Wild fish healthy in Upper Murray creeks

There’s good news emerging from the Upper Murray’s creeks.

North East Catchment Management Authority and Victoria’s Arthur Rylah Institute have been investigating the waterways and the health of fish in Cudgewa, Nariel and Thowgla creeks. Genetic samples were taken from all captured fish to compare future catches with natural recruitment versus stocking efforts.

All creeks showed some sign of recovery or survival of wild fish, including Brown Trout and Murray Cod. Numbers are extremely low, but the fish are there and in excellent condition.

All waterways appeared to have abundant food for fish, including macro-invertebrates, yabbies and shrimp.

Happy Sad Man

Following on from last year’s Are You Bogged Mate? sessions in Corryong, which shone a light on depression and men’s mental health, a documentary film, screening in Cudgewa on March 5, is changing the dialogue around masculinity and its vulnerability.

Happy Sad Man is about opening up and gaining insight into how we can better be there for ourselves, for our mates and our loved ones.

The film is touching, funny and tender while it explores hope, anxiety, joy and darkness. It laughs and cries alongside five very different men, including John Anderson from Cudgewa. It’s raw emotion will inspire you to hold the men in your life that bit closer. The 2018 film was produced by Australian filmmaker, Genevieve Bailey, who’s films have screened in 50 countries and won more than 30 awards.

Held at Cudgewa Football Club, the event starts with dinner at 7.30 before an 8.30 screening then Q&A with Ms Bailey. Tickets are free. To book your spot, go to www.happysadman.com.au/screenings.

Pic: John Anderson and Genevieve Bailey. Pic credit: Henrik Nordstrom
Get to Know Your Local Recovery Team

Council’s dedicated and passionate Recovery Team work together with Bushfire Recovery Victoria and supporting agencies to support you and your community.

Tony Irwin, Local Area Recovery Officer, Cudgewa, Berringama Lucyvale and Nariel Valley

Tell us a little about yourself
I returned to live and retire in the Upper Murray 18 months ago after having lived here 20 years ago. I moved to Wangaratta and then the Goulburn Valley leading up to retirement. With my partner Keran Stewart, I recently completed a home renovation and extension in Cudgewa- the place we now call home. Like so many of you, we experienced the horrendous fires of 2019/2020 and now want to contribute in any way we can for the recovery of this magnificent Upper Murray.

Tell us a little about your role
In late July, I started working at the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub as a Local Area Recovery Officer for Council. My role is to liaise closely with the Community Recovery Committees at Cudgewa, Berringama/Lucyvale and Nariel Valley. I also assist the residents of Colac Colac area with any needs that may arise or advice sought. We are often a sounding board for individuals, we follow up with grants for recovery, and focus on welfare and well-being.

What part of working in recovery are you most passionate about?
The thing I focus most on is to get everyone “over the line”. The fires and destruction impacted on everyone differently – hence making everyone’s recovery needs different. If we work now and into the future to address personal and community needs, with a united front, we will get there.

When things get tough, what drives you to keep going?
To beat the odds and get a favourable result for all involved. One of my football coaches once told me “you make your own luck”. That’s very close to the truth and we now have a chance to make our own luck and decide our new future.

What have you learned so far?
A fire event of this magnitude has left us searching for answers and ideas in so many areas. Some can happen quickly, and others of a more complex nature will take time. I have learned to identify priorities with committees and stay focused to achieve results. You can never say never, but you can plan and work to reduce the impact of future disasters.

Something you are proud of?
• Helping community members to help remove unnecessary pressures from them as they rebuild their lives and communities.
• The co-operative and tight knit group I work with at the Upper Murray Recovery Hub in Corryong. I can only describe them as passionate and selfless in their dealings with our community.
• We all have to be proud of so many people who did so much on the nights and days of the fires – great community spirit.
Second grant to help secure electricity supply and reliability

A joint plan to secure a renewable electricity supply in the Upper Murray, and reduce running costs, has received a $2.17 million boost. Upper Murray Inc (UMI) and Beechworth-based Indigo Power worked on the plan and were successful in their joint application for a Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grant this month through the Local Economic Recovery (LER) program. UMI Deputy Chair, Ian Cesa said they had already received a $800,000 Local Economic Recovery grant to cover solar panels on public buildings. This second grant will allow them to begin developing micro grids using community-scale batteries up to 300kWh.

Indigo Power, a community-owned energy company and certified social enterprise, will deliver the project in the Upper Murray over the next two years. CEO, Ben McGowan said the initial grant was about protecting power supply to critical assets like ambulance stations, banks, fuel and CFA sheds in the case of emergency. The second grant allows for a battery system with backup generator. “This allows us to think a bit bigger and recognise how we can improve electricity supply and reliability across the Upper Murray,” he said. “Being at the end of the line from Wodonga, it is vulnerable. This won’t solve the problem but will start addressing it. The aim is to manage the grid within a range. By sensibly managing electricity supply we may not be so reliant on grid upgrades.

“The Upper Murray community has done some really detailed thinking about what they want to do to secure the electricity supply. The end point, perhaps in 10 years, will be a really good micro grid, which secures supply, provides resilience and keeps money in this community.”

The $68.6 million LER program is jointly funded by the Australian and Victorian Governments and funds local projects vital for community recovery, stimulating the economy and boosting jobs and industry across bushfire-affected regions. The second round of the LER Local Community Projects grants opens in March. Learn more in the Focus on Grants section on page 7.

New children’s book helps to process feelings after bushfires

Inspired by real-life memories, there is a new book helping children understand and deal with bushfires. Author and Rural Fire Service volunteer, Jody Vassallo is from Tilba in NSW. She wrote *The Brave-bottomed Wombat* after her own experience answering questions from children about animals and what they do during a bushfire.

A percentage of the book’s sales will go towards Firesticks, an organisation that practices cultural burning using Indigenous land management techniques to protect against future bushfires. You can purchase the book at [www.chuffed.org/project/bravewombat](http://www.chuffed.org/project/bravewombat).

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**FUN FACT**

Did you know the peak pressure on electricity demand is at 1am when the off-peak hot water rate kicks in?
Red Cross’ ongoing recovery program

Recovery is a journey measured in years, not weeks or months. It goes beyond finances or rebuilding, and includes people’s sense of hope and self-worth, family security and community cohesion.

This is why the Red Cross recovery program will run to 2022 and beyond. Red Cross aims to help individuals cope with trauma and access support, and communities to heal and strengthen their connections during the recovery process.

Red Cross has a recovery footprint in 46 local government areas, including Towong Shire, with recovery officers living and working in bushfire affected communities and supported by trained volunteers.

Bushfire Recovery Officers, like Jessica Davison (pictured) who has been on the ground in Towong Shire for the past year, serve as eyes and ears on the ground. Each month they prepare a thematic analysis of emerging issues.

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“This enables us to advocate on behalf of the communities we serve, through targeted services, events or funding and working with Community Recovery Committees,” Jessica said. “Recovery takes time, we’re here for as long as it takes.”

You can contact Red Cross on 1800 733 276.

Your chance to give feedback

Upper Murray residents are encouraged to give feedback into Phase 2 of the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season.
The Athenaeum Art Project

Part one of The Athenaeum Art Project will bring new life to an old building. A mural inspired by the Lighthorse and its connection to the Upper Murray will be painted on the wall at Bailey’s Mechanical Service in Donaldson St, behind the Memorial and RSL halls.

Victorian street artist, Katie Eine will paint the mural, and veteran and war artist, Sean Burton is coordinating the team to bring it to reality. A QR code will allow visitors to find out more about the artist and the story behind the mural.

Among other materials, inspiration was drawn from a book, Light Horsemen of the Upper Murray, produced by teacher Steve Learmonth and students at Corryong College.

Further murals are planned around the Memorial Hall precinct along with resurfacing the car park to improve accessibility and safety to the RSL and Memorial Halls.

Buy From Corryong

A new website, which brings local businesses together and creates an online shopping experience for customers across Australia has been launched.

The website Buy from Corryong, offers easy access to local produce, homewares, gifts and more, all delivered. The project was funded by Ovens Murray Regional Partnership and developed in partnership with Startup Shakeup North East Vic and Towong Shire Council (www.buyfromcorryong.com.au).

CRC dinner

Community Recovery Committee chairs met for dinner in early February to connect with each other and identify opportunities to work together.

Each of them shared work they had done to date, their priorities and highlighted some of the recovery challenges their communities were facing. Conversations have also begun around events or activities to acknowledge 12 months since the bushfires.
**Have your say on Corryong CBD revitalisation**

Council is applying for funding to make upgrades to the Corryong Central Business District (CBD). We would like to hear what changes you would like to see included in any future upgrades.

Your feedback and ideas will be used to inform a draft design plan to submit with the funding application. If the funding application is successful, community members will again have the chance to provide feedback and help finalise the plans.

Share your ideas by taking the survey. Visit www.towong.vic.gov.au/survey, visit the Customer Service Centre in Corryong or call 1300 365 222.

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**Free property numbering**

Register before 1 April for free property numbering for all rural properties in the Upper Murray.

The small reflective signs, with a number and green band, will make it easier for emergency services to find rural properties at night and in poor visibility.

You will need to provide your name, address and property number, which may be different from your address.

Numbers are available to properties outside Corryong, Cudgewa central and Walwa central.

If you would like to order a sign for your property, call the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub before 1 April on 1800 518 222.

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**Municipal Recovery Plan**

Towong Shire’s Municipal Recovery Plan was endorsed by Council at the January meeting and is available to read on the Council’s website.

The plan outlines five core lines of recovery: natural environment and biodiversity, business and economy, health and well-being, building and infrastructure, and Aboriginal culture and healing.

The plan is a developing document with actions which will continue to be adapted in line with evolving community recovery needs and priorities.

An update to the Plan, scheduled to be delivered in early 2021, will seek to incorporate input and priorities from CRCs and the wider Upper Murray communities.
Local Economic Recovery (LER) Local Community Project Grants Stream (up to $2 million)

Round Two of the LER Local Community Projects grants will open 15 March 2021, with $14.6 million available for projects that support local recovery projects that build a sense of community pride and connectedness. BRV can discuss your proposal with you.

The project must directly benefit one or more local communities within a fire-affected region. The funding program is open to Community Recovery Committees, private businesses, industry groups, not-for-profits and LGAs. Closing 12 April, 2021.

The first round of the LER Local Community Project grants, announced late last year, included funding for key community projects such as refurbishing the Towong Soldiers Memorial Hall, upgrading the Walwa Services Memorial Hall and upgrading the courts at the Corryong Tennis Club.

Call 1800 560 760, email connect@brv.vic.gov.au or visit www.vic.gov.au/local-economic-recovery-program-bushfire-affected-communities to register your interest.

Murray PHN Grants open

After a disaster such as the 2019-20 bushfires, many people deal with memories and ongoing feelings by drawing on their own strengths, as well as the support of others, and will gradually rebuild their lives and achieve a sense of wellbeing again.

Another round of Community Recovery Grants from Murray Primary Health Network (PHN) opened on February 8 to support wellbeing. These grants are for community groups and community organisations to deliver grassroots activities to bushfire affected areas to strengthen social connectedness and support mental health and healing.

You are invited to apply for grants of up to $10,000. Applications close at 5pm on Friday, 12 March. For more information contact Greg Calder at Murray PHN at gcalder@murrayphn.org.au or phone 0417 620 859.

Gardiner Dairy Foundation Community Grants (up to $5,000)

This grant aims to strengthen small Victorian dairy communities, helping to build their capacity to deal with local issues, and enhance existing community infrastructure. Closing 16 March, 2021. Find out more at www.gardinerfoundation.com.au/communitygrants.

Border Trust Bushfire Relief Fund (up to $10,000)

Health and wellbeing; Programs, events and activities with ongoing community benefit; Programs that assist regeneration of land affected by fire; Events that connect bushfire affected communities. Next round closing 30 April 2021. Find out more at www.bordertrust.org.au/granting

COMMUNITY DIARY

If you would like to have your event included in future newsletters, please email recovery@towong.vic.gov.au.

March 6
Upper Murray Farmers and Craft Market
Attree Park, Corryong
9am - 12pm

Towong Cup
Towong Racecourse
Gates open at 11am

Tallangatta Show
Tallangatta Showgrounds
From 9.30am

March 7
Mighty Mitta Muster
Magura Park, Mitta
9am

March 28
2021 Tournament with a Difference
Walwa Golf Club
From 8am
Recovery Contacts

Support Hotlines and Websites
Speak to someone by calling:
Bushfire Counselling | 1300 514 811
Corryong Health | 02 6076 3200
Tallangatta Health | 02 6071 5200
Family Violence 1800 RESPECT 24/7 | 1800 737 732
Albury Wodonga Mental Health Triage
Line 24/7 | 1300 104 211
Lifeline Bushfire Helpline | 13 43 57
MensLine Australia | 1300 789 978
Beyond Blue | 1300 224 636
Standby, Support after Suicide 24/7 | 0439 173 310
Headspace | 1800 650 890

Or visit:
Australian Red Cross | www.redcross.org.au/stories/covid-19
Beyond Blue | www.coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au
Phoenix Australia Centre for post-traumatic mental health | www.phoenixaustralia.org/coronavirus-covid-19/

Towong Shire Bushfire Recovery Team
Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub
Phone: 1800 518 222 (Monday to Friday 9am-4pm)
Email: recovery@towong.vic.gov.au
Website: www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery
Facebook: facebook.com/towong.shire.council

Local Area Recovery Officers
If you are yet to speak to your Local Area Recovery Officer, reach out directly:
Tanya Aramini – Thowgla, Towong, Biggara | 0457 726 595
Kaye Nankervis – Walwa, Mt Alfred, Guys Forest, Pine Mountain, Tintaldra, Corryong | 0436 445 187
Tony Irwin – Colac Colac, Cudgewa, Berringama Lucyvale, Nariel Valley | 0427 869 019

Bushfire Recovery Victoria
Free Helpline: 1800 560 760
Email: connect@brv.vic.gov.au
Website: www.brv.vic.gov.au

Agriculture Victoria (Recovery)
Phone: 0428 975 728

About This Newsletter
This monthly newsletter brings together the latest updates and information to support Towong Shire residents and businesses through bushfire recovery. This newsletter is a joint initiative by Towong Shire Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria, with thanks to community members and supporting agencies including DELWP, Agriculture Victoria, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, CFA, Regional Roads Victoria and Parks Victoria.

Get In Touch
We are continually reviewing and improving the recovery information we provide and how we provide it. If you have feedback, or have a story you would like to share, call 1800 518 222 or email recovery@towong.vic.gov.au.

Subscribe Today
To subscribe to the digital newsletter, email recovery@towong.vic.gov.au. For past editions of this newsletter go to www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery.

Please note: All photos in this newsletter were taken in compliance with COVID-19 regulations.