

# Community Recovery



## Welcome

To the first edition of the Community Recovery newsletter, a joint initiative by Towong Shire Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria.

This monthly newsletter will help provide residents and businesses with updates and information on bushfire recovery.

## Coronavirus Impact on Bushfire Recovery

A State of Emergency has been declared for Victoria in response to the coronavirus pandemic. We are monitoring this situation and are taking steps to keep the community and our staff safe. Council has implemented a number of changes to services to help reduce the spread of the virus.

During this time, we want to reassure you that we remain committed to our focus on the recovery of the community from the 2019-20 Bushfires.

We know Coronavirus is the last thing our community needs, however we ask that you consider the needs of our most vulnerable residents at this time by following and adhering to the latest advice to help limit the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

We encourage residents to take every precaution to keep yourselves and your families safe during this time. For the sake of the vulnerable, please do the right thing and stay home. If you must leave the house for essential activity, please continuously and thoroughly wash your hands and

practise social distancing.

If you have ANY symptoms call the dedicated **Coronavirus Hotline 1800 675 398** and commence self-isolation.

Please continue to look out for each other. Instead of picking up the car keys to visit loved ones, pick up the phone instead.

To stay up to date on changes to council services as this situation progressed, visit [www.towong.vic.gov.au/Coronavirus](http://www.towong.vic.gov.au/Coronavirus) follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/towong.shire.council](http://www.facebook.com/towong.shire.council) or call (02) 6071 5100.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the reliable source of up-to-date information on the coronavirus. Phone 1800 675 398, follow them at [www.facebook.com/VicGovDHHS](http://www.facebook.com/VicGovDHHS) or regularly check their website for updates [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus)

## Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub

To help protect our staff and the community, the Upper Murray Recovery Hub will now be closed to visitors.

As always, Recovery staff and services are here to help Towong Shire residents. Contact them through:

**Phone: 1800 518 222 (Mon—Fri 9am—4pm)**

**Email: [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au)**

Bushfire Recovery Victoria is also here to help via their free helpline:

**Phone: 1800 560 760**

**Email: [connect@brv.vic.gov.au](mailto:connect@brv.vic.gov.au)**

## Community Meetings

Last week we began a series of community meetings to provide updates on recovery. These meetings covered recovery priorities, Community Recovery Committees, the Bushfire Clean-Up Program, Secondary Impact Assessments and more.

Due to Coronavirus restrictions, all future community meetings have been postponed until further notice. In the meantime, we'll be keeping you up to date in other ways, including through this newsletter. We'll post any updates about future community meetings to our Facebook page

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and in local papers. If you have questions please call the Towong Recovery Helpline on 1800 518 222.

## Bushfire Clean-Up Program

Grocon is undertaking Bushfire Clean-Up Program works in Towong Shire and across Victoria on behalf of the Government.

The clean-up program covers the demolition and disposal of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair by this season's bushfires (including residential homes and sheds, commercial and public buildings, and other out-buildings). This may include the removal of fencing, trees and vehicles but only where it is necessary for the safe clean up of destroyed buildings.

The Bushfire Clean-Up Program is free of charge for all property owners and is jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.

The Clean-Up is currently continuing with social distancing in place.

## Clean-up is Underway

- 194 properties in Towong Shire are registered
- 65% of these properties have been inspected
- 10 properties completed
- 16 properties currently in progress
- 5 crews are now working on the ground

## Clean Up Process

1. Register with Bushfire Recovery Victoria by calling 1800 560 760 or online at [vic.gov.au/bushfire-clean-up-program](http://vic.gov.au/bushfire-clean-up-program)
2. Receive confirmation of your registration from Grocon via telephone or email.
3. Grocon will undertake an inspection of your property where you'll complete a consent form.
4. Grocon will then be in touch with a timeline for anticipated works (atleast 48 hours prior to commencement).

If you wish to confirm your registration, or have queries about the clean-up program, call Grocon on 03 9631 8833 or via email at [victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com](mailto:victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com)

## Clean-Up Safety

Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Grocon have been working with Worksafe to ensure the clean-up will occur in a safe manner for residents, workers and communities. Getting the clean-up underway is a priority, but so is the need to ensure workers and locals aren't exposed to danger from contaminated waste and air.

All bushfire waste is classified as asbestos contaminated. Only Class A subcontractors and supervisors are certified and licensed to handle this waste.

Every day before works commence, sites will have to undergo air monitoring for asbestos particles. Grocon is engaging the closest available air monitoring services for this requirement.



Image: courtesy BlazeAid

## Local Subcontractors

A large workforce is required for the bushfire clean-up and Grocon is working to engage local subcontractors with local knowledge to deliver this work. There are a range of qualifications and compliance requirements to ensure the safety of contractors, property owners and the environment.

Grocon received over 400 expressions of interest from local subcontractors to work on the program. Under Victorian law, only Class A licenced subcontractors and supervisors can be engaged by Grocon to handle bushfire



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waste.

Contractors wishing to register their interest can visit [grocon.com/bushfire-recovery-2020](http://grocon.com/bushfire-recovery-2020), emailing [victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au](mailto:victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au) or calling 03 9631 8833.

## Financial Assistance

Financial support continues to be made available for households, farms and businesses in Towong Shire impacted by the recent fires. To find details of financial assistance and support available to you, visit Bushfire Recovery Victoria [www.brv.vic.gov.au](http://www.brv.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 560 760. Factsheets on grants and other assistance can be found at the BRV website: [www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-programs-and-initiatives](http://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-programs-and-initiatives)

## Support for Agricultural Producers and Small Business

Financial Counsellors are available from AgBiz Assist to provide advice on financial matters, available grants, help with applications and support accessing concessional loans. This includes applying for the \$75,000 primary producers grant and the \$10,000 small business and primary producers grant.

Call 1300 834 775 to arrange a free, independent and confidential over-the-phone appointment.

## Small Business Bushfire Support Grant

Towong businesses that experienced loss of income due to the recent Victorian bushfires are strongly encouraged

to apply for up to \$10,000 assistance thanks to the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.

To check your eligibility and to apply visit [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au)

## Wellbeing and Support

The Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program is available to Towong residents free of-charge. Case Support Coordinators can help you with:

- Discussing your needs and the next steps
- Information and support to access services, completing paperwork and accessing grants

You can access the Case Support Program by calling 1800 560 760.

## Are you Struggling?

Following the traumatic situation of the bushfires and now combined with Coronavirus, it is normal to feel scared, overwhelmed, anxious and confused. Anyone directly or indirectly affected by the fires can have these feelings.

If these feelings are affecting you, it is important that you seek help. It has been shown that early treatment of these symptoms can effectively help to reduce the risk of future mental health issues.

Bushfire Counselling | 1300 514 811

Corryong Health | 02 6076 3200

Lifeline Bushfire Helpline | 13 43 57

MensLine Australia | 1300 789 978

Beyond Blue | 1300 224 636

## Temporary Accommodation

Where people have lost their primary place of residence and require assistance to source temporary accommodation, BRV are working with the Department of Health and Human Services, housing assistance services and philanthropic organisations to assist to fill the gaps in local communities.

If you have urgent or immediate housing needs please call BRV's case support services on 1800 560 760 who can assist you coordinate your housing requirements.



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## Secondary Impact Assessments for Bushfire Affected Properties

Teams have now completed Secondary Impact Assessments of impacted properties in the Upper Murray.

A Secondary Impact Assessment is an in-depth assessment of how a property has been impacted by bushfire. The assessment, led by Council, includes checking the safety of partially or completely damaged buildings and issuing building orders, the condition of septic tank systems, water tanks, and identifying hazards such as asbestos. The work can also assist property insurance claims and clean-up.

For the last seven weeks dedicated teams have worked in all conditions to visit the fire-affected properties, completing all 400 secondary impact assessments.

Work to remove hazardous trees on private properties identified during the inspections is continuing.

If you have questions about Secondary Impact Assessments being undertaken on your property, please contact the Towong Recovery Helpline on 1800 518 222 or email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au).

## BlazeAid in Corryong

BlazeAid volunteers have been working to clear and build new fencing across Towong Shire, following the initial relief provided through Rotary Club Belvoir.

Since January 30th 2020, works at 30 properties have been completed with 80 properties currently underway.

195 farmers have registered. 67.3km of fencing has been cleared and 82.1km of new fencing has been constructed.

485 volunteers have worked a combined total of 2494 volunteer days. There are 80-90 volunteers at the BlazeAid base each week, coming primarily from NSW, Vic and QLD with 10 international volunteers on deck.

We cannot thank these volunteers enough for giving up their time to do such physical work, helping to rebuild the thousands of kilometres of fencing destroyed during the fires.



Photo: courtesy DELWP

While the BlazeAid camp in Corryong is currently closed in line with state and federal social distancing regulations, the team plan to return in Spring. For more information visit [blazeaid.com.au](http://blazeaid.com.au)

## Hazardous Trees and Road Access

Works to re-open the Benambra-Corryong Road have commenced, which includes the assessment and removal of hazardous trees, drainage repairs and critical road maintenance.

The Benambra-Corryong Road was significantly impacted by the Upper Murray - Walwa fire and since then the road has also been damaged by flash flooding.

Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) is working to undertake hazardous tree works, after which Regional Roads Victoria will commence road repairs and reinstate road related infrastructure. These works commenced between Stacey's Bridge in the north and Gibbo River Bridge in the south on 16 March, and crews are working to get this done as quickly as possible. We ask for your patience during this time as it is still too early to know how long it will take to get the road to a satisfactory level to reopen for use by the public.

For all road and track closures we recommend visiting [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au), and [www.traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au) for up to date information.



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## Firewood

Due to the fires and ongoing recovery works, there will be changes to firewood collection in the Upper Murray area. Many of the usual areas have been burnt and pose serious safety risks due to hazardous trees.

FFMVic are working to ensure that hazardous trees removed from State Forest are made available to the community for firewood as part of the Upper Murray Bushfire Recovery Program. Initially, wood will be available in areas that are not impacted by fires.

Please visit the website, or your local DELWP office or the FFMVic website before heading to a collection point to check it is open for the day.

For more information visit or call your local DELWP office on 136 186 or visit: [www.ffm.vic.gov.au/firewood/firewood-collection-in-your-region](http://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/firewood/firewood-collection-in-your-region)

## Planned Burning

Planned burning has recently commenced across Victoria and is conducted to reduce the size, intensity and impact of future bushfires. FFMVic is taking every opportunity to burn while conditions allow and it is safe to do so.

As a result of the impacts of the 2019/20 bushfires, the fuel management program has been reviewed in the Upper Murray area. While non fire-impacted districts will be a priority, burns in the Upper Murray District may still be implemented where there is high level of community support, for critical burns that reduce risk to communities or biodiversity.

During this time, you may see and smell smoke from planned burns, and some roads and parks may close. We understand that smoke from planned burns may cause concerns for those who have experienced trauma from the recent bushfires. We encourage you to reach out to the support services available to you if you are feeling overwhelmed by planned burns happening in your area.

To find out when and where planned burns are happening near you go to [www.vic.gov.au/plannedburns](http://www.vic.gov.au/plannedburns) or call 1800 226 226.

## Water

Residents with issues regarding access to drinking water should contact [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 518 222.

For stock water, the Tintalra stand pipe is accessible by calling Greg at Agriculture Victoria on 0428 975 728.

Access potable water through Towong Shire Council managed standpipes in Cudgewa and Corryong by contacting [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 518 222.

South East Water have a webpage dedicated to water supply in fire affected areas. Visit: [southeastwater.com.au/NewsEvents/Pages/Emergency-water-relief-program-QAs.aspx](http://southeastwater.com.au/NewsEvents/Pages/Emergency-water-relief-program-QAs.aspx) or call South East Water on 131 851 and press 9.

## Community Recovery Committees

Towong Shire Council is working in partnership with Bushfire Recovery Victoria and communities to understand recovery needs and to support community-led recovery planning.

CRCs provide an avenue for community members to have a voice throughout the recovery phase by sharing views and aspirations. While an interim recovery committee has supported immediate recovery needs, an ongoing Community Recovery Committee will be established.

The Committee will act as a collective, helping to guide local priorities and shape future direction, supported by a number of local action groups. The CRC will provide direction on community needs and priorities to the Municipal Recovery Committee which is co-chaired by Council and Bushfire Recovery Victoria.

To get involved in either your local action group or a Community Recovery Committee, email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 518 222.

## Local Area Recovery Officer's

Recovery Officers are now working together with communities across Towong Shire to help determine local priorities and key recovery initiatives, and to deliver on these activities.

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## Council Meetings

An Ordinary Council Meeting took place on Tuesday 3 March 2020, which discussed the recent bushfires and matters relating to planning and the rebuilding of property. Council passed a resolution to waive business registration renewal fees (including food premise, prescribed accommodation and health act premises).



At the March Monthly Council Meeting it was decided to waive fees for the remainder of the Corryong swimming pool season and extend the season. Given the number of closed days at the Corryong pool due to the bushfires, 2020 season ticket holders will also be provided with a free pass in 2021.

A further special meeting was called on 24 March to appoint a number of contractors. The minutes from that meeting will be available on the council website: [www.towong.vic.gov.au/about-council/agendas-minutes/minutes](http://www.towong.vic.gov.au/about-council/agendas-minutes/minutes) The next council meeting is scheduled for April 7, details to be provided in local papers and on the Council website.

## Rebuilding Farm Sheds

To assist in fast-tracking the rebuild process for farming communities, Council made an exemption to the building regulations and fees for unoccupied 'farm sheds' (Class 10A) built in fire-affected farm land.

To be considered, a basic application form needs to be completed together with a site plan. A planning permit and other regulations may still apply.

If you are looking to replace a farm shed please contact the Recovery Team prior to the commencement of work. A Council Planner will work with you to confirm what documentation and permits are relevant to your property. Call 1800 518 222 or email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au)

## Recovery Contacts

### Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub

Phone: 1800 518 222 (Mon—Fri 9am—4pm)

Email: [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au)

Website: [www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery](http://www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery)

### Towong Shire Council

Phone: (02) 6071 5100 (Mon—Fri 8.30am—5pm)

Website: [towong.vic.gov.au](http://towong.vic.gov.au)

Facebook: [facebook.com/towong.shire.council](https://facebook.com/towong.shire.council)

### Bushfire Recovery Victoria

Helpline: 1800 560 760

Email: [connect@brv.vic.gov.au](mailto:connect@brv.vic.gov.au)

Website: [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au)

Facebook: [facebook.com/BushfireRecoveryVIC](https://facebook.com/BushfireRecoveryVIC)

### Local Area Recovery Officer's

- Cudgewa, Berringama, Lucyvale | Contact: Jessica Jarvis 0408102095
- Walwa & Cross-Border, Mt Alfred, Burrowye, Guys Forest, Jingellic | Contact: Eden Cook 0429060239
- Towong, Thowgla, Corryong | Contact: Pete Dikschei 0428950739
- Tallangatta Valley, Mitta Valley, Biggara | Contact: Tracey Farrant 0419636956
- Nariel | Contact: Jenny McKoy 0407293907
- Tintalra, Tooma | Position Vacant 1800 518 222

## Feedback

We are continually reviewing and improving the information we provide and how we provide it. If you have a suggestion or feedback contact 1800 518 222 or email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au)

This is a summary of support available. More information about these and other grants can be found at [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) or by calling **1800 560 760**.

## SMALL BUSINESS

### Small Business Bushfire Support Grants

*For:* To assist with the costs of maintaining businesses, including covering salaries, rents and utilities.

*Who can claim:* Businesses and primary producers in Towong, Alpine and East Gippsland shires who have experienced a 40 per cent drop in revenue over a three-month period, compared to the previous year, as a result of the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* \$10,000

*How to apply:* Visit [ruralfinance.vic.gov.au](http://ruralfinance.vic.gov.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application.

**NOTE: Indirectly-affected businesses may apply for the above grant.**

### Small Business Bushfire Recovery Grants

*For:* Clean-up and reinstatement of small businesses and not-for-profits.

*Who can claim:* Victorian small businesses (1-19 employees) and not-for-profits that have sustained damage as a result of the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply. Farm businesses are not eligible under this program.

*Payment:* Up to \$50,000 in grants

*How to apply:* Visit [business.vic.gov.au](http://business.vic.gov.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application.

### Concessional loans

*Who can claim:* Small businesses and primary producers who have suffered significant damage to assets or significant loss of income as a direct result of the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Loan amount:* up to \$500,000.

*How to apply:* Visit [ruralfinance.com.au](http://ruralfinance.com.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

For more information about grants, clean-up, fencing, your community's recovery and other issues, visit [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 560 760



## PRIMARY PRODUCERS

### Emergency Bushfire Response in Primary Industries Grants

*For:* To cover costs of rebuilding primary production enterprises including disposing of dead stock, repairing or replacing fencing, rebuilding or replacing damaged on-farm infrastructure, and more.

*Who can claim:* Primary producers, including apiarists, directly affected by the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* Up to \$75,000 per farm business.

*How to apply:* Visit [ruralfinance.com.au](http://ruralfinance.com.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

### Emergency Transport Support Program for Primary Producers

*For:* To pay for emergency transport costs that directly address immediate animal welfare and safety needs.

*Who can claim:* Primary producers, including apiarists, directly affected by the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* Up to \$15,000 (excluding GST) per farm business.

*How to apply:* Visit [ruralfinance.com.au](http://ruralfinance.com.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

## HOUSEHOLDS

### Farm Household Allowance

*Who can claim:* Farming households experiencing financial hardship. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payments:* Various financial support programs and services are available. Payments depend on individual circumstances.

*How to apply:* Visit [business.gov.au](http://business.gov.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

[Continued overleaf]

## State Schools' Relief and Bushfire Hardship Grants

*For:* To help families cover the costs for school items.

*Who can claim:* Families from bushfire-affected areas who require assistance purchasing school items. Available to government and non-government schools. Discuss eligibility and payment with your school.

*How to apply:* Schools have been asked to notify families of the bushfire relief package and invite families who have been impacted to request a support package. Visit [education.vic.gov.au](http://education.vic.gov.au) or [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for more information.

## Emergency Relief Assistance Payments

*For:* Emergency food, accommodation, clothing, medication, personal items.

*Who can claim:* People whose homes are lost or inaccessible, or who cannot afford their immediate needs. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* Up to \$560 per adult and \$280 per child (up to a maximum of \$1960 per eligible household).

*How to apply:* Call the DHHS Emergency Relief Assistance Payment hotline on **1800 961 054** or visit [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au) or [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au).

## Emergency Re-establishment Payments

*For:* Clean-up, alternative accommodation, repairs, rebuilding (a principal place of residence), and replacing damaged contents.

*Who can claim:* Individuals or families whose home is uninhabitable for more than seven days because of a disaster. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* Up to \$42,250 per eligible household.

*How to apply:* Call the DHHS Emergency Relief Assistance Payment hotline on **1800 961 054** or visit [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au) or [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au).

## Disaster Recovery Payment

*Who can claim:* You must be from Alpine, East Gippsland, Towong or Wodonga areas and have been seriously affected by bushfire, such as serious injury or loss of a home. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* \$1,000 per adult and \$400 for each child younger than 16, plus an additional one-off payment of \$400 per child.

*How to apply:* Call **180 22 66**, visit [servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://servicesaustralia.gov.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

## Disaster Recovery Allowance

*Who can claim:* People who have lost their income as a direct result of the bushfires. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* The payment rate is based on your circumstances. You can receive up to 13 weeks cover.

*How to apply:* Call **180 22 66**, visit [servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://servicesaustralia.gov.au) or go to [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) for a direct link to the application page.

## Victorian Bushfire Appeal— Primary Residence

*Who can claim:* Residents in bushfire-affected areas whose primary residence is lost or damaged. Further eligibility criteria apply.

*Payment:* Funding from \$1,000 to \$4,500 will cover temporary accommodation costs, such as hotel bills.

*How to access:* Contact Bushfire Recovery Victoria on **1800 560 760** for further information.

## Red Cross Immediate Assistance Grants

*Who can claim:* People whose primary place of residence was destroyed, people who have spent 2+ days in hospital with physical injuries or mental health issues and homeowners whose homes are damaged and unsafe.

*Payment:* Grants are available of up to \$5,000, \$7,500 and \$20,000 each.

*How to apply:* Visit [redcross.org.au/grants](http://redcross.org.au/grants) or [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au).

For more information about grants, clean-up, fencing, your community's recovery and other issues, visit [brv.vic.gov.au](http://brv.vic.gov.au) or call 1800 560 760

