

# Community Recovery Newsletter

## Wye River Fire

COMMUNITY  
RECOVERY

WYE RIVER | SEPARATION CREEK

25 JANUARY 2016

*This is a weekly newsletter issued by Colac Otway Shire to provide the community key updates about recovery following the fire.*



### Victorian Government announces support

The aftermath of a fire that destroyed 116 homes is significant.

The health and wellbeing of the people affected and supporting communities has been the number one priority and concern. This is being well managed and the community is engaged, connected and involved.

There has been much destruction and the clean-up will be difficult and complex.

Colac Otway Shire welcomes last week's Victorian Government announcement of a \$2.25 million package to assist with this. This includes the demolition and clean-up of fire affected properties in Wye River and Separation Creek.

The package also includes a \$1 million Economic and Community Recovery Fund to support locally driven recovery priorities and local businesses and community organisations.

Once the clean-up has been completed, the focus will turn to planning and rebuilding and this will be

coordinated through a 'one-stop-shop.' This will provide community members with information and advice on clean up, planning and rebuilding, as well as general information and will streamline and fast track the process.

A further \$400,000 will go towards support for business mentoring, advertising and marketing, and support for events in communities affected by the Otway bushfires.

Further information will be available on the Emergency Relief and Recovery website [www.recovery.vic.gov.au](http://www.recovery.vic.gov.au)

### Wye River fire contained

The Wye River-Jamiesons Track fire is now contained which means 'the spread of the fire has halted'.

This is a significant achievement however; there will be hot spots and smoke from within the fire area, from time to time.

Firefighting resources will remain in place to extinguish the hot spots and to completely secure the fire.

Until containment, the fire burnt for 34 days in deep and difficult to reach forest and some hot spots remain around the western area of the fire.

This means firefighters are walking several hours to reach the fire ground each day and in some parts, are dropped in by aircraft.

Firefighters are manually tracking the fire and building containment lines using hand tools and equipment, such as bulldozers and excavators, and aircraft where access is possible.

Victorian personnel have been supported by crews from New Zealand and New South Wales who started returning home on Sunday. We thank all firefighters for their hard work and support.

It is also important to acknowledge the amazing resilience and leadership being shown by the Wye River and Separation Creek communities.

## From the mayor

It has been great to catch up with many of you personally over the past week. The attendance at the community meetings in Wye River last Sunday and in Melbourne on Thursday really is a testament to how engaged and united our communities of Wye River and Separation Creek are.

It is this engagement and strength that will help you come through this disaster stronger than ever and Council is committed to doing everything it can to assist.

There was more good news on the funding front last week with the State Government announcing a \$2.75 million recovery package to help the communities clean up and rebuild.

Since Boxing Day, the CEO and I have been speaking to the Premier and relevant Ministers about the assistance our community requires to help it rebuild quickly.

The one-stop-shop, which will streamline the planning and building process, announced last week is one of the items for which we have been advocating strongly.

We continue to be grateful for the ongoing support shown by the State Government and its agencies.

I am pleased to say the Council has also voted to provide a range of rate relief options for the fire affected communities. We have also announced that we will waive planning permit fees for those whose homes were destroyed in the fire.

Details of all of these assistance packages can be found within this newsletter and on the Colac Otway Shire website.

Finally, just a reminder to nominate for the Community Recovery Committee by January 29 if you are interested in playing an ongoing role in the recovery process.

Nomination forms are available on the Colac Otway Shire website or from the Nelson Road Recovery Centre in Apollo Bay or the Colac Otway Shire Offices in Rae Street, Colac.

- **Cr Frank Buchanan**

## From the Emergency Management Commissioner

The containment of the Wye River fire on Thursday, 21 January 2016 was a significant milestone and achievement.

The key issue we all need to focus on is looking after each other. Health and wellbeing is the most important priority for us all.

Helping each other is important, but also remember a visit to a professional health practice is also as important. Take time to help yourself.

We are different in how we react and behave. We all have experienced and continue to experience and see things differently.

Living in your community is now different as the landscape has changed and will never be as it was.

From destruction also comes opportunity. The opportunity for many will still be a 'cloud' but with the right help through the right processes, we will get through this post-emergency phase.

I have attended and been involved in discussions and community meetings, which have been excellent. A respectful and mature approach to a community problem has been the stand out to me.

A great plan before Christmas Day, a great plan on Christmas Day – now let us make the 'after' one to remember too.

Alongside the firefight, affected residents are in the recovery phase looking to rebuild their homes, their lives and their communities.

This will be an ongoing process and one that government and agencies – at a local and state level – is committed to supporting.

We continue to meet with affected communities to hear your concerns and ideas. This included at a forum held in Melbourne on Thursday, which was held in addition to the Wye River community meeting last Sunday. This allowed for those who don't live in the local area to share their thoughts and hear the latest recovery information.

The clean-up is huge – particularly from an infrastructure and rebuild point of view. But I am confident that we are on the right track and I would like to congratulate the Wye River and Separation Creek communities for their ongoing involvement and commitment to support this process.

- **Craig Lapsley**

## The fence and access to your property

The fence was put up after the fire and following assessments by independent experts that found potential risks in affected areas.

All homes in the high-impact zone have undergone detailed assessments looking at hazards including asbestos, geological risks such as landslips, tree hazards and fencing.

The priority has been to get as many people back to their homes as soon as possible, and to do that safely.

As of last Thursday, 21 January, the Shire and the Victorian Government had received all assessments. These reports are now being collated and looked at on a case-by-case basis and this is taking some time.

Council and the Victorian Government hope to be in a position to advise residents (with undamaged properties in the restricted zone) by the middle of this week, on whether it is safe to return.

Escorted tours for residents to visit their properties are continuing until 31 January 2016, when a review of the ongoing process and needs will be looked at.

Tours are between 10.00am and 4.00pm, seven days a week and must be booked with the Colac Otway Shire on 5232 9400 between 8.30am-5.15pm, Monday to Friday.

Recovery kits can then be collected from the road management point in Wye River, opposite the CFA shed. These include Personal Protective Equipment, which may need to be worn when visiting your property.

## Clean up efforts

The Victoria Government has announced it will coordinate and contribute funding to the clean-up and rebuild.

The clean-up and making roads and properties safe in Wye River and Separation Creek will be challenging - the terrain is steep with many dangerous trees and there is only a single entry point. The safest and most effective way to go about this is to appoint a single contractor.

Grocon has been appointed as the single contractor to oversee all works associated with clean up and demolition.

A comprehensive clean-up project plan will be developed to minimise disruption to residents, businesses and holiday makers and this will be developed in partnership with the community.

A registration process will be set up for local residents. Importantly insurers and residents will still have the option of pursuing their own clean up arrangements.

## Community Committee

Nominations are still open for the Community Recovery Committee, which will assist with the ongoing recovery process by ensuring that the community's views are actively integrated across all recovery activities.

It will be Chaired by the Mayor of Colac Otway Shire and supported by Council staff and Emergency Management Victoria. It will include six to eight community members.

The committee will meet fortnightly for 12 months.

The nomination form can be found on Council's website under the Bushfire Recovery heading.

Nominations can be made through the following channels:

Online: [bushfirerecovery@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfirerecovery@colacotway.vic.gov.au)

In Person: Bushfire Community Information Centre, Nelson Road, Apollo Bay Colac Service Centre, 2-6 Rae Street, Colac

By mail: Bushfire Recovery Co-ordination Centre, PO Box 283, Colac 3250

Nominations close 5.00pm, Friday, 29 January 2016.

## Rate relief

Colac Otway Shire Council has resolved that all ratepayers with properties destroyed by the bushfire (excluding those owning vacant land) will receive a 100 per cent waiver of the current financial year's council rates and charges.

Properties - excluding vacant land - that were not destroyed by the fire and are located within the high impact zone (enclosed by the fence) in Wye River and Separation Creek will receive a 50 per cent waiver of their current financial year's council rates and charges. To qualify for this waiver the property will need to meet the following criteria:

- If the property is your principal place of residence, then the 50 per cent waiver of rates and charges will apply if access has been restricted at anytime from 25 December 2015.
- If the property is not your principal place of residence, the the 50 per cent waiver of rates and charges will apply, only if access is restricted after 20 January 2016.
- The 50 per cent waiver of rates and charges does not apply to vacant property.

General Rates, the Municipal Charge and the Waste Management Charge are included in the waiver and council is advocating to the Victorian Government to have the Fire Service Property levy waived for destroyed properties.

If you have already paid your current financial year rates and charges, in full or in part, and qualify for the full or 50 per cent waiver of rates and charges, then

you will have the option of maintaining a credit on your rates account or receiving a refund of amounts paid.

If your property is in Wye River or Separation Creek but was not destroyed, and access has not been restricted, your rates and charges payments will be deferred to 30 June 2016 and no interest charges will apply up to this date. Ratepayers who have experienced financial hardship as a result of the fire can make an individual application to council for assistance.

### Planning permit costs

Colac Otway Shire has announced that it will waive planning permits costs for all homes destroyed in the Christmas Day fires. The Victorian Government has also announced that it will fund a site-wide geotechnical report, which will reduce costs for residents wishing to rebuild.

### Disaster Legal Help Victoria

Disaster Legal Help Victoria can provide fire affected residents with free legal information and referrals in relation to a number of legal issues including insurance, emergency and crisis assistance payments and replacing lost or destroyed documents.

If you are in need of legal assistance, call Disaster Legal Help Victoria's free helpline on 1800 113 432. The phone line is open Monday to Friday 8.45am to 5.15pm. Or visit [www.disasterlegalhelp.org.au](http://www.disasterlegalhelp.org.au)

### Potential rain impacts

Bushfires have a significant impact on the landscape due to the loss of vegetation.

Fire affected trees can become unstable and more prone to falling in wet and windy conditions. There is often increased runoff from fire-hardened soil, leading to flash flooding. Large amounts of debris from the fire can be washed downhill during a flash flood, and the floodwater may contain contaminants from broken septic tanks.

If you are back in your home in a fire affected area, be prepared for the wet weather by heading to <http://www.ses.vic.gov.au/>

### Emotional support is available

It is normal to have strong reactions following a distressing or frightening event.

Emergencies create a high level of stress that can have a significant effect on emotional health and wellbeing. You may feel exhausted and emotional and

these reactions can occur hours, days, weeks or even months after the event.

Dozens of Red Cross and Victorian Council of Churches volunteers have been helping distressed people as they return to their properties, and checking in by phone to ensure they have access to the support they need.

Another option to receive emotional support is to visit with your local GP or health service provider who can tell you what support is available in your local area.

Or you can call Lifeline on 131 114 and Beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or visit the Better Health Channel [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery).



### More information and staying informed

A specialised bushfire recovery line has been established to assist with enquires and requests arising from the fire. Please call the Colac shire office on 5232 9400 between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday and between 10.00am and 4.00pm over the weekend. You will be prompted to 'dial 1' to access the recovery line.

You can like the Colac Otway Shire Facebook page for updates or go to <https://www.facebook.com/colacotwayshirecouncil/>

A Community Recovery Information Centre is open at 69 Nelson Street, Apollo Bay. Opening hours: 10 am - 4 pm every day.

Representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches and local council are in attendance.

You can also keep across what is happening with the fire and the latest warnings and advice by visiting [emergency.vic.gov.au](http://emergency.vic.gov.au), tuning into Victoria's emergency broadcasters or by calling the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on freecall 1800 240 667. Download the Fireready app or follow VicEmergency on Twitter (#vicfires) or Facebook.