

# East Gippsland Fires 2019-20 Recovery Plan



# Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgement of country East Gippsland Shire Council acknowledges the Gunaikurnai, Monero and the Bidawel people as the Traditional Custodians of the land that encompasses East Gippsland Shire.

We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in East Gippsland, their Elders past and present.

## Version Control

Security classification	Official
Authority	East Gippsland Shire Council
Author	Bushfire Recovery Committee
Document status	Authorised
Version	1

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## Accessibility:

This document is available for downloading at  
<https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au>

## Publication details:

Authorised and published by East Gippsland Shire Council  
PO Box 1618, Bairnsdale Vic 3875

# Messages

## Minister for Police and Emergency Services

### Hon. Lisa Neville MP



The Eastern Victorian Fires 2019–20 had a devastating impact on the East Gippsland community and the environment. I am committed to ensuring that the right support is provided to the community to help with recovery and rebuilding.

Homes were lost, farms destroyed, businesses affected, and the natural environment ravaged. Tragically, five lives were lost in East Gippsland, and I join all Victorians in extending my sympathies to their families, friends, and work mates.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and efforts of emergency workers and volunteers, many from East Gippsland, who over many days and nights fought to bring the fires under control, supporting residents to protect their lives and livelihoods. I also extend my thanks to the many volunteers who stepped up to provide support in response to the fires and who continue to give their support today. We have seen the best of humanity in action.

In the months since the fires, Victorians have demonstrated extraordinary strength and community spirit as they start to rebuild their lives.

The Victorian Government is dedicated to standing shoulder to shoulder with communities to ensure people can access the immediate, medium, and long-term support that will help them to recover and rebuild.

Our approach to recovery is guided by the principle that a locally-led and locally-driven recovery will ensure the best outcome. East Gippsland, and other affected communities should be confident they will be not only empowered to lead recovery efforts but also well supported over the long haul.

The road to recovery is long and while much has been done since the fires were contained there is still a long way to go. The Victorian Government has invested more than \$347 million towards bushfire

recovery and established Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) as a permanent agency to support the long-term recovery journey. BRV is working closely with the Commonwealth Government and East Gippsland Council to streamline assistance and support individuals, businesses, and communities to get back on their feet.

The 2019-20 Victorian fire season was unprecedented and caused devastation and loss in communities across East Gippsland and North East Victoria. These communities have since been subject to the compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Victorian Government will continue to stand with these communities every step of their recovery.

Together we will work to ensure these communities emerge stronger, better, and more resilient in the future.

**Hon. Lisa Neville MP**  
**Minister for Police and Emergency Services**

# Messages

## Mayor, East Gippsland Shire Council Cr John White



The 2019/20 East Gippsland bushfire season was one of the most significant events our region has faced. All residents and visitors were directly or indirectly impacted in some form, particularly those who lost their homes or loved ones.

The bushfires were a large-scale emergency, with impacts on private and public infrastructure, lives and livelihoods. The devastation was felt immediately as the bushfires took hold in late November. The impacts continue well into recovery as our communities lead their own rebuild and look ahead to opportunities.

It goes without saying that the emergency services both based in East Gippsland and the many hundreds commandeered to assist from across Australia and internationally did a magnificent job in the response and relief efforts.

Due to the scale of this event, the region needed immediate assistance. I commend the thousands of individuals, local community and service groups, emergency services, and all tiers of government in providing the relief, response and now recovery actions to support our community in one of its most difficult times.

The generosity of Australians and their willingness to help in times of desperate need, and the support from around the globe, was humbling. We will be forever grateful.

During that initial response and relief effort and now in recovery, I have been continually struck by the resilience of East Gippslanders. This resilience is ‘our’ character trait, highlighted by how we have responded in the face of adversity - several years of drought, bushfire and the COVID-19 pandemic. This resilience will help us as we continue with our recovery. Council has been working with the community and other agencies throughout the bushfire emergency and now in recovery, and this recovery plan has been developed with considerable consultation. Community-led recovery is the cornerstone of how East Gippsland will recover and rebuild.

We’ve been active with the high-level coordination of recovery, jumped straight into the reestablishment of public infrastructure, and have been alongside our residents as they plan their individual community recovery.

This East Gippsland 2019-20 Bushfire Recovery Plan, developed by the East Gippsland Recovery Committee, articulates the arrangements and is an important document to plan and manage the delivery of bushfire recovery services and support.

This plan is just one important example of how Council and our recovery agencies will continue to be with the community every step of the way in recovery.

**Cr John White**  
**Mayor, East Gippsland Shire Council**

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgement of Country</b> .....	2
<b>Messages</b> .....	3
<b>About this recovery plan</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
Response to the disaster .....	8
<b>Purpose of this recovery plan</b> .....	10
Established approaches to bushfire recovery .....	11
National Principles for Disaster Recovery .....	11
Emergency Management Manual of Victoria .....	11
<b>Recovery framework and principles of recovery</b> .....	13
Context: More than just a bushfire .....	13
A community-led recovery management approach .....	13
East Gippsland Principles for Recovery .....	13
East Gippsland goals and objectives for recovery .....	13
<b>Community recovery committees, recovery plans and community voice</b> .....	15
Background to community planning in East Gippsland .....	15
Community recovery committees .....	16
District representative groups and community recovery committees .....	16
Community Recovery Committee – Chairs Group .....	17
Community engagement .....	17
Community recovery plans .....	17
Community-led planning in East Gippsland .....	17
<b>Planning for bushfire recovery: The five recovery environments</b> .....	19
Social environment .....	20
Built environment .....	20
Culture and healing environment .....	22
Economic environment .....	22
Natural environment .....	22
<b>Governance, leadership and delegations</b> .....	23
Overview .....	23
East Gippsland Recovery Committee .....	24
Review and endorsement sub-committee .....	25
Recovery working groups .....	25
<b>Communications Planning</b> .....	27
Communications coordination .....	27
East Gippsland recovery communications .....	27
Communication channels .....	28
Bushfire newsletter .....	28
<b>Summary of priority recovery actions and issues</b> .....	29
Built environment recovery .....	29
Natural environment recovery .....	30
Economic environment recovery .....	31
Culture and healing environment recovery .....	31
Social environment recovery .....	32
<b>Statewide recovery programs</b> .....	33
Recovery hubs .....	33
Individual case support .....	33
Clean up .....	33
Temporary accommodation and rebuilding support .....	33
Business and agriculture support .....	34
<b>Reporting and evaluation</b> .....	35
Progress reporting .....	35
Recovery evaluation .....	35
<b>Appendices</b> .....	36
East Gippsland Demographic Information .....	36
Summary of Impacts .....	36
Social Environment Recovery Plan .....	36
Built Environment Recovery Plan .....	36
Culture and Healing Recovery Plan .....	36
Economic Environment Recovery Plan .....	36
Natural Environment Recovery Plan .....	36
Map of Impacted Area .....	36

# About this recovery plan



*Mallacoota. Image: courtesy News Corp*

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee (EGRC) has developed this plan to articulate the arrangements for planning and managing bushfire recovery services and support across East Gippsland following the East Gippsland fires 2019/20.

Community-led recovery is central to our approach and this plan has been informed by issues and priorities raised by our communities and developed in parallel with the establishment of community recovery committees.

The EGRC will update the plan to incorporate priority issues raised by communities following further community engagement.

# Introduction



*ADF gather near Orbost. Image: ADF Operation Bushfire Assist*

East Gippsland faced unprecedented natural disaster during the summer of 2019/20 after lightning strikes started numerous fires across the region.

The fires, which burnt out of control throughout the summer months, were particularly challenging due to their extent, duration and substantial community and economic impact, which may continue for years.

East Gippsland was already experiencing significant drought and there was severe and widespread dryness throughout the Shire.

The first fires began on 21 November; their remote locations and unfavourable conditions made them difficult to contain and several fires joined, creating fires of a magnitude never previously experienced in Gippsland, the North East and adjacent NSW. In late December, dry lightning started new fires west of Mallacoota and these merged on New Year's Eve during extreme fire and weather conditions.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews declared a state of disaster under the provisions of the Victorian Emergency Management Act on 2 January, a few days after Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp, urged holidaymakers not to travel to East Gippsland and asked all visitors to leave.

Arterial roads were closed, numerous communities were cut off and the Australian Defence Force and Victoria Police worked with East Gippsland Shire Council and other government agencies to deliver emergency supplies and evacuate residents and holidaymakers trapped by fire. Around 46,000 residents from 118 communities were directly or indirectly impacted.

The region remained under various states of warning for several weeks and residents were evacuated numerous times.

By the time the disaster had passed, the fires had burnt more than 1.1 million hectares, representing 56 per cent of East Gippsland. The extensive cost included loss of human life and property, livestock, wildlife, damage to the natural environment and resources, livelihoods and consumer confidence, and to air quality and emissions.

Three people died, an estimated 410 residential properties, 15 commercial properties and 29 farming properties were damaged or destroyed. 56% National Parks and conservation reserves, 12% other conservation reserves, 11% other State forests and 67% other public land was burnt.



*EGSC Cr Mark Reeves thanks the Republic of Fiji Military Forces soldiers stationed at Orbost. Image courtesy ADF.*

The bushfires also delivered a major economic blow with arterial roads, including the Princes Highway, cut for several weeks, and minor roads, telecommunications, power and water all significantly impacted.

The bushfires have had a devastating impact on local economies across Gippsland, with the impact of the bushfires and subsequent COVID-19 restrictions on East Gippsland in 2019/20 estimated to be a 15-23 per cent plus reduction in economic output, including 75 per cent loss in annual tourism expenditure. Of the 411 businesses in the East Gippsland and Wellington shire areas, 18 per cent were directly impacted by fire and 52 per cent were indirectly impacted.

Lost income continues to impact businesses, staff, supply chains and the community, resulting in instability, uncertainty and acute stress. These impacts amplify the ongoing challenges of drought, economic transition and other contributing factors.

On 2 April, East Gippsland moved officially into recovery and decisions about recovery coordination were transitioned to the East Gippsland Recovery Committee.

## Response to the disaster

East Gippsland has experienced many emergencies and natural disasters, and major bushfires are a significant annual threat in the region.

East Gippsland Shire Council and local agencies recognise the importance to working together to plan for and respond to emergency events and the region has an active Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee and sub-committees. Thirty-three East Gippsland communities have local incident management plans.

When the first fire began on 21 November, incident control centres were established in Bairnsdale, Orbost and Swifts Creek.

Throughout the emergency, Council operated assembly areas and relief centres for fire-affected communities, as required, in Buchan, Delegate, Omeo, Cann River, Orbost, Bairnsdale, Sale and Morwell.

Council employees were joined by representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Australian Red Cross to provide immediate support and financial assistance to people who sought shelter at relief centres.

Several major arterial roads, including the Great Alpine Road, Princes Highway and Monaro Highway, were closed for extended periods and Council facilitated the delivery of essential supplies, including food, water, fuel, medical supplies and generators, into remote and isolated communities, with assistance from Victoria Police and the Australia Defence Force. Victoria Police also arranged for supplies to be brought from NSW and set up and managed detours so people in isolated communities could travel to major centres.

In early January, Council convened the East Gippsland Recovery Committee, in partnership with Bushfire Recovery Victoria, and began recovery operations, alongside its emergency response. A local recovery centre was opened in Bairnsdale in early January to provide customer service and manage call-out operations, sharing information about support and assistance available to fire-affected residents. More than 15,000 referrals were made through the recovery centre.

A Mobile Recovery Information Service was also established and teams of representatives from Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, Red Cross, Centrelink, Rural Financial Counselling, Agriculture Victoria, Environment Protection Authority and GROCON visited 39 fire-affected communities to provide recovery information and support before COVID-19 restrictions came into effect.

The region lost 75 per cent of its annual tourism expenditure, an estimated loss of \$170-180 million.



*Cabbage Tree Creek mobile recovery service visit.*

# Purpose of this recovery plan

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee (EGRC) has developed this plan to articulate the arrangements for planning and managing bushfire recovery services and support across East Gippsland following the East Gippsland fires 2019/20.

It brings together planning at the regional and municipal levels in one East Gippsland Recovery Plan.

The plan includes:

- A description of the 2019/20 bushfires.
- The goals and objectives for East Gippsland's recovery.
- The governance arrangements for the recovery committee.
- The principles upon which the agencies agree to operate.
- The recovery management approach.
- Key challenges, risks and priorities.

Specifically, the plan aims to coordinate and align state-wide recovery programs with regional and community-led recovery initiatives.

East Gippsland Shire Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria are jointly responsible for coordinating the recovery and are committed to supporting a community-led approach.

To this end, the plan will be informed by themes emerging from the community recovery plans and raised by community recovery committees.

This version of the East Gippsland Recovery Plan reflects issues and priorities raised by communities and individuals to date through their engagement with various agencies.



*Hundreds gathered at the town hall meeting in Mallacoota about evacuating to the ship. Image: The Herald Sun*

# Established approaches to bushfire recovery

The East Gippsland Recovery Plan builds on established approaches and literature in bushfire recovery, including the experience of other major fires in Victoria and interstate.

## National Principles for Disaster Recovery

The National Institute for Disaster Resilience publishes guidance for disaster recovery, including the National Principles for Disaster Recovery (see below). The East Gippsland Recovery Committee considered these in developing a recovery approach and principles.

## Emergency Management Manual of Victoria

The Emergency Management Manual of Victoria provides a framework for emergency response and recovery in Victoria; Part 4 deals with relief and

recovery and Part 7 deals with agency roles and responsibilities.

The manual assigns responsibility for recovery coordination at a municipal level to local government, and at a regional and state level to the Department of Health and Human Services. The regional and state roles have since been assumed by Bushfire Recovery Victoria. Typically, coordination occurs through a multi-agency recovery committee.

The manual is supported by the Resilient Recovery Strategy (including the Resilient Recovery Outcomes Framework) and Disaster Recovery Toolkit for Local Government. These set out principles consistent with the national principles, outcomes that have informed this plan and a number of recovery 'environments' as a basis for organising the work.

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee has adopted this approach in this plan.

## National Principles for Disaster Recovery



While all the principles are equally critical to ensure effective recovery, understanding the local and broader **context** and recognising **complexity** are foundational

### Understand the **context**

Successful recovery is based on an understanding of the community context, with each community having its own history, values and dynamics.

### Recognise **complexity**

Successful recovery is responsive to the complex and dynamic nature of both emergencies and the community.

### Use **community-led** approaches

Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.

### Coordinate **all activities**

Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach, between community and partner agencies, based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.

### Communicate **effectively**

Successful recovery is built on effective communication between the affected community and other partners.

### Recognise and build **capacity**

Successful recovery recognises, supports and builds on individual, community and organisational capacity and resilience.

# Bushfire Recovery Victoria

The Victorian Government established Bushfire Recovery Victoria in January 2020 as an ongoing agency to coordinate bushfire recovery activities state-wide.

This means there are likely to be changes to recovery arrangements set out in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria, though this has not yet happened.

A state-wide recovery framework also is being prepared but has not been finalised or approved. Significantly this includes the addition of a fifth recovery environment, Aboriginal culture and healing. The East Gippsland Recovery Committee has included Aboriginal culture and healing as a recovery environment in this plan.

## Principles of Community Led Recovery

**Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive and flexible. BRV's approach to supporting community-led recovery will be underpinned by the following principles**



1. Centre on the community to allow those affected by a disaster to actively participate and make decisions about their own recovery.



2. Consider the values, cultures and priorities of all affected communities.



3. Use and develop the communities strengths, leadership and existing networks and structures, where possible.



4. Recognise that communities might choose different paths to recover and policies, plans and services should be flexible and adaptable to support this.



5. Build strong partnerships between communities and those involved in the recovery process.

# Recovery framework and principles of recovery

## Context: More than just a bushfire

The context for bushfire recovery in East Gippsland is far broader than the fires that began in November 2019 and includes:

- Prolonged drought impacting rural communities and businesses, service towns and associated businesses.
- Significant industry transition over several years, including but not limited to changes to native timber harvesting.
- Generational social dislocation of Aboriginal people from their lands.
- Major landscape fires over 20 years that have significantly impacted the environment and East Gippsland community, restricting normal function.
- Global Covid-19 pandemic, which has restricted recovery activities, including the capacity for communities to support each other and plan for the future, reduced volunteering and external assistance, secondary impact assessments put on hold.

East Gippsland communities have expressed a desire for recovery to take into account this broader context and to plan for the region's renewal with this in mind.

## A community-led recovery management approach

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee will take a community-led approach with East Gippsland Shire Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria supporting communities to establish and lead their own recovery planning process, identify their recovery priorities and develop a plan for achieving these.

This plan sets out how we approach the planning, coordination and delivery of services to support communities in their recovery.

It will be revised as further information about community priorities becomes available.

## East Gippsland Principles for Recovery

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee has agreed on principles for recovery to reflect the local context while taking into account the National Principles for Disaster Recovery and the Bushfire Recovery Victoria Principles for Community-Led Recovery.

- We partner with and listen to the community in the design and delivery of programs in a timeframe that balances their recovery and needs.
- We seek to protect and enhance our cultural values by involving the Traditional Owners early.
- We seek to deliver both short and long-term social and economic value to East Gippsland through the recovery program.
- We seek to future proof (in relation to climate change and new technologies) replacement infrastructure.
- We learn from the fires and seek to reduce future risk of a repeat event through strong design, good practice and improved management of our natural systems.
- We seek to rebuild confidence in East Gippsland as a future-focused place to invest and live.

## East Gippsland goals and objectives for recovery

East Gippsland recovery goals:

- Support our communities and environment to recover and stabilise after recent events.
- Support a community-led future, enabling resilient communities that are stronger, safer, more prosperous, healthier and more sustainable.
- Reduce the economic, environmental and social impact of future events and ensure our community is in a better position to thrive in the future.
- Ensure recovery activities are well coordinated to deliver the best outcome for impacted communities.



*Bruthen. Image: Chris Hopkins, Guardian Australia.*

East Gippsland recovery objectives:

- Provide people, communities, businesses, local governments and other stakeholders affected by the East Gippsland fires 2019/20 with the information, support and services needed to pursue their recovery.
- Plan and deliver recovery support in a manner consistent with the East Gippsland Principles for Recovery.
- Report, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of recovery.
- Deliver a coordinated, multi-agency response that supports communities in leading their own recovery.
- To agree on actions firstly to recover and stabilise after the current event and secondly to reduce the economic, environmental and social impact of future events and ensure our community is in a better position to thrive.



*Supplies HMAS Adelaide deployed Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-20 ADF.*

# Community recovery committees, recovery plans and community voice

## Background to community planning in East Gippsland

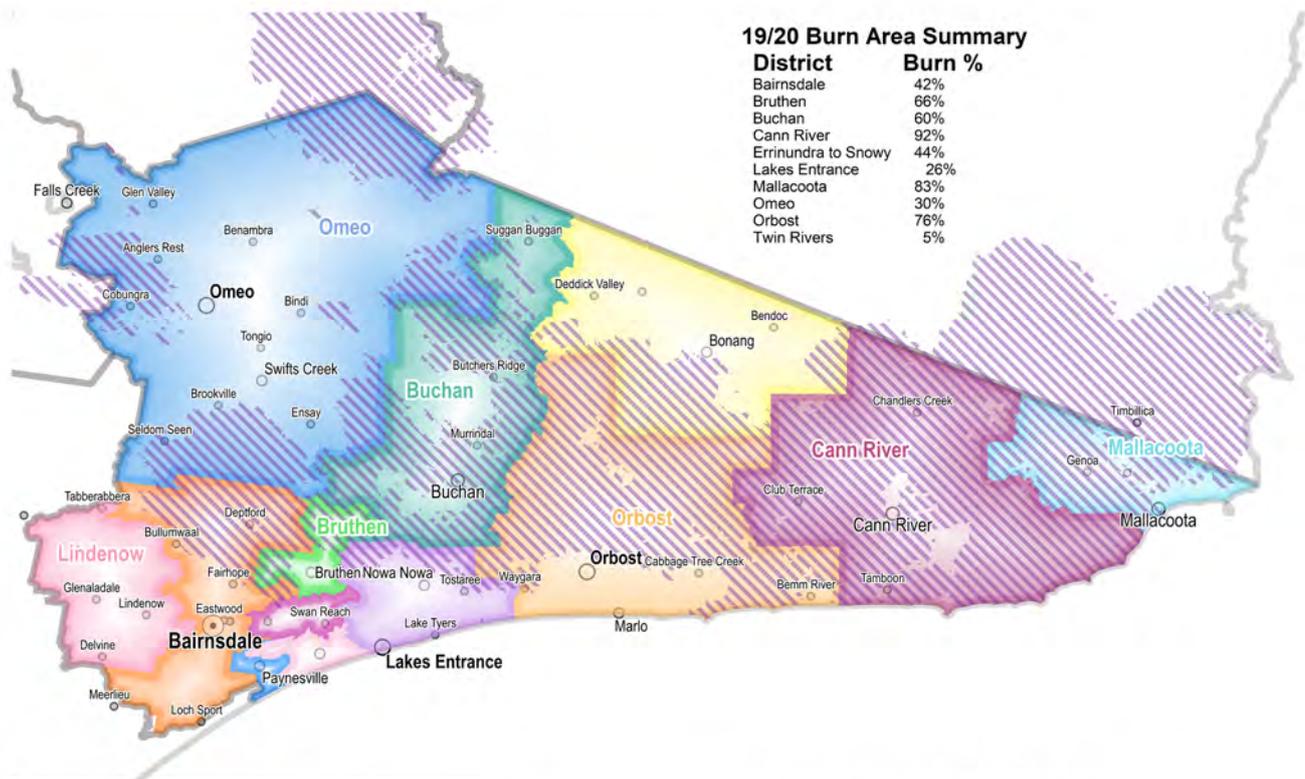
East Gippsland has many small communities scattered across the municipality, each with its own history, cultural and social structures and groups that support community prosperity, health and wellbeing.

A total of 171 localities make up 12 districts, determined by the social and trade routes the communities use in their daily lives. Each district is distinctly different.

The 2019/20 fires directly impacted nine of the 12 districts, with the remaining three districts impacted by community evacuations, economic or social disruption.

Some of the districts have representative groups that lead planning and development in their communities. For example, Bruthen District Citizens Association has been active for more than 23 years. In Twin Rivers, a representative group was created during a 2010 community planning process and representative groups in Cann Valley and Errinundra to Snowy were created to drive their community planning in June 2019.

## East Gippsland Shire Districts with 19/20 burn area overlay



DISTRICT MAP SHOWING  
FIRE BURN AREA



**EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE  
2019/2020 BUSHFIRES**

EGSC Bushfire Administration Centre, Bairnsdale  
9/10/2020



*Over time we came together by Cassie Leatham Fisher*

## Community recovery committees

Community recovery committees (CRC) will be established to give a voice to the broad views and aspirations of communities, and the way they interact with local, state and federal governments. They will identify the community's recovery priorities, including but not limited to priorities that would benefit from government or other agency advice and/or support.

CRCs also will be supported to lead community recovery activities and projects.

The CRC will be a vehicle for community members' priorities, issues and ideas to be heard and to guide recovery, with membership drawn from local communities. CRCs will not be a platform for organisations, industry, representative groups or government departments.

CRCs may evolve from an existing community group or be newly established through an open and transparent process. Communities may choose for their CRC to be informal, a working group or sub-committee of an existing group, or an unincorporated or incorporated association. The composition of the committee will vary depending on the affected area. Every community will go through a different process, depending on how the group evolves and the community's needs and preferences.

Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria will support communities to ensure their CRC has engagement processes for membership so the whole community can have a voice in the recovery.

The committee functions are to:

- Lead local community recovery.
- Represent community needs after an event.
- Develop a local community recovery plan.
- Monitor the overall progress of the recovery process at a community level.
- Undertake local recovery activities where appropriate, e.g. community events.
- Liaise, consult and negotiate on behalf of affected communities with relief and recovery agencies, Council and government departments.

Council, with support from Bushfire Recovery Victoria, will work with communities to establish or recognise representative groups as CRCs in fire-impacted communities and to support the CRCs to plan and identify priorities. Support available to CRCs, and the duration of this, will be determined by need and may include independent facilitators, community psychologists and experienced community mentors, such as Red Cross, to provide practical guidance.

## District representative groups and community recovery committees

Each district has its own strengths, assets, service systems and community capacity.

While there is a need to establish CRCs or recognise existing groups to fulfil this function, this should not undermine or disregard existing community groups in a district.

Many districts have representative groups that can fulfil the function of a CRC. In considering an existing group, it is important that it is both inclusive and representative. This also provides the opportunity for groups to review membership, refresh and seek new membership from within their communities. In some districts, such as Mallacoota, it is appropriate for a new representative group be formed as a CRC.

Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria will support communities to ensure their group has appropriate engagement processes for membership.

## Community Recovery Committee – Chairs Group

A Community Recovery Committee – Chairs Group will be established comprised of:

- An independent chair
- The chair or delegate representative of each of the CRCs

The Chairs Group will be supported by BRV and Council as appropriate.

The Chairs Group will advise the East Gippsland Recovery Committee about community recovery issues. This does not prevent an individual CRC from raising issues but the Chairs Group provides an opportunity to identify issues in common across multiple communities.

## Community engagement

CRCs are integral to engaging with communities about bushfire recovery and planning, however all agencies will need to engage with communities around some recovery activities, including responsibilities to engage with Traditional Owners. Such project or activity engagement will include CRCs where relevant.

Community views also may be obtained through recovery hubs, case support, place managers and a range of established groups (e.g. local business and tourism associations).

## Community recovery plans

Community recovery plans will be used to identify the priorities and key projects for fire-impacted communities.

Communities identify and lead their own recovery planning activities. An iterative recovery planning process allows activities and priorities to be adapted and refined as required. Community plans focus on the specific needs of communities and create local ownership of recovery.

The plans will capture the community's recovery goals and priorities, as well as broader aspirations and priorities for the future of a community.

Community recovery plans may include:

- The community's story.
- The impact of this event on the community.
- Location overview.

- Way of life and what they do, the things the community value.
- Community connections / people / recognition of cultural sensitivity.
- Gaps between community need and assistance provided.
- What would recovery look like to them.
- Community strengths and challenges (for example access points).
- State owned/local owned/community owned assets.
- Facilities (integral to community).
- Existing governance and leadership relationships.
- Resourcing.

Communities may develop a plan that captures their immediate needs as well as their aspirations for community renewal and betterment. These may be new plans or build on existing community plans or other plans in the district.

## Community-led planning in East Gippsland

Council is committed to community-led planning and community planning officers have worked with communities since 2010. Thirteen community plans have been developed to guide community-led decision making and prioritisation. These plans capture a community's aspirations and vision.

Council has allocated significant resources over the past two years to establish a system of planning and prioritising with communities. Central to this work is the creation of representative groups at a district level to enable democratic planning and decision-making. Experience shows that without this structure, plans are not realised and opportunities to collaborate are missed.

Council's community planning model enables partnership between community, government and other services and agencies. This model includes a readiness tool to assess the strengths and capabilities of a community's readiness to participate in planning and collective decision-making.

This model is in line with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery, the Emergency Management Victoria Resilience Framework and Bushfire Recovery Victoria Principles for Community-led Recovery. This process aims to empower citizens to articulate the

vision they have for their communities and provide them with the tools to plan and deliver on this vision.

The community-planning process is robust enough to weather significant events and can be used in an iterative manner to identify immediate priorities while also moving toward longer-term aspirations.

**Outcomes: Healthy and safe communities | thriving economy | resilient and connected communities | sustainable and healthy environments.**

## The Process Working in Place

### Phase 1: Listening, research and discovery

- Collect evidence of what's happening and where the community want to be,
- Understand the issues,
- Map the assets,
- Understand opportunities,
- Look at existing plans,
- Agree the issues/ opportunities to address.

### Phase 2: Imagine

- Is the context the same,
- Gather as many ideas as possible to address our issues,
- Create the ideas bank,
- Select the interesting ideas.

### Phase 3: Develop

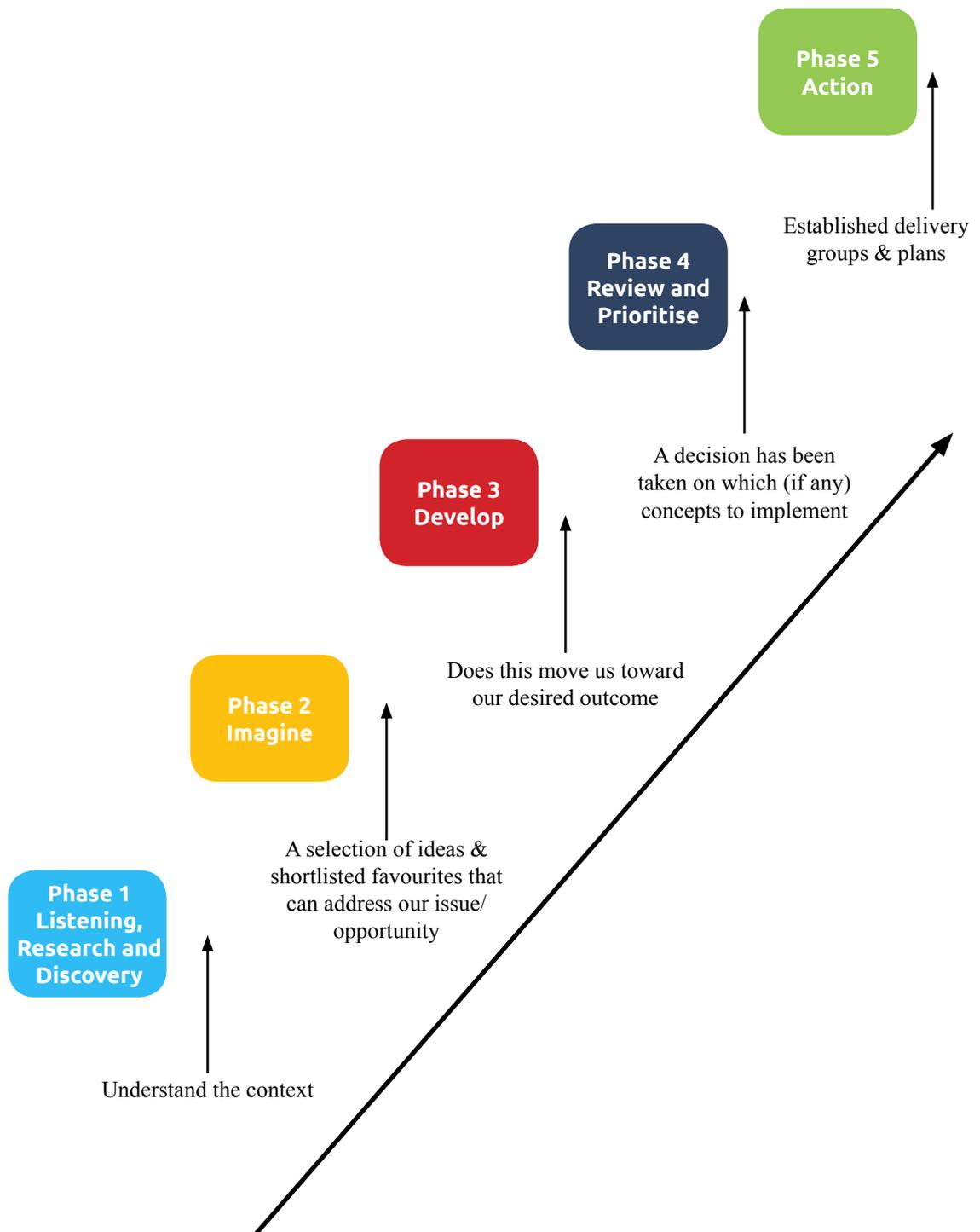
- Is the context the same,
- Establish working groups,
- Design the ideas,
- Apply the parameters,
- Achieving the desired outcome.

### Phase 4: Evaluate

- Working groups evaluate, then bring to larger group,
- Testing designs,
- Prioritisation/decide course of action.

### Phase 5: Act

- Larger group approve the plan,
- Working group action and develop a plan of delivery

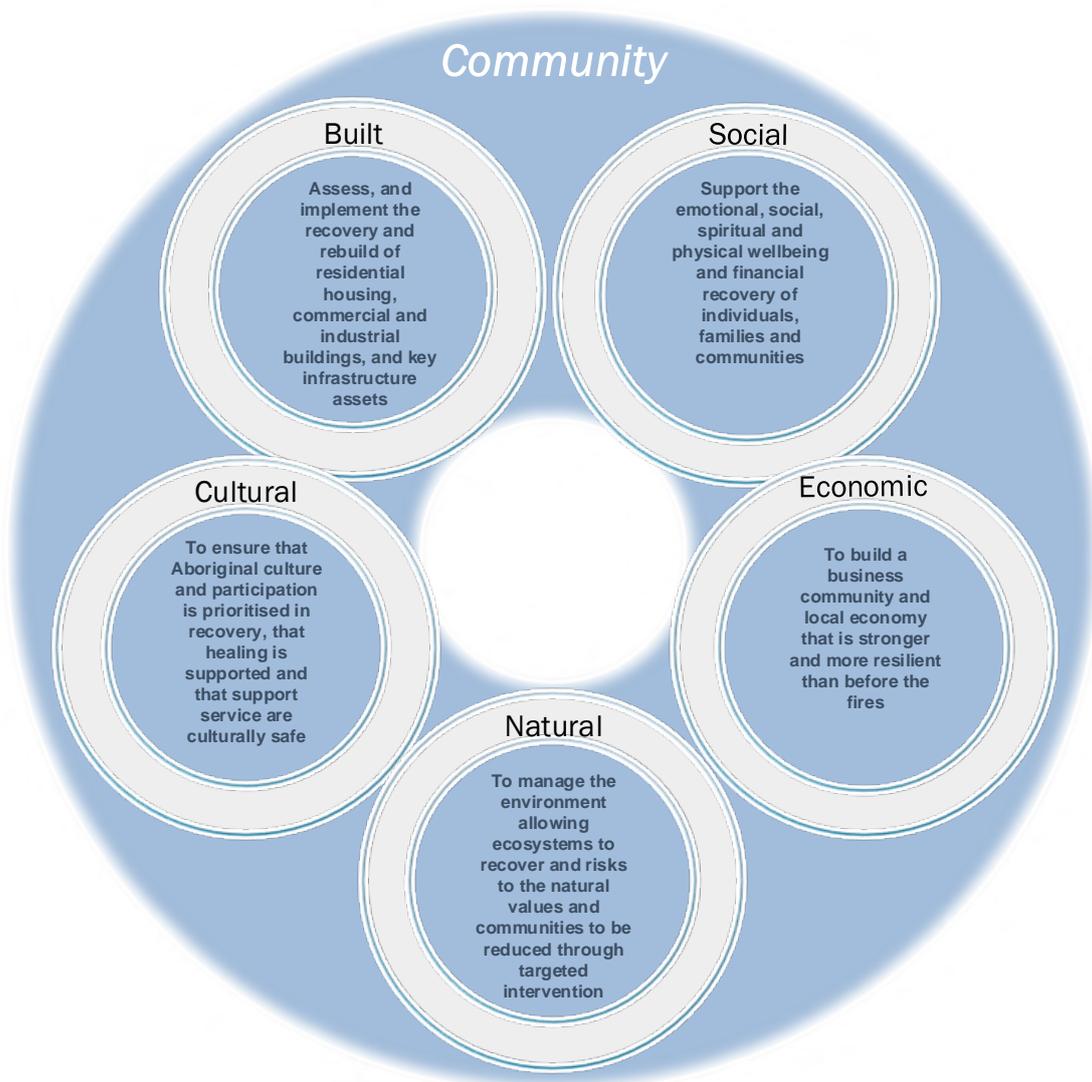


Based on the Minds at Work IDEA Model

# Planning for bushfire recovery: The five recovery environments

Planning and delivery of bushfire recovery services occurs across five recovery environments:

- **Social environment** – The social environment considers the impact an event may have on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. This environment is primarily concerned with safety, security and shelter, health and psychosocial wellbeing.
- **Built environment** – The built environment considers the impacts an event may have on essential physical infrastructure, including essential services, commercial and industrial facilities, public buildings, assets and housing.
- **Economic environment** – The economic environment considers the direct and indirect impacts an event may have on business, primary producers and the broader economy.
- **Natural environment** – The natural environment considers the impact an event may have on a healthy and functioning environment, which underpins the economy and society. It includes air and water quality, land degradation and contamination, plant and wildlife damage and loss, and national parks, cultural and heritage sites. Recovery initiatives may address specific elements of one recovery environment or operate across multiple environments.
- **Culture and healing** considers the impact that local disaster events have on our Aboriginal communities, the unique needs and attributes of individuals, families, communities, and businesses as the traditional owners in our region. Participation by Traditional Owner groups and Elders in the community is invited and encouraged to build a conduit in cultural recovery activities and actions.





*Red Cross volunteer with a Club Terrace resident outside Bairnsdale relief centre.*

## Social environment

**Goal:** To support the emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing and financial recovery of individuals, families and communities.

**Objectives:**

- To assist those affected by the disaster with access to safe accommodation suitable to their needs, including access to their own properties as soon as practicable.
- To assist those affected by the disaster with opportunities to reconnect with their communities.
- To provide access to timely information about post-disaster circumstances and recovery activities.
- To assist with the coordination and distribution of material relief and donated goods to those affected by the disaster.
- To reduce risks to public health following the disaster.
- To build trust in council in the affected communities.
- To identify emerging social issues for incorporation into short, medium and long-term recovery plans.

## Built environment

**Goal:** To ensure the assessment and implementation of the recovery and rebuild of impacted private and public infrastructure and assets through a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach between community and partner agencies, based on continual assessment of impacts and needs.

**Objectives:**

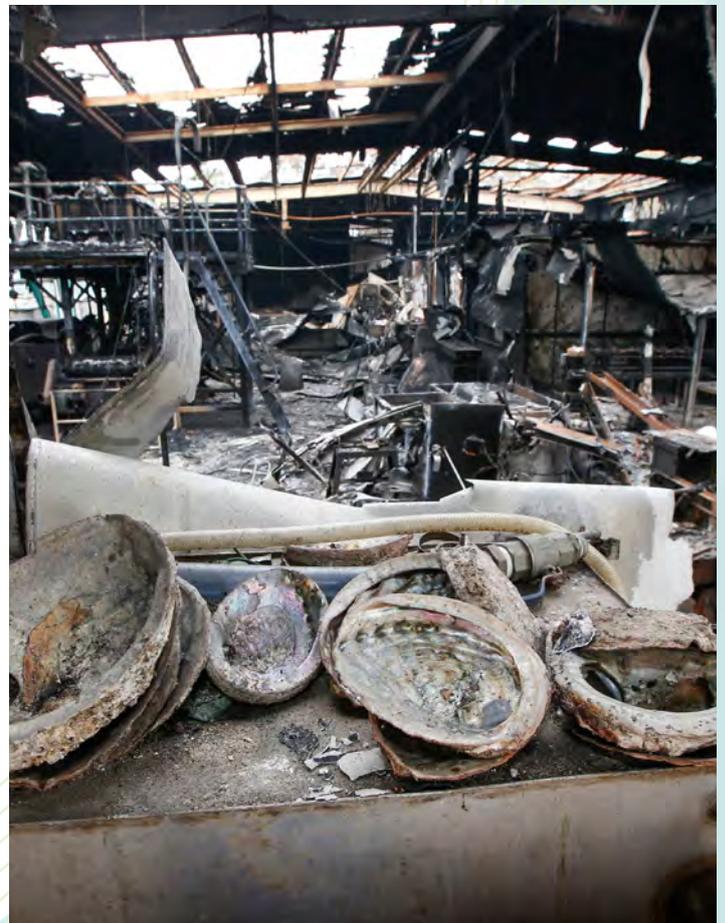
- To deliver the rebuild of residential and rural infrastructure ensuring it is sustainable and resilient, safe and affordable, and meets the needs of all members of the East Gippsland community.
- To provide support services to assist communities through the planning and rebuilding processes.
- To deliver the rebuild of public buildings and assets with consideration to resilience, adaptation and climate change as a core component of its design and service principles and meets community needs.
- To identify opportunities for the enhancement and resilience of community-based public assets to improve the safety of communities during future events.
- To ensure the community is consulted and involved in relevant decision-making processes



*Australian Army soldier Corporal Robert Thatcher hosts a traditional smoking ceremony for the people of Orbost at a farewell for the ADF and Republic of Fiji Military Forces soldiers stationed in Orbost during Operation Bushfire Assist.*

through community-led approaches, which are responsive, flexible and engaging.

- To ensure risk reduction is considered in the rebuilding of commercial and industrial infrastructure and public infrastructure and essential services, with consideration to resilience, adaptation and climate change as a core component of its design and service principles and meets community needs.
- To ensure protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage, places and objects of cultural significance.
- To ensure protection of heritage places, areas and objects of community heritage, value and significance.
- To deliver an assessment and voluntary clean-up program to assist landholders to rebuild.
- To monitor review and evaluate any known and/or potential risks that effect recovery in the built environment.



*Mallacoota Abalone Co-op. Image: courtesy NewsPix.*



*Koala at Gelantipy. Image: courtesy of ADF.*

## Culture and healing environment

**Goal:** To ensure Aboriginal culture and participation is prioritised in recovery, healing is supported and support services are culturally safe.

### Objectives:

- To provide continued support for self-determination, rights and aspirations, as per government policy.
- To develop gatherings and culturally supportive programs as required by community and family groups.
- To ensure culturally safe integration of programs as described in other themes.

## Economic environment

**Goal:** To build a business community and local economy that is stronger and more resilient than before the fires.

### Objectives:

- To consider the direct and indirect consequences of state industry changes, East Gippsland bushfires 2019/20 and restrictions on businesses, local industries and the tourism economy as the result of Covid-19.

- To provide businesses affected directly or indirectly with the information, support and services needed to pursue their recovery.
- To plan and coordinate the implementation of economic and financial recovery in the impacted area of the municipality.

## Natural environment

**Goal:** To manage the environment, allowing ecosystems to recover and risks to the natural values and communities to be reduced through targeted intervention

### Objectives:

- To develop and implement risk-based programs aimed at supporting natural system recovery, including targeted pest and invasive animal and weed programs.
- To work with communities to assist the natural values recovery at a local and regional level.
- To build resilience into the natural environment for longer-term adaptation to a changing climate and supporting safer communities.
- To ensure nature-based visitor experiences and sites are reestablished to reflect Traditional Owner and community values and aspirations and support recreation, tourism and economic opportunities.

# Governance, leadership and delegations

## Overview

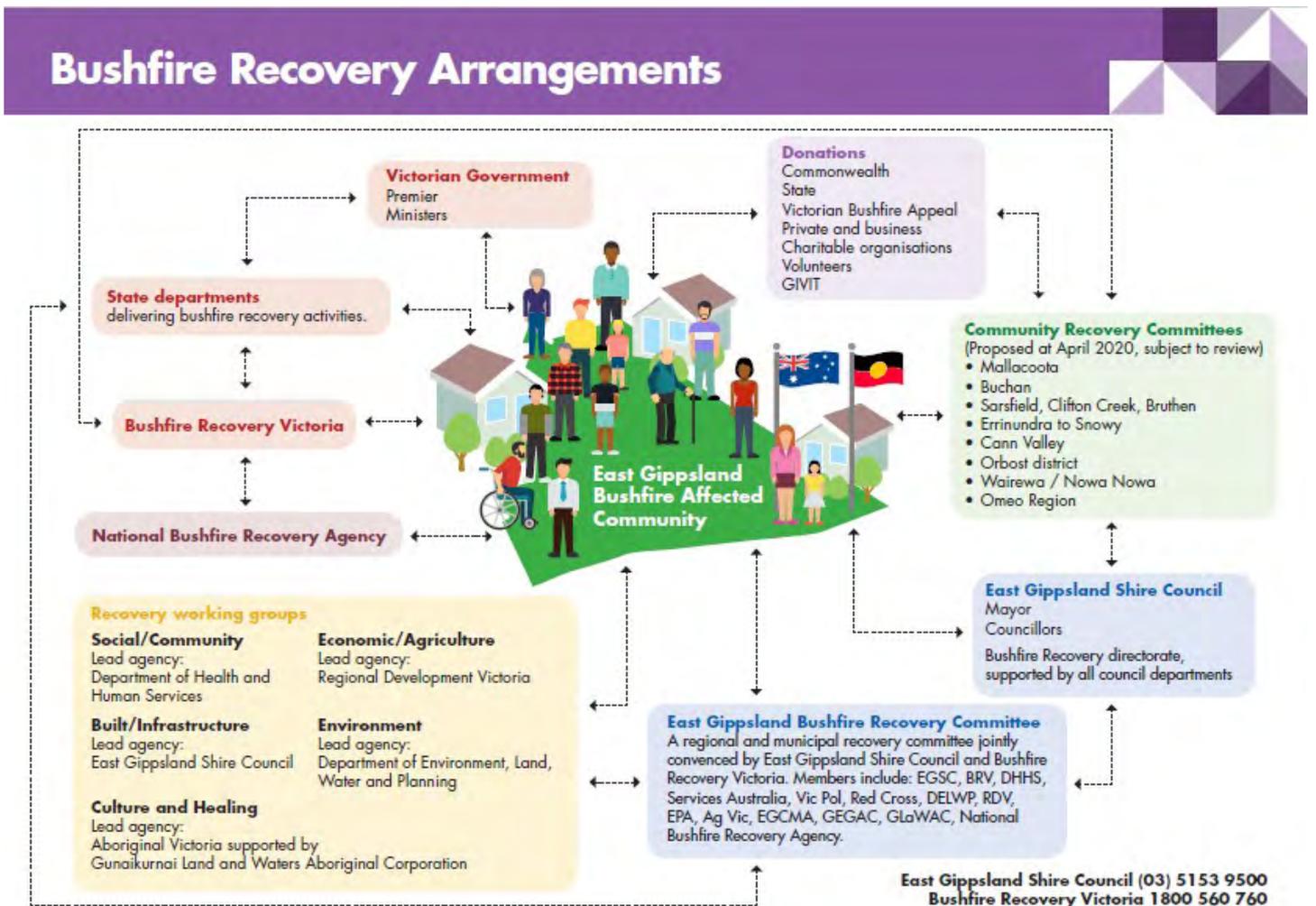
Bushfire recovery is led most importantly by communities, with the community recovery committee and the community recovery plan being the foundations of this.

Agencies will coordinate activities to support community recovery at a community, municipal/ regional and state level. To this end:

- Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria jointly lead the East Gippsland Recovery Committee (and its associated working groups).
- Bushfire Recovery Victoria leads coordination of recovery activities at a state level, with its associated communities and working groups.

A significant number of government agencies across the three levels of government, together with a number of non-government organisations, are all involved in recovery activities leading to complexity and the need for careful coordination to support community to navigate the range of supports.

This formal governance sits alongside existing local networks with and between communities, and between individuals and community groups with local government and local state government agency representatives, which will continue to be important in supporting relief and recovery activities.



## East Gippsland Recovery Committee

The East Gippsland Recovery Committee (EGRC) provides strategic oversight and leadership to support the coordination and planning of recovery activities.

EGRC is jointly led by Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria, reflecting the respective roles in municipal recovery coordination and regional recovery coordination.

The committee provides oversight and coordination of recovery activities with a focus on supporting community-led recovery, including:

- Developing and maintaining the East Gippsland Recovery Plan.
- Supporting coordination and implementation of recovery at local and regional levels.
- Ensuring components of the regional emergency response plans, municipal emergency management plans, lead agency plans are incorporated in and complementary to the East Gippsland Recovery Plan.
- Supporting community recovery committees and ensuring consistency between the East Gippsland Recovery Plan and plans prepared by community recovery committees, where appropriate.
- Determining the recovery environments that require leadership, establishing relevant working groups and endorsing the agencies to lead these working groups.
- Ensuring outcomes of committee decisions are reported to key stakeholders, contributors and other relevant parties – as determined on a case-by-case basis – in a timely manner.
- Monitoring and mitigating known and potential risks to effective recovery.

The EGRC is chaired by the East Gippsland Shire Council CEO, with the deputy chair nominated by Bushfire Recovery Victoria. The committee consists of senior regional representatives from:

- National Bushfire Recovery Agency.
- Department of Health and Human Services.
- Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions.
  - Rural and Regional Victoria.
  - Agriculture.
- Department of Environment Land Water and Planning.
- East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

- Department of Transport (Regional Roads Victoria).
- Department of Education and Training.
- Services Australia.
- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation.
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative.
- Victorian Cross Border Commissioner.
- Red Cross.
- Victoria Police.
- Country Fire Authority.
- Parks Victoria.
- Environment Protection Authority Victoria.

The East Gippsland Shire Council Mayor is also a member of the committee.

The EGRC reflects the recovery coordination and recovery service delivery responsibilities set out in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria, modified as appropriate for the establishment of new agencies at the state and Commonwealth level. Bushfire Recovery Victoria is currently developing a state-wide recovery framework.

The EGRC has no additional authority over and above the coordination functions assigned to Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria.

Members of the EGRC participate based on a commitment to partnership and effective coordination of recovery for the benefit of the East Gippsland community. Where differences arise, the EGRC will seek to resolve these by consensus. Where necessary, the chair or deputy chair may escalate issues within member organisations to seek resolution.

## Review and endorsement sub-committee

Since commencing there have been on occasions proposals and projects that seek support from the Committee. This support has sought endorsement on its way to other levels of government or funding (noting that the Committee does not hold or manage any grants funds).

A Review and Endorsement sub-committee will be set up for the purpose of addressing this need. It is recognised that as CRCs become more established and active, there may be a requirement to review and endorse proposals or applications they are submitting to government. This review and endorsement process will strengthen any such proposals and the committee may provide feedback to proponents to assist in improving project proposals.

The sub-committee is not intended to duplicate the role of CRCs in identifying projects and priorities for their local communities. Instead the sub-committee will focus on projects that have a broader impact, and in particular, projects at the regional or municipal scale.

As potential grant funds and decisions sit with various Ministers, departments or agencies it is not intended that the Review and Endorsement Sub-committee become a decision-making body. Rather projects are reviewed and endorsed for consideration by the relevant decision maker.

Membership of this sub-committee includes:

- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- National Bushfire Recovery Agency
- The Chairs of each sub-plan working group
- A representative of the Community Recovery Committees

Meetings of the sub-committee will be held as required.

Any review and endorsement of proposals will be tabled at a meeting of the Committee for information.

## Recovery working groups

Five recovery working groups have been established to lead and coordinate recovery activities in East Gippsland as follows:

- Built environment.
- Natural environment.
- Social environment.
- Economic environment.
- Culture and healing environment.

The governance principles applying to the EGRC similarly apply to the working groups, i.e. the working groups plan and coordinate relevant recovery activities, reporting to the EGRC. The authority and delegations of the working group are those held by the members of the working group.

Each working group is responsible for:

- Overseeing the service delivery of relevant recovery activities.
- Monitoring and reporting risks, consequences, progress and capacity issues to ensure service delivery is being achieved to impacted communities in a timely manner.
- Determining and implementing appropriate communication and information sharing mechanisms with relevant departments, agencies and key stakeholders to facilitate the above.
- Reporting progress and issues to the recovery committee.

Each environment has several recovery activities. An activity is a defined recovery program, service or product delivered to assist community in its recovery. Delivery of every activity is undertaken locally. The government lead agency and other agencies will support delivery through the local or regional tiers.

Community needs will determine if the recovery activity is required. Working groups may establish sub-committees as required to effectively coordinate the delivery of recovery activities.

The five recovery environments and working group members are presented in the figure below.

## Five Recovery working groups

Social	Economic	Culture & Healing	Built	Natural
To support the emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing and financial recovery of individuals, families and communities	To build a business community and local economy that is stronger and more resilient than before the fires	To ensure that Aboriginal culture and participation is prioritised in recovery, that healing is supported and that support service are culturally safe	Ensure assessment, and implementation of recovery and rebuild of residential housing, commercial, industrial buildings, key infrastructure assets such as roads, bridges and public spaces, telecommunications, energy services, drinking water and sewerage and transport	To manage the environment allowing ecosystems to recover and risks to the natural values and communities to be reduced through targeted intervention
East Gippsland Shire Council, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Training, Australian Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches, Salvation Army, Lifeline, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Anglicare, Windermere, Child and Family Services, Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative (GEGAC), Regional Arts Victoria, Bairnsdale Regional Health Service, East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership, Gippsland Primary Health Network, Relationships Australia, St Vincent de Paul.	Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Regional Development Victoria, Agriculture Victoria Forestry & Game, Small Business Victoria, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, East Gippsland Shire Council, Destination Gippsland, Committee for Gippsland, Food and Fibre Gippsland, Federation University, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Council (GLaWAC), Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bonaccord Freightlines.	Gippsland Alliance G5 (Unofficially called G6), Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation GLaWAC), Taungurung Land and Waters Council, Far East Gippsland Representative, Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC), Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service, Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc Lakes Entrance, Aboriginal Health Association Lake Tyers Health and Children's Service, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation First Peoples Assembly, Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation Albury Wodonga, Aboriginal Health Service, Traditional Owners representatives from unformalized RAP Country.	East Gippsland Shire Council, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, AusNet Services Development of Transport, Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, East Gippsland Water, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, Parks Victoria, NBN Co, Regional Roads Victoria.	Landcare Network, Parks Victoria, Environment Protection Authority, East Gippsland CMA, East Gippsland Shire Council, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, East Gippsland Water, Federation University Australia, Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation, Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, Department of Jobs Precincts and Resources (Agriculture Victoria).

# Communications Planning



*Bairnsdale Recovery Centre Information.*

One of the overarching objectives of this plan is to:

- *Provide people, communities, businesses, local governments and other stakeholders affected by the East Gippsland fires 2019/20 with the information, support and services needed to pursue their recovery.*

## Communications coordination

Bushfire Recovery Victoria leads a Bushfire Recovery Communications Working Group. This working group is represented by communications leads from all local, regional and state agencies with a role in recovery.

The working group meets regularly to:

- Coordinate state and local government agency recovery communications across all channels.
- Share insights and information regarding local communications needs, workplans and channels, including emerging issues.
- Support East Gippsland and Wellington Shire communications activities.
- Segment audiences to ensure those impacted are receiving communications relevant to them.
- Support capacity building and offer resources to councils when and where appropriate.
- Operate within Victoria's state recovery framework.

The working group continues the work of the Regional Joint Public Information Committee, which operated during the bushfire response phase and now has a renewed terms of reference.

## East Gippsland recovery communications

Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria will lead communications for bushfire recovery to ensure impacted residents and communities are kept up to date. This does not detract from the responsibility of agencies delivering recovery actions to effectively communicate what they are doing.

Recovery communications will use all channels available to Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria to ensure residents, businesses and visitors in East Gippsland receive information that is:

- Consistent, coordinated, relevant and up to date.
- Meets community needs.
- Locally focused.
- Supports community-led engagement and recovery.
- Segments audiences to ensure those impacted are receiving communications relevant to them.

Municipal, regional and local community communications planning will take into account all relevant stakeholder groups.

## Communication channels

Bushfire recovery communications will use a wide range of channels to effectively reach target audiences including:

- Traditional print media – articles, news reports, media responses, advertising.
- Radio – news reports, media responses, advertising.
- Television – news reports, media responses.
- Newsletters – targeted local community information, distributed in print, online and e-subscription.
- Social – targeted content, content sharing, videos, live stream meetings and information sessions.
- Established community networks.

## Bushfire newsletter

Council introduced a bushfire newsletter and sent multiple editions a week during the height of the fires to keep impacted residents and communities accurately informed about bushfire relief, response and support.

The newsletter continues into recovery with an emphasis on place-based content.

The newsletter is distributed via printed copies into community, website and social media, and via e-subscription.

It provides a consistent message and enough information to provide readers with a solid starting point to access further support and/or information if required.

# Summary of priority recovery actions and issues

Details of the recovery actions are presented in recovery sub-plans prepared for each recovery environment and are included as appendices to this plan. Priority actions, programs and projects identified in each of the sub-plans are summarised as follows:

## Built environment recovery

<p><b>Deliver clean-up program to support landholders rebuild.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BRV are leading the delivery of a state-wide clean-up program and providing options for disposal waste.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deliver rebuilding support and advice.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council, with support from BRV will provide an advisory service with a focus on approval processes to assist landholders navigate the rebuilding process, support resilience and sustainability. BRV and Council will identify pathways to support landholders that may still find rebuilding difficult.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Restore public assets (eg roads, community open space assets and visitor sites)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration of damaged roads and similar assets by Council, DELWP, PV and RRV (eg Mallacoota foreshore paths and boardwalks).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support the rebuilding of fencing and related agriculture infrastructure.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support to rural landholders to rebuild fencing and other agriculture infrastructure through provision of grants (BRV/AgVic) supporting the work of volunteers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improve the resilience of key road access routes to reduce the likelihood and/or duration of interrupted access to communities.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While restoring access and condition of damaged roads is a critical first step, the extent and duration of interrupted road access to communities was a critical issue associated with the event. There is a need to explore options to reduce the risk of road access being interrupted in future events to reduce timelines for restoring access. The Princes Hwy is a focus for this project.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improve the resilience of telecommunications, water, and electricity infrastructure to reduce the likelihood of failure, particularly for remote communities, during future events.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telecommunications (landline and mobile) and electricity supplies were interrupted early in the event for some remote communities and took extended periods of time to restore. This impacted community's capacity to access information during the event and reduced capacity of agencies to deliver effective relief. There is a need to explore and implement options to improve resilience of systems including education about use of systems during events.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enhance and improve the resilience of community facilities to support community need, including the capacity to support communities during future events.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community facilities played an important role supporting impacted communities during and after the event. This included relief centres, Neighbourhood Safer Places, places of assembly and community halls which were used by communities to provide relief support after the event. There is a need to review these facilities and identify opportunities to enhance facilities to better support communities in the event of a major natural disaster. Improvements might include installation water tanks, generators, or other power supply, supplies of relief goods etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support and educate communities in their preparedness for disasters when key infrastructure fails.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support communities to increase resilience and self-reliance in responding to infrastructure vulnerability.</li> </ul>

# Natural environment recovery

<p><b>Support natural system recovery</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity response programs including emergency extractions of threatened wildlife, fire-severity mapping and pest plant and animal controls across private and public land;</li> <li>• Biodiversity recovery programs to control pest plants and animals, enable Traditional Owner land management to heal country, ash reseeded and native revegetation programs;</li> <li>• Remove hazardous trees that possess an immediate safety risk and reutilise hazardous trees for community firewood collection;</li> <li>• Work together to replace and repair fire damaged fencing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Work with community in natural environment recovery</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide employment opportunities to work on natural environment and community based projects through the Drought Employment Program and Working for Victoria;</li> <li>• Work closely with Landcare to support and deliver Landcare projects and community based social gatherings;</li> <li>• Support landholders in the replacement and recovery of agricultural assets, including the re-establish and improved groundcover and pasture, and delivering grant programs and support services to farmers, including a range of activities such as farm planning, soil and pasture management;</li> <li>• Work with partners, landholders and local community groups to deliver a coordinated program of works to control priority weeds and pest.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Build resilience for long-term adaptation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community to plan and build long term resilience into East Gippsland's waterways, estuaries, catchments and community infrastructure;</li> <li>• Review fire behaviour and fire risk mitigation actions, to modify and improve future programs;</li> <li>• Assess and manage the ongoing natural resource use of public land.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nature based visitor experiences are re-established</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature based visitor experiences and sites are re-established that reflect traditional owner and community values and aspirations and support recreation, tourism and economic opportunities;</li> <li>• Ensure Traditional Owners are supported to deliver projects and aspirations to heal Country;</li> <li>• Reinstated safe access to public land and reopen recreation sites, tracks and trails on public land;</li> <li>• Restoration and improvement of visitor centres at sites of regional economic significance.</li> </ul>



*Renewal. Image: courtesy Salvation Army.*

## Economic environment recovery

<b>Support business and industry recovery and development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to business recovery advisors and services in the short to medium term.</li> <li>• Deliver a suite of business and industry development and capacity-building programs.</li> <li>• Provide grants to support business continuity and recovery.</li> </ul>
<b>Stimulate local economies and supporting trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver Regional Industry Groups and Chambers of Commerce Grant Program.</li> <li>• Support priority projects that create jobs and provide economic stimulus through reprioritisation and investment fast-tracking.</li> <li>• Support leadership development through Gippsland Community Leadership Program.</li> </ul>
<b>Support recovery of the tourism industry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to business recovery advisors, financial support and the information and resources needed for tourism businesses to recover.</li> <li>• Support priority tourism initiatives and strategic projects including Buchan Caves Reserve Stage 2 and Cape Conran Stage 1.</li> </ul>
<b>Support Aboriginal economic development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalise a Centre of Excellence for a Managing Country Training Centre at Forestec.</li> <li>• Support the Aboriginal economic development work of GLaWAC and the Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions to turn GLaWAC into a hub for Aboriginal business and economic development.</li> </ul>

## Culture and healing environment recovery

<b>Strengthen emergency preparedness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for a range of community activities and emergency management preparedness improvements across Gippsland.</li> <li>• On ground TO led Survey and assessment of cultural heritage.</li> </ul>
<b>Commence healing activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community healing events to bring the mods and families together and direct support for psychological services for community-wide initiatives.</li> <li>• Smoking and healing ceremonies as required by communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Ensure culturally appropriate support services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family support regarding housing and employment care packages, etc.</li> <li>• Cultural appropriate mental health support.</li> <li>• Improved media communications portals and assist healing and a consistent voice.</li> </ul>
<b>Increase use of cultural burning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding to build Cultural Fire knowledge and training. TO led.</li> </ul>

## Social environment recovery

<p><b>Support and coordinate a community-led recovery based on community need and aspirations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for communities to lead place-based recovery efforts.</li> <li>• Deliver bushfire case support to individuals.</li> <li>• Establish community recovery hubs and modible outreach services.</li> <li>• Support, resource and provide information to existing local community events, partnerships and networks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assist people to access temporary accommodation and support when returning to permanent housing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the securing of appropriate and affordable immediate and short to medium term accommodation.</li> <li>• Inform residents and owners on the clean-up process.</li> <li>• Provide information on advice and guidance to enable informed decision-making relating to rebuilding.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support and assist people to access practical assistance to manage their own financial recovery</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate the delivery of and access to timely and accurate grants information from non-government organisations (NGOs), Commonwealth, state and local governments.</li> <li>• Promote access to financial, insurance and legal information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engage with individual families and communities to provide psychosocial supports to enable recovery</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver psychosocial support and assistance to individual families and communities through a range of health and community services and initiatives across the stages of recovery.</li> <li>• Build community capacity to prepare and respond to fire and other disasters.</li> <li>• Engage with community to identify trusted social networks and opportunities for development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensure public health and wellbeing services are delivered to support individuals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate public health advice to promote informed decisions, positive choices and to mitigate risks.</li> <li>• Promote safe and healthy living, recreational and work environments.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aboriginal cultural safety and healing is valued, respected and supported</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen awareness, respect and recognition of the continuing connection and care of Country by Aboriginal people.</li> <li>• Support Aboriginal communities and their families to continue to connect and care for Country.</li> <li>• Support community healing events.</li> </ul>



*Clean up. Image: courtesy BVR.*

# Statewide recovery programs

## Recovery hubs

Bushfire Recovery Victoria is establishing five recovery hubs in East Gippsland at:

- Buchan
- Cann River
- Orbost
- Mallacoota
- Sarsfield (satellite hub)

The Bairnsdale Recovery Centre opened by Council in January also forms part of the recovery hub network. The hubs support impacted communities by providing a one-stop-shop for people to access services.

The provision of recovery support services to the Tambo Valley and Omeo is being considered, including the option of mobile outreach services and/or the establishment of a hub in an existing facility in Omeo.

This multi-agency response supports the community by providing relief, information or referral services. The hubs also provide disaster specific advice, psychological and emotional support, financial support, offers of assistance, practical support services and resources to assist vulnerable individuals or groups. An outreach service will be offered as an extension of these hubs.

## Individual case support

Bushfire Recovery Victoria has commissioned agencies to provide a state-wide case support program for impacted individuals to access the services required. In East Gippsland the case support is provided by:

- Windemere.
- Gippsland Lakes Complete Health.
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative.

Case support is provided to registered individuals through phone, online and face-to-face mechanisms, connecting individuals to support services such as mental health, financial and legal support, and clean-up services. The case support program will work closely with the recovery hubs.

## Clean up

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have engaged Grocon to support the bushfire

recovery process in Victoria and to demolish, remove and safely dispose of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair. The voluntary program is open to Victorian property owners free of charge, so communities can rebuild as soon as possible. Where possible, Grocon will engage local contractors in the clean-up.

## Temporary accommodation and rebuilding support

The Department of Health and Human Services, Bushfire Recovery Victoria and councils are working together to support impacted landholders to secure temporary accommodation and to navigate the process of rebuilding. This support includes:

- Assistance in accessing rental accommodation.
- Short-term provision of caravans for accommodation for impacted residents who would otherwise be homeless.
- Provision of short-term modular housing that can be installed on private land, which has been cleaned up.
- A rebuilding concierge service to assist people wanting to rebuild to navigate the relevant approval processes, and other information to support rebuilding.
- A range of funding supports are available for landholders who have lost houses as a result of the fires, including Department of Health and Human Services re-establishment grants and grants from non-government organisations.

## Business and agriculture support

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have developed initiatives to support impacted businesses and landholders.

Businesses can receive information, relief and support services needed to recovery and enable business continuity. Small Business Victoria and the Rural Financial Counselling Service are providing business advisers to work free of charge, with businesses, including primary producers, providing a range of services including assistance in accessing grants, understanding insurance, financial and business planning and referrals to other agencies for an extended range of support.

Up to \$50,000 grants are available through Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to assist eligible businesses that have been directly impacted by the fires, including fire damage, smoke damage or stock loss due to power outages.

\$10,000 grants are available through Rural Finance to support re-establishment or business continuity of directly and indirectly impacted businesses. Rural Finance is also offering concessional loans of up to \$500,000 to primary producers, small businesses and not for profit organisations.

Primary producers can access technical advice, information, relief and support services through the Agriculture Victoria drought and fire recovery officers. Emergency response grants of up to \$50,000 are available through Rural Finance to eligible primary producers.

Landholders can receive assistance to repair damaged or destroyed fences between private land and national parks, state parks and state forests. The Victorian Government will pay half the cost of these boundary fencing upgrades, up to \$5,000 per kilometre.



*Agriculture support. Image: by Salvation Army*

For primary producers, transport subsidies of up to \$15,000 are available. Primary producers can claim the subsidy on eligible transport costs that directly address immediate animal welfare needs, including the transport of emergency fodder for stock to fire-affected properties, moving stock to agistment (including returning stock), moving stock to sale or slaughter, and transportation of emergency stock drinking water.

# Reporting and evaluation

## Progress reporting

The EGRC will develop a reporting framework that supports both public and internal reporting.

Reporting will address ‘progress against plan’, including the status of specific projects and activities and whether funding has been secured. Reporting also will include selected metrics to indicate the progress of key programs (e.g. proportion of properties cleaned up, proportion of destroyed dwellings where rebuild approval granted). This style of reporting also provides status on specific activities being ‘progress halted’, ‘at risk’ or ‘on target’. Some recovery activities are more amenable to numeric reporting and careful design will be required to ensure reporting is practical and meaningful.

A public report on recovery progress will be prepared twice annually, the first scheduled for release in August 2020.

## Recovery evaluation

The EGRC will commission a periodic evaluation of recovery planning and actions to inform ongoing recovery from the 2019/20 East Gippsland fires and future events. The evaluation will help to identify opportunities for improvement, learn from experience and improve ongoing recovery planning and practice.

The first step in the evaluation is preparation of a recovery framework, including feedback from impacted communities.

Agencies responsible for specific recovery activities also may evaluate the effectiveness of specific activities.

Council has provided numerous responses to the Inspector-General for Emergency Management and Royal Commission inquiries.

Recovery activities also will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the:

- Inspector-General for Emergency Management Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season (due to report on recovery matters in 2021).
- Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (due to report in August 2020).

# Summary of impacts

## East Gippsland Demographic Information

As East Gippsland has matured as a region, its communities have also developed and diversified. We are a large and vibrant region in a beautiful natural setting, home to proud and involved communities that embrace and encourage self-reliance, responsibility and new ideas.

The largest commercial centre is Bairnsdale, while Orbost serves as a district centre for the far east of the Shire. East Gippsland's best-known tourist centre is Lakes Entrance. Other significant towns include Paynesville and Mallacoota, the half-way point between Melbourne and Sydney. To the north are Omeo and other townships of the Great Alpine Road. In the past decade population growth for East Gippsland has remained higher than the average for regional Victoria. The region comprises more than 45,000 people. The median age of East Gippsland residents is 50 years; however, there is an ongoing shift in population distribution to the 60+ age group, which represents 36.5 per cent of our population. The region has a significant Aboriginal population, representing 2.8 per cent of the total population.

The population of East Gippsland is unevenly distributed, with a concentration around the Gippsland Lakes in the south-west and relatively sparsely settled areas elsewhere. The major commercial and service centre of Bairnsdale and surrounds has a population of over 14,800.

## Summary of impacts and Sub-plans

- Summary of impacts
- Built Environment Sub-plan
- Culture & Healing Sub-plan
- Economic Sub-plan
- Natural Environment Recovery Sub-plan
- Social Sub-plan

## Map of Impacted Area

