

# Towong Shire Community Recovery Newsletter

Edition 13 - March 2021



## Reseeding the Upper Murray

A major reseed program is set to boost economic recovery and pasture regeneration for primary producers in the Upper Murray.

A month after the fires, Biggara farmer and co-owner of Global Soil Regeneration, Stephen Whitsed identified the need to re-seed burnt pasture to assist rural recovery.

Stephen approached Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), which connected him with AgBiz Assist, a registered charity which provides agriculture and small business assistance services.

Now AgBiz Assist has secured a \$500,000 BRV Bushfire Recovery Grant to support local farmers to reseed and re-establish burnt pasture.

As well as restoring economic viability, reseed will help protect agriculture land from further environmental degradation after heavy rain caused flooding, erosion, and subsequent weed infestation.

AgBiz Assist Executive Officer Nerida Kerr said the project would provide farmers and landholders with vouchers or rebates to buy pasture seed from local produce stores and assistance to engage local contractors in a bid to inject further economic stimulus into the Upper Murray.

"Local contractors will be engaged to assist re-seeding pastures in hardships situations or where seeding machinery was destroyed by the fires," Ms Kerr said.

"That has a flow on effect to the economic wellbeing of the town."

The project has begun co-hosting a series of field days focusing on pasture regeneration, assessing pastures for re-seeding, sowing methods, species selection, seed blends to bolster soil carbon and carbon markets, and pasture management to provide farmers with information about long-term recovery of pastures.

Re-seeding with sustainable pasture mixes should significantly boost productivity and economic recovery for farm businesses, integral to the health of the local community.

The project is open to all farmers and holders of productive agricultural land in the Upper Murray whose properties were burnt in the 2020 bushfires.

Ms Kerr said 376 agricultural properties were affected by the fires, not all property owners would be ready or able to start re-seeding this season.

"AgBiz Assist will work with them and local groups such as Landcare, the North East Catchment Management Authority and Agriculture Victoria to help manage their land and prepare them for future programs," she said.

To register your interest, go to [www.surveymonkey.com/r/JLKM7KK](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JLKM7KK) or phone AgBiz Assist on 1300 834 775.

## APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECT GRANTS

Applications are now open for the second round of the Local Economic Recovery (LER) program's Local Community Project grants.

\$14.6 million is available for grants of up to \$2 million to fund projects that support local economic recovery and build a sense of community pride and connectedness.

The grants are open to Community Recovery Committees and other eligible community organisations, as well as private businesses, industry groups, local councils, higher education institutions, and Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal businesses.

Organisations wanting to apply should complete the online registration of interest through the BRV website - [www.br.vic.gov.au](http://www.br.vic.gov.au).

This will connect them with BRV staff to discuss their proposal before they apply.

Practical support is available to assist volunteer community organisations with their grant application process. This could include project scoping or even grant writing and volunteer community organisations can access that by getting in contact with BRV.

The LER program is just one avenue of funding available to support community recovery, our staff can provide assistance with identifying alternative funding options.

**Applications for the Local Community Project grants close on 12 April 2021.**

### 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.

**Bevan Klein, Manager Infrastructure**

#### Tell us a little about yourself

I commenced work with Council on January 12 this year as Manager Infrastructure for Recovery Projects and am really enjoying the challenge. I live in Corryong with my wife Mel and our dog Nuggets. My experience includes 30 years as Engineering Project Manager with Main Roads Queensland in Toowoomba, Roma and the Sunshine Coast, and 10 years with local governments in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory as a Manager, Director and consultant.

#### Tell us a little about your role

As Manager Infrastructure, it is my duty to deliver various projects, ensure that they are delivered to an acceptable standard whilst providing good value for money for Council and the community.

#### What part of working in recovery are you most passionate about?

Successfully delivering projects within Towong Shire for the various communities.

#### When things get tough, what drives you to keep going?

The satisfaction of knowing a successfully delivered project will bring a smile to community members faces. Knowing that I personally have made a positive difference in a small community.

#### What have you learned so far?

Since arriving in Corryong, I have learnt that the residents of this area are very resilient, proud, and welcoming people; that I work with a great crew at the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub; this is such a beautiful scenic area; and I cannot wait to complete some projects for the people of Towong Shire.

#### Something you are proud of?

I am proud of the community members who are chin up, rebuilding their lives and communities. I am proud to be a part of this Council and delivering projects within the Shire. On a personal note, I am very proud of my wife Mel and children Jennilyn, Jhon, Jeffrey, Dominee and Broderick, who make my life pleasurable.



## Green light for 54 community projects

There are now 54 more community projects with the green light after Round 2 of Council's Community Recovery Grants Program were announced in February.

The projects received up to \$5000 each, bringing the total value of Round 2 projects to \$253,464 and \$494,919 across both rounds.

Mayor David Wortmann said he was delighted to see the 80 applications represented more than those received in Round 1. Council officers will work with

those who were not successful to access funds from alternate sources before being reconsidered in Round 3.

Funds for the Community Recovery Grants came from the Australian Government's Bushfire Recovery Program (\$550,000) and the Victorian Government's Community Recovery and Resilience Grants (\$200,000).

The closing date for Round 3 applications is Friday 14 May, 2021. For program guidelines go to [www.towong.vic.gov.au](http://www.towong.vic.gov.au).

## Local Government Minister visits Towong Shire

Victorian Local Government Minister, Shaun Leane visited Corryong on 24 February to meet with Towong Shire Mayor David Wortmann, Councillors and CEO Juliana Phelps.

The visit included a meeting with the team at the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub (*below*) and Bushfire Recovery Victoria's Acting CEO Carmel Flynn, and gave Minister Leane grass roots insight into the recovery and rebuilding challenges facing communities.



Discussions focussed on the challenges small rural councils face with financial sustainability.

"We discussed the State Government's role in helping Council to continue delivering key infrastructure projects and services, and the need for additional funding to help small, rural councils play their role in emergency management," Mayor Wortmann said.

"We also talked about the need for additional State Government funding to help small, rural councils like Towong Shire to play their role in emergency management."

Minister Leane welcomed the opportunity to spend

time in Corryong.

"It was great to meet the hardworking staff at the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub and to learn about the support they are providing those impacted by last summer's devastating bushfires," he said.

Earlier this month, the Mayor attended the official opening of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) new office and depot at Tallangatta with the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio.

The new complex brings together the existing office and depot onto the one site, streamlining operations and providing improved services to staff and the surrounding communities. It will accommodate 19 office staff and a further 18 Forest Fire Operations Officers, and seasonal project firefighters.

At the opening, the Minister recognised the efforts of all agencies and community members involved in the response to and recovery from the 19/20 bushfires.

Indi MP, Helen Haines was also in the Upper Murray this month where she heard from Councillors about priority areas for 2021. In Tintaldra she congratulated members of Upper Murray Inc (UMI) on their funding boost for the Upper Murray Place-Based Power Plan. In Corryong she spoke with Corryong Health CEO and Upper Murray CRC chair Dominic Sandilands (*below*) about mental health service delivery and bushfire recovery.



## Over the coming months, we'll take a closer look at the 11 CRCs working towards recovery and renewal of Towong Shire's towns, villages and valleys.

Though the town was relatively spared from the bushfire's direct impact, Corryong sits at the centre of a region still struggling to come to terms with the devastation.

**Corryong CRC** was the last of the Upper Murray's Community Recovery Committees to form. It is one of 11 across Towong Shire, and chaired by retired schoolteacher, Cathy Ross.



She says the Corryong community is "a little undefined" and with lots of groups already operating before the fires, "it's a bit 'chicken and egg'.

Late last year, the committee surveyed the Corryong community and established an email list of 130 community members who wished to be kept up to date.

"That was great, but there are many more people we have never heard from, and we can only represent the views of those who have been in touch with us," Cathy said.

The survey has helped the committee develop five priorities for recovery and renewal of the Shire's largest town.

1. Support community gatherings and events and facilitate a coordinated approach to community gatherings through a community calendar.
2. Advocate for better emergency/relief infrastructure and input into the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.
3. Represent and inform the community on the development of a masterplan for the old Primary School site with representation on the former Primary School Site Project Steering Group.
4. Advocate for the development of industry and business opportunities including a Corryong Chamber of Commerce.
5. Advocate for the development of tourism opportunities and attractions, including the redevelopment of Playles Hill and a mountain bike track.

Cathy (pictured) says some things, like emergency relief and evacuation, aren't the committee's responsibility, but it's important they advocate and make sure the community knows what the plan is.

"And we don't need to run events, but we do have the means to support them," she said. "The big thing we can do there is push for a community calendar to gather what's out there from different sources. Community communication is an issue."

As the Community Recovery Committee developed its own priorities, members have actively supported the Corryong community by representation on the Upper Murray CRC and discussions with Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Council.

"It's vital the important projects, like redeveloping the old primary school site, have the time to get it right. We want to see things done well, with community support," Cathy said. "The big thing in any conversation is always the people - taking care of those who need looked after, connecting with each other.

"There's also the exhaustion. Everyone involved lived through the bushfires and was impacted. That is why small wins are important.

"Programs like Council's Community Recovery Grants allow community groups and individuals to do what they believe is important, with CRCs looking at bigger picture things.

"There are some brilliant people in this community prepared to work together for the common good."

You can contact Corryong CRC at [corryongrecovery@gmail.com](mailto:corryongrecovery@gmail.com).

*\*The current Municipal Emergency Management Plan is being reviewed to meet new standards under State Government legislation. It is expected to be released in August, 2021.*

## Truckies unite to help farmers

In a major transport industry support project, a fleet of trucks arrived in Corryong in February to deliver the second part of 42 donated shipping containers to fire impacted farmers.

The containers, donated by the Victoria International Container Terminal in Webb Dock, Melbourne, were brought to the Upper Murray in trucks donated by Victorian Transport Association member companies and driven by Michael Cahill (Cahill Transport), Colin and Kellie Rees (Ettamoogah Rail Hub), Danny Sebduck (DSN), Bill Smith (Hi Haul), Paul Freestone (Freestone's Transport), Dave Farvis (Nationwide Towing) and Vincent Arthur (L. Arthur Transport).

Peter Anderson, VTA CEO coordinated the project which resulted in 21 containers being dropped off along the Stock Route before being delivered on tilt trays across the region. Many of the sites were more than 40kms from Corryong and difficult to access after rain had washed out roads, but the drivers kept



**Pictured: Greg Wild receives a container from a volunteer truckie**

at their tasks in great spirits.

Philip Lovel, Non- Executive Director for VICT travelled with Peter to Corryong on a mission that suffered a few setbacks with COVID lockdowns but was eventually completed on a hot and dusty weekend.



## Cudgewa family fun day

Cudgewa School Park came alive last month as more than 60 people turned out for a morning of old-school fun and games, Nadia's coffee, Phil and Ken's BBQ and the calming sounds of local musos, Mountain Alliance.

According to committee members Ingrid Sharp, Marja Jarvis and Tracy Paul, it was great to hear kids' laughter and see the smiling faces at the park once again. The day was about more than just egg and spoon, and sack races. It was an opportunity for the Cudgewa School Park committee of management to present the draft plans for a reinvigorated park.

The idea for a pump track and to renew the park came about at the first Cudgewa CRC meeting last year. Leigh Hollands, from Terrain Trail, was on hand at the Family Fun Day to answer questions from the community who were able to give their feedback and provide input into the designs before a masterplan is finalised and funding sought.

**Pictured: Michelle Foxcroft**

## Feeding the masses

Since the early days after the fires, one group of people has returned to the Upper Murray many times, with their offering of fine Indian food to help the recovery effort.

At Cudgewa's Fire Preparedness Day in December, Talwindah Singh, Arjun Jayee, Jatinder Singh, Satnam Singh, and Lovejeet Singh arrived 10 minutes before the day's activities ended. After a quick introduction, and just 15 minutes, they were serving up a lunch of curry, rice, and fresh salad to more than 40 people.

After lunch there was time for a quick photo, and with the support of Cudgewa locals, the Sikh men held a small protest for the plight of Indian farmers before heading back inside to clean up. As quickly as they arrived, they were gone, in a flurry of handshakes, laughter, and waves and the gratitude of everyone they had met.



**Talwindah Singh, Arjun Jayee, Jatinder Singh, Satnam Singh, and Lovejeet Singh with Cudgewa CRC chair Melissa Whitehead, LARO Tony Irwin and Jan Craig**

gone, in a flurry of handshakes, laughter, and waves

## Short-Term Modular Housing

Short-Term Modular Housing (STMH) is an option available for those who lost their primary place of residence in the 2019-20 Victorian Bushfires. The program is flexible and aims to get people back on their land and in their communities.

### What is the design of a Short-Term Modular House? Can I choose my own design?

Standard designs come with one, two and three bedrooms, ranging from 30 to 50 square metres. The standard design of a Short-Term Modular House can be customised to meet needs such as mobility access requirements.

Susan Peterson and her parents Diane and Thomas Webb received a custom designed Short-Term Modular House in November 2020.



Pictured: Dianne and Thomas Webb, Susan's parents, outside their new Short-Term Modular Housing unit.

*'It was actually one of the easiest things of all the dramas I had to deal with. I just told our case worker what I needed for Dad and that's what they came up with' - Susan Peterson, STMH recipient.*

### What if I can't afford Short-Term Modular Housing?

There isn't a one size fits all when it comes to paying for Short Term Modular Housing. The program is designed to be affordable.

To date, more than 60% of people who have signed up for a STMH have met eligibility for lower hire rate. Short-Term Modular Housing will never cost more than 25% of your income.

### What if my site is difficult to access?

Even if your site is difficult to access, a Short-Term Modular House is still an option.

The Sternson family of Cobungra had their Short-Term Modular House delivered in eight individual pieces, one at a time, along a 4km track. Their home was assembled on-site over twelve hours. Two cranes and three trucks were used in the process.

*'It was all in the too hard basket before. The process with BRV and Windermere was seamless and easy' - Jeremy Sternson, STMH recipient.*

**The Short-Term Modular Housing program is open now. To get started, call 1800 560 760 to speak with a local Recovery Case Support Worker.**

## The Incredible True Story of Sparky the Wonder Puppy

Albany author Craig Sheather was listening to the radio in his car when he first heard about a little dog called Sparky.

Straight away, he thought Sparky's story would make a great picture book to help young children understand and talk about the traumatic bushfire events like those of last summer. He began writing a year ago and The Incredible True Story of Sparky the Wonder Puppy was launched last month to an enthusiastic crowd of Corryong College preps, where Sparky's best friend Logan goes to school.

Sparky came into the lives of Logan, his sister Summer, and parents Michael and Carolina Wild on Christmas morning, 2019. Logan was sure Sparky would be his best friend forever. But not long after Christmas, things took a dramatic turn.



A raging bushfire swept through Tintaldra where the family lived, and it looked like Logan and Summer had lost their little friend forever. Michael and Carolina battled to keep the flames from the house, but the fire was too big, and the family left to find shelter.

Sparky was so frightened; he ran off into the smoke

**Continued from page 6.**

and it was too late for anyone to go after him. Two days later, the family returned to find their home destroyed, the surrounding land black, and all their belongings gone. But then out of the lingering smoke appeared Sparky. His nose and whiskers were singed, his paws burnt, and he was thirsty and exhausted.

Logan and Summer soaked him in cold water, treated and bandaged his burnt paws and took him to see Dr Lauren at Corryong Vet Surgery. She told them his lungs were damaged and he would need to be carefully looked after. But after a few weeks Sparky was chewing shoes, fetching sticks and running around in circles again. The Corryong College preps listened to Craig

read the story and then met the real Sparky before every child was given a copy of the book to take home.

The Incredible True Story of Sparky the Wonder Puppy was illustrated by Eloise Short from the Blue Mountains and published by Australian Geographic with funding from Create NSW, ANZ Bank and the Joss family.

Copies are on sale for \$19.95 at Corryong Post Office. You can find links at [www.australiangeographic.com.au/product/sparky-the-wonder-puppy/](http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/product/sparky-the-wonder-puppy/) to help talk to children about bushfires and associated grief and trauma.

## FOCUS ON GRANTS

For information on these and other available grants, contact the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub on 1800 518 222 or email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au).

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

Open to community organisations with an ABN. 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. The next round closes on 30 April. To discuss your application call Glenys on 0447 684 506 or email [mail@bordertrust.org.au](mailto:mail@bordertrust.org.au).

### Victorian Bushfire Appeal Community Grants Program (\$4 million pool with no upper limit)

Community groups and organisations are eligible.

Projects need to be one off, community-led projects delivered by organisations within the next 6-12 months.

The appeal can fund bushfire relief/aid services, or Community Recovery and Reconstruction. There is no end date, but projects will need endorsement from a Community Recovery Committee. Go to [www.cia.communityenterprisefoundation.com.au](http://www.cia.communityenterprisefoundation.com.au) to find out more.

### Don't want to miss a grant opportunity?

Don't want to miss a potential grant but experiencing 'grant fatigue'? Subscribe to receive a fortnightly Community Grant Update from the Upper Murray Community Recovery Hub by contacting us on 1800 518 222 or email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au).

## COMMUNITY DIARY

If you would like to have your event included in future newsletters, please email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au).



### April 1-5

**Mitta Valley Art and Photography Show**  
Eskdale Hall in conjunction with Eskdale School fete

### April 3-4

**Recovery Quilt Show**  
Corryong Memorial Hall  
10am – 4pm

### April 3

**Upper Murray Farmers Market**  
Attree Centre, Corryong  
9am – 12 noon

### April 8-11

**Man from Snowy River Bush Festival**  
[www.bushfestival.com.au](http://www.bushfestival.com.au)  
for information

# 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:

**DHHS** | [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mental-health-resources-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mental-health-resources-coronavirus-covid-19)

**Australian Red Cross** | [www.redcross.org.au/stories/covid-19](http://www.redcross.org.au/stories/covid-19)

**Beyond Blue** | [www.coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au)

**Phoenix Australia Centre for post-traumatic mental health** | [www.phoenixaustralia.org/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://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](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au)

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

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/towong.shire.council](https://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, Tintalra, 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](mailto:connect@brv.vic.gov.au)

**Website:** [www.brv.vic.gov.au](http://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](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au).

## Subscribe Today

To subscribe to the digital newsletter, email [recovery@towong.vic.gov.au](mailto:recovery@towong.vic.gov.au). For past editions of this newsletter go to [www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery](http://www.towong.vic.gov.au/bushfirerecovery).

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