

East Gippsland Fires 2019-20 Culture & Healing Recovery Sub-plan



EAST GIPPSLAND
SHIRE COUNCIL



BUSHFIRE RECOVERY
VICTORIA

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Purpose of this Recovery Plan



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.

Aboriginal people are disproportionately affected by the impact of bushfires due to a higher proportion of Aboriginal people living in bushfire affected areas, than elsewhere in the State (especially East Gippsland). Aboriginal people also face structural and financial inequalities, effects of historical and intergenerational trauma, and the destructive nature of bushfires to Country and cultural heritage.

Aboriginal people across Gippsland have been on a long journey of healing and reestablishing their culture and lore practices since European settlement during the 1800s. The dispossession has had generational impacts on the community and Country, and while some recent improvements have occurred, there is still a long way to go. The recent bushfires, compounded by the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, have added additional burdens on the Aboriginal community to heal, support their families and connect with culture.

The East Gippsland Shire Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan) provides information for the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) and its Bushfire Recovery Committee, to understand and respond to the collective aspirations of the Bushfire Recovery

Aboriginal Reference Group (Reference Group) and the Interdepartmental Aboriginal Culture and Healing working Group that is chaired by Aboriginal Victoria (AV). This working group reports and advises the State Bushfire Recovery Coordination Committee (SBRCC) which in turn reports to Minister's Special Advisory Council (MSAC). This plan also ensures all stakeholders are informed by EGSC's bushfire recovery plans.

Much of the wider community preparation work, initiated from the Black Saturday Bushfire Royal Commission and Safer Together strategies, failed to resonate with Aboriginal communities. This Recovery Plan recognises the importance of having greater oversight for the needs of Aboriginal communities, improved communication processes and ensuring fire and emergency preparations are culturally appropriate and inclusive.

Gippsland Aboriginal People and organisations

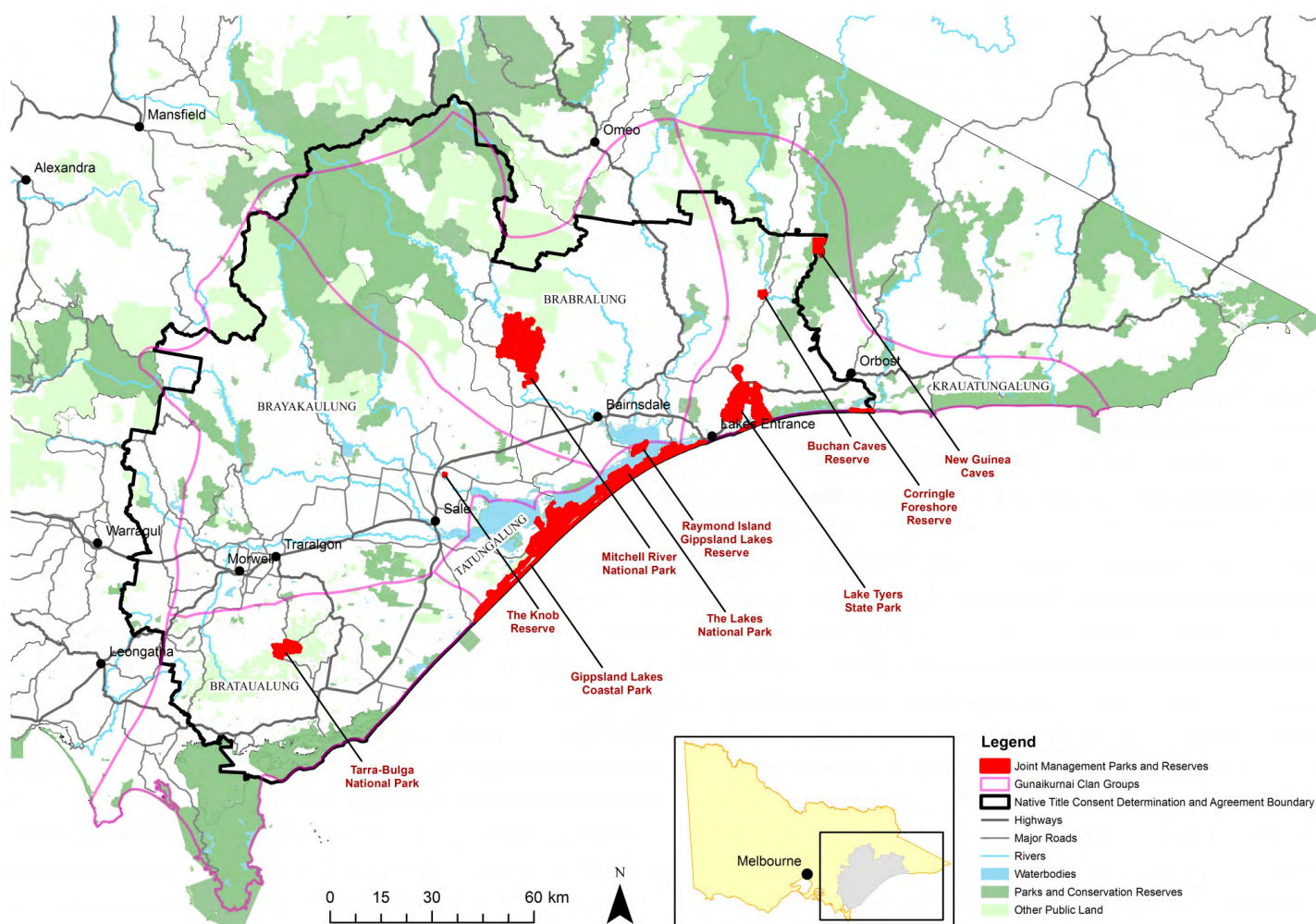
The EGSC acknowledges the Gunaikurnai, Monero and the Bidhawal (Bidwell) people as the Traditional Custodians of the land that encompasses East Gippsland Shire, and their enduring relationship with Country. EGSC is aware that many other people identify as traditional custodians and they too will be acknowledged where required.

The Traditional Custodians have cared and nurtured East Gippsland for tens of thousands of years. Aboriginal people continue to play an important role in managing Country through traditional land management practices and can increase awareness and connection to broader emergency management processes. Recovery planning should support engagement led by the local registered Aboriginal party (RAPs) groups in building recovery planning capabilities.

GLaWAC is the recognised RAP for a large part of East Gippsland Shire. They are responsible to their members for the management of Country, and the protection and education of Gunai Kurnai Culture and Heritage. They are also working to support sustainable economic development for Aboriginal people in Gippsland.

On Country, healing begins when the Aboriginal community are involved in the recovery work for their traditional lands. An operational model was proposed by GLaWAC that was not universally adopted by all Traditional Owners. GLaWAC will still engage and collaborate with neighbouring groups if asked.

The Gippsland Alliance (G5) is a collaborative health organisation group in Gippsland that the GLaWAC has built a strong relationship and have established regular meetings. The G5 group and GLaWAC rapidly responded and supported each other through the



bushfire crisis, and now is doing the same through the COVID- 19 pandemic. The Reference Group was activated quickly due to their pre-existing collaborative efforts and established partnership. Other organisations may need to be included later, as required.

The Aboriginal community maintains connections through sports, arts and culture, at local and regional levels – assisted by the Local Aboriginal Networks (LAN). The Gippsland LAN employee supported the development of communications during the fire event, assisting the Aboriginal organisations' community networks.

The LAN's purpose is to bring Aboriginal people together at the local level to set priorities, develop community plans, improve social cohesion and empower Aboriginal Victorians to participate in civic and community life. These voluntary community networks provide a safe and welcoming space for the Aboriginal community to connect, share, learn and lead. LANs provide a critical and effective channel to engage and celebrate the diversity within the Aboriginal community.

Census data

Census data for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in East Gippsland: 1,288 or 2.9% of total EGS shire population.

The size of East Gippsland Shire's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour force in 2016 was 378 people, of which 160 were employed part-time and 145 were full-time workers.

Analysis of the employment status (as a percentage of the labour force) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in East Gippsland Shire in 2016 compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Victoria - shows a lower proportion in employment, and a higher proportion unemployed. The unemployed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour force was 19.3%, compared with 14.0% or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Victoria.



Gunaikurnai Elders and community with ADF.

Policy Drivers

The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework

The Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023 (the VAAF) provides an ambitious and forward-looking agenda for Aboriginal affairs.

The VAAF has two key purposes:

- It is the Victorian Government's overarching framework for working with Aboriginal Victorians, organisations and the wider community to drive action and improve outcomes.
- It sets out whole of government self-determination enablers and principles and commits the government to significant structural and systemic transformation.

The principles of the VAAF will be realised through the delivery of the governance implementation and support for the actions of this sub-plan. The Recovery committee also recognises the importance of considering the VAAF principles across the other sub-plans during recovery efforts.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria

Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) is a permanent and dedicated Victorian Government agency, committed to locally led and driven bushfire recovery.

BRV is responsible for coordinating and supporting the state's rebuilding and recovery activities for the areas affected by the 2019-20 Eastern Victorian Fires through a whole of Victorian Government effort. The agency works closely with affected communities, all levels of government, businesses and non-government organisations to meet recovery needs.

BRV is currently developing a Statewide Recovery Framework and The Eastern Victorian Fires 2019-20 State Recovery Plan (the Plan). The Plan sets out the Victorian Government's plan for recovery following the devastating fires that swept through East Gippsland and North East Victoria. It sits adjacent to the Recovery Framework and outlines the high-level activities that will facilitate regional, municipal and community-led recovery planning. It will be a public-facing Whole of Victorian Government (WVOG) document that outlines the government's recovery direction, with a focus on the next 12-18 months. It will be regularly updated to reflect changes

in approach to recovery as dictated by changing community needs.

The Framework and Plan will guide the prioritisation of proposed initiatives for inclusion in a whole of Victorian Government bushfire recovery budget submission.

The Framework and subsequent Plan are built on five lines of recovery:

- Environment and biodiversity focus on addressing the impacts of bushfires to plant and animal life, the management of amenities in parks and forests that support recreation and nature-based activities, and the sustainable use of natural assets and resources.
- Building and infrastructure cover utilities and public infrastructures, such as roads, schools and community facilities, and residential and commercial buildings.
- People and wellbeing focus on ensuring people are safe and secure, have improved mental and physical health and wellbeing and meaningful social engagement and connection to their community.
- Business and economy support businesses to survive in the short-term and thrive in the long-term and the participation of the local workforce in established and new employment opportunities.
- Aboriginal Culture and healing acknowledge the special connection that Aboriginal people have to the land, culture and community.

BRV's recovery work will be guided by the eight recovery principles identified in the Recovery Framework. The principles underpin BRV's approach to community-led recovery. The principles support flexible, locally driven and locally delivered action and can be applied to deal with complex issues and support needs as required. The principles are:

- Understand the context
- Recognise complexity
- Use community-led approaches
- Coordinated all activities
- Communicate effectively
- Recognise and build capacity
- Strengthen communities
- Ensure an inclusive approach.

The state-wide recovery framework provides five lines of recovery to guide a holistic and coordinated

recovery; principles for effective recovery; and an approach to community-led recovery.

Each line of recovery will have a working group to report to the State Bushfire Recovery Coordination Committee (SBRCC). The state recovery working groups are:

- Environment and Biodiversity
- Buildings and Infrastructure
- People and Wellbeing
- Business and economy
- Aboriginal Culture and Healing

The recovery working groups lead the implementation of activities in their respective field. They are chaired by an executive from the line of recovery's lead department and comprise relevant Victorian Government executives and external stakeholders. The recovery working group chair's role is to guide the effective implementation of recovery activities, connect initiatives with department recovery services, and foster partnerships with government and non-government stakeholders.

Aboriginal Victoria will chair the state recovery working group focussed for the Aboriginal Culture and Healing line of recovery, to lead bushfire recovery for Aboriginal communities. The Director of the Aboriginal Culture and Healing team will be the Deputy Chair of the Recovery Working Group. The Working Group will assist in addressing issues that relate to interdepartmental intersections on Aboriginal culture and healing efforts, in a bushfire recovery setting.

Local engagement framework

Formal engagement bodies at the municipal and community level are a key tool for BRV that will assist better understanding of communities and their needs. Community Recovery Centres (CRC) will be established when the community is ready and will be made up of and led by members of the local community – selected through an open and transparent process. CRCs will help to shape recovery, grant and support programs and projects that meet community needs.

CRCs will also drive the development of community recovery plans that guide the future investment of resources by local, state and commonwealth governments. Bushfire Recovery Victoria will support the CRCs with a Community Recovery Facilitator, to organise meetings and events on behalf of the CRC.

The establishment of local CRCs is on a location by location arrangement and in conjunction with the local community. Different locations will be determined based on the need for the recovery stages and the set-up of their CLC will align with this process. The rate of progress on the local CRC will also depend on community mechanisms in place before the fire event.



GLaWAC GEGAC Staff providing hay deliveries to fire impacted areas

Feedback to the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA)



This sub-plan can support initiatives currently under consideration at a federal level, including:

- the need for improved Aboriginal involvement in on Country land and emergency management
- analysis and improved consistency regarding different states approaches to Joint Management and resource provision to support Traditional Owner involvement in public land management
- to assess and modify the communication approach to ensure messages are conveyed to Aboriginal people in a more culturally appropriate and safe way
- better command and control considerations for rapid decision making and resource support to local organisations and leadership networks, rather than a reliance on bureaucratic pillars that can be complex and confusing.

BRV Funding Streams



Over time we came together by Cassie Leatham Fisher

Resourcing

Appropriate resourcing is required to support the Victorian Aboriginal community to recover from the recent bushfire crisis.

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have established the \$35 million Community Recovery and Resilience Grants Initiative to provide financial support to locally led and responsive programs to support the recovery efforts in Victoria's bushfire impacted regions. \$3.5 million has been secured to support Aboriginal communities, with a portion allocated to support the cultural heritage and biodiversity (the proposal outlined in section four). To administer the funding, guidelines are being developed by AV and BRV and the Community Reference Group.

Community Recovery and Resilience Grants:

- \$700,000 for Arts Initiatives delivered by DJPR
- \$15 million for Community Recovery Grants delivered by BRV
- \$5 million for Bushfire Recovery Grants for Community Facilities delivered by BRV
- \$7.5 million for local government and community service organisations delivered by BRV

- \$1 million for Community Events Grants delivered by DJPR
- \$1.65 million for the Community Events grants program delivered by BRV and DJPR
- \$500,000 for Community Leadership Workshops delivered by DJPR
- \$150,000 for flexible funding
- \$3.5 million for Aboriginal Community Recovery grants program delivered by BRV.

Planning

The table below summarises key themes that the Aboriginal Reference group have discussed and adopted for this plan. The table is a guide to understanding the need for a phased approach to recovery efforts, and not intended to be definitive, that will require further assessment and amendments.

Key Themes

Short term: Jan - May	Medium term: May-Dec	Long term: 2021-
<p>Cultural heritage restoration</p> <p>Immediate funding to support Cultural heritage and working on country initiatives.</p>	<p>Funding for a range of community activities and emergency management preparedness improvements across Gippsland</p>	<p>Improved support for the organisations that represent Traditional Owners and ABORIGINAL communities and clarity regarding lead and support sectors of organisational core business.</p>
<p>Caring for Elders and Carers</p> <p>Financial relief funding for Aboriginal individuals and families</p> <p>Culturally competent support programs for the Aboriginal community, funneled through the appropriate ACCO</p>	<p>Community healing events to bring the mobs and families together and direct support for psychological services for community-wide initiatives</p>	<p>Improved cultural healing and learning centre's to assist employment tourism and community education.</p>
<p>Healing Country</p> <p>Support to enable TO led on country recovery works</p>	<p>Culturally informed and holistic healing</p> <p>Smoking and healing ceremonies as required by communities.</p>	<p>Family service reviews to build holistic connections to Country</p>
<p>Communications support to assist the Aboriginal community to receive critical messages regarding cultural heritage protection and storyline integrity.</p>	<p>Rebuilding Aboriginal community infrastructure</p> <p>Family support regarding housing and employment care packages etc.</p>	<p>Improved Economic Development Strategy for all Aboriginal communities and sectors across Gippsland.</p>
<p>Immediately identified health and community support services</p>	<p>Improved media and communications portals that assist healing and a consistent voice.</p>	<p>Improved support for Aboriginal people not on Country to reconnect to their cultures.</p>
<p>Resourcing support for the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation sector</p> <p>Residential Aboriginal communities</p> <p>Required capacity support for Reference group organisations</p>	<p>Funding to build Cultural Fire knowledge and training. TO led.</p>	<p>Review the EGS Reconciliation Action Plan</p>

Governance

Aboriginal Culture and Healing State Recovery Working Group

The unique experiences of Aboriginal communities in disasters have often been overlooked in recovery planning, with limited focus on gathering evidence that considers the impact of bushfires on Aboriginal people. Insufficient or inappropriate engagement and consultation also led to ineffective recovery responses.

The Aboriginal Culture and Healing Working Group will support the designing, implementation and ongoing delivery of initiatives, that include:

- prioritising Aboriginal culture
- addressing trauma and supporting healing
- promoting cultural safety
- promoting participation and ownership.

Aboriginal Victorians will flourish with adequate support to manage their cultural knowledge systems, that inform their physical, mental, wellbeing and spiritual health. The recovery work prioritises cultural engagement through education; respect for land practices; connection to land, water and wildlife; and strengthened representation in the workforce.

Bushfire Recovery Aboriginal Reference Group

The purpose of the Bushfire Recovery Aboriginal Reference Group (reference group) is to work collaboratively to meet the needs of bushfire affected Aboriginal Victorians. The reference group was established to nominate an Aboriginal voice to the Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) Ministerial Special Advisory Council (Advisory Council). Jamie Williamson is the nominated representative.

Once formalised, the reference group will sit within BRV's newly established structure. The reference group will inform and support its nominated representative to champion adequate and sustainable resourcing for Aboriginal communities across the state for recovery efforts.



Orbost local thanks Fiji Military Forces.

The reference group will provide advice to the Advisory Council on:

- Culturally informed and holistic healing:
 - Addressing health care concerns
 - Responding to mental health needs
 - Addressing vicarious trauma, fatigue and stress
 - Supporting collaboration of local Aboriginal organisations
- Healing Country:
 - Traditional Owner led development and implementation of land management practices, including employment opportunities
 - Increasing knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal heritage values to inform future land and fire management activities
 - Ensure land rehabilitation works do not lead to avoidable damage to Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Caring for Elders and carers:
 - Addressing the needs of Elders and carers
 - Providing additional supports to Elders and carers
 - Ensuring concepts of kinship are understood
- Cultural heritage restoration:
 - Site visits and surveys to identify the impacts of fires (including to register any new sites uncovered by the fires)
 - Remediation works to damaged sites, including sites damaged by bushfire protection activities

- Put mitigation measures in place to reduce future potential impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Rebuilding Aboriginal community infrastructure:
 - Advise on the needs of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) that own infrastructure which has been damaged by bushfires
 - Ensure communities have access to transport, security, backup power, alternative water and food supplies and emergency shelter
 - Advocating for the refurbishment of bushfire damaged infrastructure owned by ACCOs within the State of Disaster
 - Coordinating support for planning and building assessments to support the rapid rebuilding of community infrastructure
- Resourcing support for the ACCO sector:
 - Advise on the resourcing and funding needs of ACCOs including long term economic prosperity and employment
 - Coordinate support to address the loss of income by ACCO's/organisations due to:
 - staff absences during fire season and a reduced fee for service
 - closure of organisations due to danger caused by fire and smoke (effect on output/targets required for the Department of Health Human Service accreditation)
 - lack of supplies reaching organisations
 - inability to continue servicing all client and offering all programs.
 - Ensure communication between government departments, agencies, ACCOs and other community stakeholders is streamlined and consistent
- Financial relief funding for Aboriginal individuals and families:
 - Facilitating centralised support to allocate and manage donations, supplies and services
 - Support for families to rebuild and repair damaged households
 - Reimbursement of the costs of relocation and evacuation
- Housing stress:
 - Temporary accommodation to support Aboriginal communities impacted and displaced by the bushfires
 - Planning and building assessments to inform longer-term planning and support for Aboriginal community housing
- Residential Aboriginal communities:
 - Bushfire recovery, mitigation and future planning for Aboriginal communities, including Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust
- Economic development:
 - Aboriginal employment and training opportunities
 - Aboriginal employment targets and priorities embedded across the sector
 - Aboriginal enterprise development

Aboriginal Bushfire Reference Group Members

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 (LEAHA)

Lake Tyers Health and Children's Service

Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (LTAT)

Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation

First Peoples Assembly

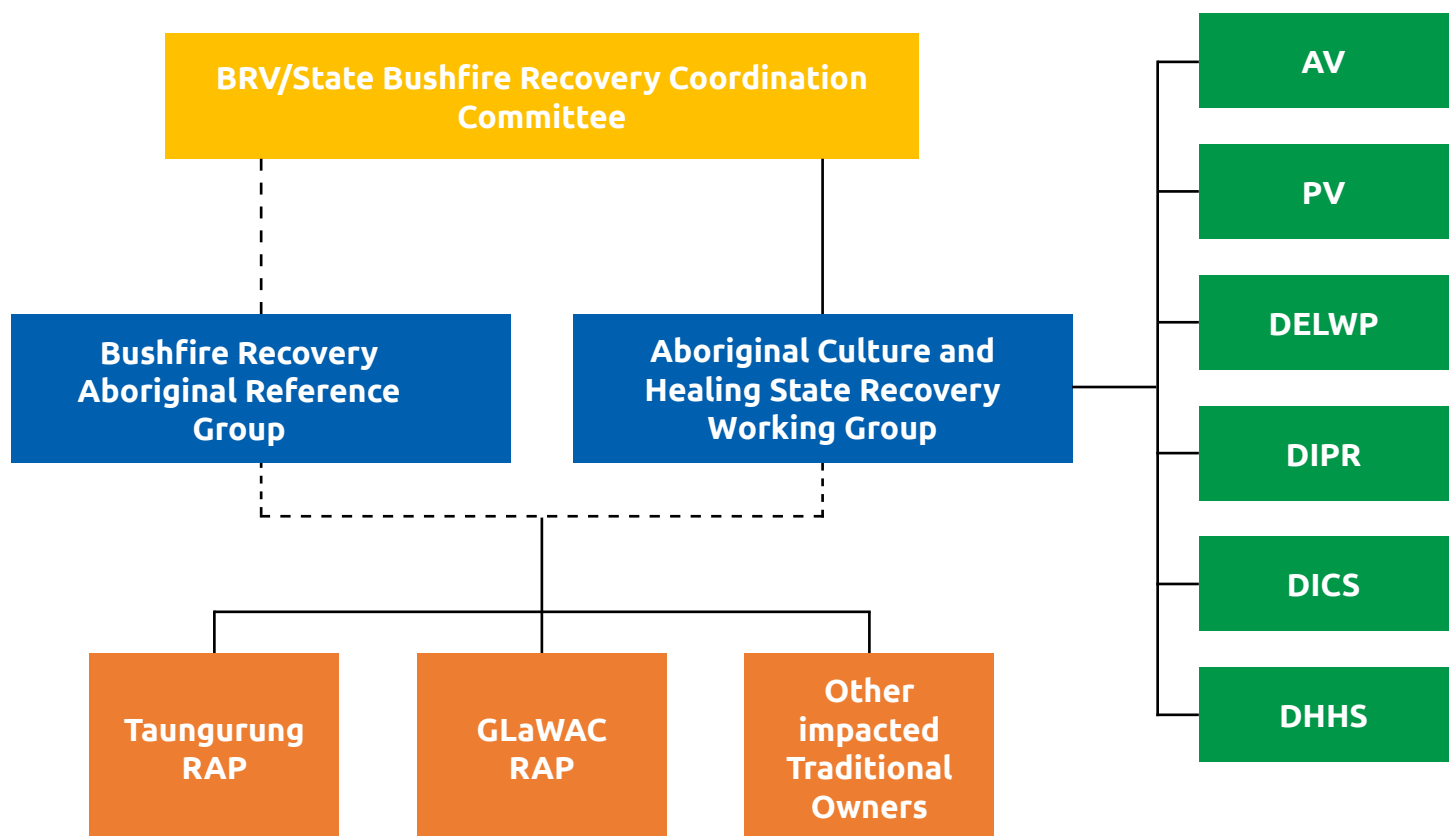
Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation

Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS)

GLaWAC and Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation (Taungurung) have worked with Traditional Owners across the fire-affected regions in north-east Victoria and East Gippsland, to formulate a systematic and centralised approach to manage the impacts of the bushfires on Aboriginal cultural heritage (the cultural heritage proposal).

Funding was secured to deliver activities under this sub-plan, to be administered through BRV. The Aboriginal reference group will provide oversight for the funding criteria. The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation will continue to support AV in their role of lead for Culture and Healing -sub-plan and will support East Gippsland Shire in their work.

Aboriginal Culture and Healing Line of Recovery Governance Structure



Acknowledgements

The work of numerous people and organisations contributing to the journey and development of this sub-plan is acknowledged and produced in this document:

- Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- Aboriginal Victoria
- East Gippsland Shire and its Bushfire recovery committee.
- Gippsland Environment Agencies
- All CEO's of the Aboriginal Reference Group
- Department of Environment Land Water and Planning
- Parks Victoria
- Local Aboriginal Network representative Gippsland