

Omeo Region Recovery Update

SEPTEMBER 2022



Work on the Omeo Heritage Precinct is progressing (see update in this issue). However, the landscape looked much different in August with snow dusting much of the High Country.

Update on activities in Omeo

Council continues to play a key role in negotiating partnerships with agencies and community groups to help recovery activities reach their end goal. Current activities across the communities of Omeo region include:

- Consultant, funded by BRV, to work with the community to examine current usage and potential future uses of the Benambra Recreation Reserve, neighbourhood house, hall, CFA shed and school. A brief will be delivered by the consultants which explains these needs and the suitability of the facilities.
- Meeting organised, in collaboration with Benambra Neighbourhood House and

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), for 5 September to discuss fire experiences of agencies and services across Alpine Shire and East Gippsland Shire, and how to better plan for future events.

- Omeo Hub will be located in an under-utilised room at the Omeo Service Centre. Funding applications to fit out this space as a study hub, networking and social activities centre are in progress along with a public meeting to raise awareness of the proposal.
- Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve committee has lodged an application with Regional Development Victoria for the

construction of all abilities access public toilets; work is now ready to go to tender for Stage 1.

- Swifts Creek Hall has received funding to upgrade the kitchen and meeting rooms. The hall now has solar panels and batteries courtesy of RACV Solar and STAND wi-fi to provide reliable connectivity during power failures.
- Workshops are continuing on the seven priority areas identified in the ORCRA survey. See ORCRA website or www.facebook.com/ORCRAInc/
- TAFE Gippsland is visiting neighbourhood houses, community centres and industries across East Gippsland to increase access to free TAFE courses in relation to emerging industries and identified skill development.

Native timber harvesting position adopted

A formal position on native timber harvesting was adopted at the Council meeting on 16 August. It recognises the critical role that forest contractors play in the management of our forests and particularly the prevention and response to bushfire.

It is critical for the safety of our communities that access to timber harvesting contractors, their skills and equipment is maintained.

A position paper was developed in response to the decision by the Victorian Government to phase out native timber harvesting by 2030. Implications for

Helen Sheil
Place Manager -
Omeo District

(03) 5153 9442
0460 631 734
helens@egipps.vic.gov.au

Contact Council
5153 9500
feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au

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East Gippsland communities and the supply of forest products were considered by Council following presentations from a range of industry and environmental stakeholders. The position paper also outlines 10 concerns in response to long-term changes in the native timber industry and Victorian Government's 2019 Victorian Forestry Plan. To read more see the My Council, My Community newsletter at <https://bit.ly/3COohmU>

Snapshot of capital projects in 2022-23

\$6.46 million across the Omeo District:

Omeo Recreation Reserve upgrade netball and tennis court: Contract awarded and construction to begin shortly.

Omeo Mountain Bike Trails (stages 1 and 2): Stage 1 construction is underway with Stage 2 to follow. First trails expected to be open mid-2023. Other complementing projects, bridges, paths, toilet blocks are in the final design stages and will be constructed throughout 2023 and 2024.

Further funding for shire-wide projects that will strengthen future resilience include:
\$281,000 Static water tanks
\$845,000 Stormwater infrastructure
\$350,000 Gravel road renewal

Resilience planning

Resilience planning conversations were held in Omeo, Cobungra, and Anglers Rest on 10 and 11 August as part of the Omeo District planning process. Liza Gelt has been engaged on behalf of the Omeo Region Community Recovery Association to facilitate these conversations.

Attendees discussed practical insights to inform Community Resilience Plans and Local Incident Management Plans (LIMPs) for townships / localities across Omeo region.

Fruit tree grafting workshop

A fruit tree grafting workshop held in August was a welcome event for community and was one of many workshops held across East Gippsland.

The aim was for bushfire affected communities to come together to share food, stories, and learn from the wonderful Neil Barraclough from the 'Heritage and Rare Fruit Network'.

Neil shared his knowledge and skills on fruit tree grafting, planting, ongoing care, and provided people with free grafted fruit trees. These workshops were supported by East Gippsland Shire Council and funded in partnership with Regional Development Victoria and GIVIT.

Mountain Bike Destination Project

Common Ground has had a planning team on site since May to begin planning for construction. Trail alignments have been confirmed, and environmental, cultural and historical heritage inspections undertaken for each trail. Construction is set to start in September 2022.

Livingstone Park update

Tenders have closed for the shared pedestrian / bike bridge leading to the caravan park. Construction is scheduled to begin later this year. For more information or to view images of this project, please visit yoursay.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve Upgrade - project update

The working group has adjusted the project scope to a staged approach, beginning with netball and tennis courts and change rooms. An application has been lodged with Regional Development Victoria for the construction of all abilities access public toilets. Final designs and specifications for the netball/tennis courts and pavilion have been completed and tender documentation for Stage 1 prepared.

We recognise that an active and well-connected community is more able to work together particularly during times of natural disasters and - the recreation reserve is a critical staging space and facility in such times.

For more information regarding project updates please contact us at feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au

Community Conversations set to restart

Community Conversations are being held for those impacted by the 2019-20 Bushfires and other high-risk communities in East Gippsland. Facilitated by Council staff, discussions between emergency services, recovery agencies and community members have been an important step in hearing about experiences during the fires and identifying where things can be improved for the future.

Previously on-hold in the Omeo region due to COVID-19, it is anticipated that they can be undertaken in October to coincide with completion of Resilience Planning being undertaken by ORCRA. To learn more please contact your Place Manager.

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Omeo Justice Precinct

Conservation and protection work for the historically significant Omeo Justice Precinct courthouse buildings has led to formalising of arrangements between the Omeo Historical Society and Council's Assets team. Roles and responsibilities are being clarified in a Memorandum of Understanding that acknowledges the heritage status of the precinct.

With all structural components on both buildings now assessed, the full extent of issues appears evident, with works and timeframes to rectify issues currently being revised. External conservancy restoration work is nearing completion and architectural features are now visible.



Conservation works at the Omeo Justice Precinct Work has included the Old Courthouse, interior painting in the New Courthouse (middle), and the horse stables (bottom).

Omeo Region Health Preparedness Report

Omeo Region Business and Tourism Association Inc (ORBITA Inc) gained funding in Nov 2021 to investigate Health Preparedness in the Omeo Region. Mercuri Health Planning Group undertook face-to-face and online consultation with the following stakeholders: Ambulance Victoria, Omeo District Health, Swifts Creek Bush Nurse Centre, Ensay Bush Nurse Centre, and Benambra Neighbourhood House.

Representatives from each organisation and community members were invited to discuss what they felt they needed within their township and what current services they were able to provide. The final report is a public document and can be used by each agency to support further applications for funding for services as it was prepared by an independent consultant. ORBITA Inc thanks East Gippsland Community Foundation for funding this project.



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Foot and Mouth Disease

We recently moved to reassure the region's farmers, who were drought affected and bushfire affected, that we have been proactive in preparing for any impacts related to the overseas outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). Agriculture Victoria officers recently briefed Council on the risk FMD could have on Victoria's farming industry.

The East Gippsland Livestock Exchange is prepared for any FMD outbreak. The facility has a saleyard standstill plan and all agents who sell through the yards have been briefed on its detail. All livestock that are sold or go through the yards in transit are traceable via the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS), and staff are in the process of sourcing equipment such as foot baths and personal protective equipment to ensure they are fully resourced if an outbreak occurs.

With these exceptional biosecurity practices the facility is one of the safest and most bio-secure facilities in the region. We encourage all farmers to stay vigilant in their NLIS practices and ensure their farm biosecurity plans are up to date. For more information about Foot and Mouth Disease, upcoming workshops and the precautions you can take, please visit the Agriculture Victoria website: <https://bit.ly/3R1Xvf2>

International study targets East Gippsland farmers

International researchers have approached East Gippsland Shire Council to collaborate on worldwide research looking into the impacts of extreme events on agricultural producers.

Lund University, in conjunction with the University of Montana (United States), is surveying agricultural producers in the United States (Montana), Sweden (Skane), Bangladesh, Cambodia, Martinique and East Gippsland.

Dr Guy Jackson, from Lund University Centre of Sustainable Studies, said they are reaching out to specifically understand the experiences of East Gippsland and Wellington agricultural producers who have experienced extreme weather events, such as drought, heatwaves, floods and bushfires.

The opportunity to share lived experiences of some of the most challenging circumstances with international researchers is testament to what our farmers have been through, their resilience, and that East Gippsland is a valued contributor to this sector.

We encourage everyone on the land in East Gippsland to participate in this important short survey about experiences of extreme events.

The survey and related information can be accessed at: https://lucsus.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2iwTeMGBtZvbd0i

Hardcopy surveys are available at Council's customer service centres and libraries or by contacting our Agricultural Development Officer Kaylene Wickham.

This research survey follows Council's East Gippsland Farmer Survey conducted last year.

New grants are available

East Gippsland Community Foundation has two grants available with applications closing 9 October:

- Youth specific grant - maximum \$50,000; available to support local projects that strengthen youth recovery.
- Small community grant - maximum \$5,000; available to support events, projects, and minor equipment purchases.

Both grants are aimed at community groups, incorporated entities, and associations to support their long-term bushfire recovery. For further information on the grants, visit GiveToEastGippsland.org.au/grants/ or talk to your Place Manager.

To learn more about Council projects, decisions and news read our monthly [**My Council My Community**](#) newsletter on our website.

