove and safely dispose of building materials either destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

We encourage all contractors and other interested parties who wish to collaborate with Grocon to register their details at victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au, by phoning 03 9631 8833.

Property owners are encouraged to register for the 2020 Clean-Up program at <http://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria> or by phoning [1800 560 760](tel:1800560760)

Business survey reveals impact

Almost 300 East Gippsland businesses have given Council a comprehensive initial snapshot into the immediate and predicted longer term economic impacts of the bushfires through the Rapid Impact Business Survey.

The survey results indicated that more than 40 percent of the respondents were open and trying to operate as normal. Just below 40 per cent were operating at a reduced level and 18 per cent were closed because of the fires.

The results indicate businesses have lost 29 per cent (average) of their annual income since the fires started, and 71 per cent of their January trade.

Based on the 295 survey respondents, more than \$17 million has already been lost from the local economy.

The current challenges identified in the survey included retention of staff, especially casual and part-time staff; being unable to get supplies in, or export products out due to road closures; local people not having capacity to spend; and few tourists around.

The survey identified financial assistance through a range of mechanisms as the greatest requirement, though respondents said the focus has to be on both short term and longer-term planning and business support.

The results from this initial survey are designed to help inform key decision making and recovery programs.

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Road status update

Roads, following recent rains, and forecast winds over coming days means road access status can change. It only takes one fallen tree to close a road or hit a vehicle.

Great Alpine Road between Bruthen and Ensay is open to residents and permit holders. Speed restrictions are in place.

Bonang and Monaro highways remain closed with significant impact to roads requiring assessment.

Princes Highway between Orbost and Cann River is open for residents and permit holders only between 8am and 8pm.

Returning to Mallacoota: The road between Cann River and Genoa has been further impacted by storms overnight Monday/Tuesday. Further works, including clearing trees, are required to allow residents to safely use this part of the Princes Highway.

Residents returning from NSW can travel to Genoa, Gipsy Point and Mallacoota.

The road from Mallacoota to Genoa is accessible between 8am - 8pm to residents and permit holders only.

The **Bairnsdale Dargo Road** at the Beverleys Road intersection through to Dargo will be closed for the Australia Day long weekend - 7am Thursday 23 January to 7am Tuesday 28 January.

Road status update as of Tuesday 21 January afternoon. More at VicTraffic or DELWP Gippsland.

Genoa truss bridge pier demolition

The bushfires claimed a significant piece of infrastructure – the Genoa truss bridge (pictured right). The deck was destroyed, and the main piers also suffered significant cracking at the base. The cracking has increased, and piers have started to lean considerably.

This is significant and immediate safety hazard, as the riverbed is freely accessed by members of the public.

With approval of the Orbost Incident Control Centre a contractor has been engaged by Council to



undertake a controlled demolition of the two failed piers into the riverbed.

We appreciate there will be many people in the community who have a connection with the historic bridge and the purpose it serves in the community, however this action is necessary for public safety.

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Bushfire Recovery Centre

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

A one-stop-shop for bushfire-related enquiries. Agencies include Council, Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Finance, Ag Victoria and others.

Please bring identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments and donation distribution (if applicable).

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.

- Wednesday 22 January: Buchan
- Friday 24 January: Clifton Creek Hall
- Saturday 25 January: Nowa Nowa

Please bring identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments and donation distribution (if applicable).

Register for return

A registration service has been set up for people from the Mallacoota, Genoa and Gipsy Point communities who wish to return to their homes.

To register from Victoria, call the Police Assistance Line on 131 444 or from interstate call 03 8667 5444.

Local roads

Council's Works Department has begun felling dangerous trees on fire-affected council roads with the help of Australian Defence Force and arborists.

Roads have been prioritised to get frequently used roads open as soon as possible. The work is in

addition to those occurring on non-Council roads such as the Great Alpine Road and Princes Highway.

Agricultural fencing

Landholders are asked to stockpile their fencing waste. Damaged fencing materials will be collected as part of the broadscale clean-up.

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

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, please consider the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

In 14 days, GERF has raised \$3.879 million and distributed more than \$2.057 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

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.

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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.

Emergency water assistance

Anyone seeking emergency water assistance from the bushfire affected areas should 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. 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 East Gippsland to check whether they are still operational and accessible.

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve 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.

For more information visit www.srw.com.au/east-gippsland-fires/ or phone 03 5139 3100

Electricity

AusNet Services is responsible for local electricity networks. You can contact them if you are trying to reconnect, understand outage lengths and to keep up to date with changing issues around electricity:

- Bushfire Support line: 1300 561 171
- Website with bushfire specific information: www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support

- Outage Tracker featuring estimated times of restoration and reasons for delays in areas of bushfire: www.outagetracker.com.au

Hearing Australia

Hearing Australia buses will be available in Bairnsdale to assist with hearing aid batteries, repair items, loan aids and on the spot repairs. The service is open to everyone.

The Hub, Dalmahoy St Bairnsdale

Wednesday 22 January, 9am to 5pm

Kmart Bairnsdale

Thursday 23 January, 8.30am to 3pm

What you can do

Emergency information

Fire warnings: Vic Emergency app or website, www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/

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

Bushfire Case Support Program

There are so many things to be done after a bushfire – from cleaning up to applying for support to making a plan for the future. It's sometimes hard to know what to do first.

Bushfires Case Support Program can provide you with practical support following the bushfires.

This is a free service for people in East Gippsland who have been impacted by the fires.

Case support coordinators can help you with:

- Discussing your needs and the next steps you could take
- Information and support to access recovery and mental health services

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- Completing paperwork
- Community information
- Financial counselling and assistance with insurance
- Advice for business owners
- 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

Email: bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au

Red Cross assistance

Australian Red Cross is reuniting people who have registered through Register.Find.Reunite. It also helps deliver food, water and other essential items to vulnerable communities.

Through its Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund, Red Cross can provide emergency grants of \$10,000 for people whose primary place of residence has been destroyed or is uninhabitable as a result of bushfires.

Red Cross will also provide a new bereavement payment of \$20,000 to meet the immediate needs of the families of the those who have tragically lost their lives.

Emergency Services Resources:
www.redcross.org.au/emergency-resources#recover-from-disasters

Customer Care Team: 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276)

Register.Find.Reunite: 1800 727 077 or
<https://register.redcross.org.au/>

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>

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 and try to stay indoors.
- Keep activity levels as low as possible. Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Masks are available from community health organisations 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

- Disconnect downpipes to prevent potential contamination from the catchment area.
- Before reconnecting, clean the catchment area or wait for good flush of rain.
- 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).

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- Fire affected water in your tank can still be used for irrigation, toilet flushing and firefighting purposes.
- 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.

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

- If you're considering returning to fire damaged property personal protective equipment should be worn as there are potentially hazardous materials including asbestos.

General hygiene

- Remember to keep up personal hygiene practices such as regularly washing your hands with soap and warm water.

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.

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.

The fastest way to claim is over the phone. Call 180 22 66, or go to this website:

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.

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

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Secondary assessments have started in some communities.

A secondary assessment is an in-depth assessment of how a property has been impacted and includes assessing the safety of sites and/or partly damaged buildings, if septic tank systems have been compromised, emergency orders, and identifying hazards such as asbestos. This work will also potentially assist property owners' insurance claims.

We will liaise with homeowners wherever possible, and all staff will be required to enter private property. They will carry identification indicating their need to be on site. There may be instances where notices are attached to fence/structures (where possible), notifying there are hazards present on site.

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Council is being assisted by specialised officers from other shires across Victoria, so the faces you see may not be East Gippsland staff you are familiar with.

House plans of destroyed properties

Residents who have had their home damaged or destroyed by bushfire will be able to access copies of their house plans free of charge. Where possible, please provide photos of the damage when making the application.

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.

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.

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 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.

Normal daily opening hours apply to most sites, see eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/waste for details.

The **Bendoc and Bonang** transfer stations are now open for their usual business hours.

Mallacoota Transfer Station will be opened from 8am to 5pm 20-26 January. After this date the Mallacoota Transfer Station will be open on its normal opening hours, 8am to 12pm.

Kerbside collections have recommenced in both Mallacoota and Cann River.

Stay in touch with us

We are producing this newsletter on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To subscribe, email media@egipps.vic.gov.au

Phone: 03 5153 9500

Website: eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

Facebook @EastGippyShire

Twitter: @egsc

Support available for small businesses

The Federal Government will provide grant funding, concessional loans, tax relief, a dedicated and single contact point to access support, and financial counselling to small businesses impacted by bushfires.

Support will be available to eligible small businesses impacted by the bushfires (direct fire damage) or indirectly economically.

Immediate support announced includes:

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- Top-up grants of up to \$50,000 (tax free) to eligible small business and non-profit organisations that have sustained damage as a result of the fires under Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.
- Concessional loans of up to \$500,000 offered to business that have suffered significant asset loss or significant loss of revenue for the purposes of restoring or replacing damaged assets and for working capital. This would include a repayment holiday of up to two years, with no interest accruing during this period.
- The establishment of the Small Business Bushfire Financial Support Line and funding 10 additional financial counsellors.
- Tax relief to alleviate cash flow pressures and assist these businesses with their recovery efforts.

The Federal Government will also work with local and state governments, business groups and other community organisations to develop Local Economic Recovery Plans.

While the specialist Support Line is being established, businesses can visit www.business.gov.au or call 13 28 46.

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.

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://bteg.com.au/>

Primary Producer Recovery Package

Cash grants of up to \$75,000 are available for farming, forestry and fishing businesses. This fund is to allow producers to replace sheds, fences and farming equipment damaged by the fires.

More information:

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

Destination Gippsland

For tourism operators seeking business resources regarding planning, preparing, responding and recovery from an incident visit

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 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

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