

Community Recovery Newsletter

Wye River Fire

COMMUNITY
RECOVERY

WYE RIVER | SEPARATION CREEK

1 FEBRUARY 2016

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



Moving forward with recovery

The clean-up process has commenced with the appointment of Grocon as the managing contractor to oversee works associated with the clean-up of fire affected areas and properties.

All properties impacted by the bushfires are eligible to have their properties cleaned as part of the coordinated Grocon contract. If there are parts of your property that were affected by the fire, you can register to be part of the clean-up. This includes houses, out buildings, sheds, fences, trees etc. that have been damaged in the bushfire.

The impact of the bushfire on the environment is immense and an important aspect of the clean-up is to safely remove items and debris that may continue to damage the environment such as treated timber, asbestos and other building materials.

The cost of the clean-up will be covered through individual insurance policies and the State and Commonwealth governments.

Residents in the fire affected area have been contacted to give their consent to Colac Otway Shire to release their contact details to Grocon. This, as well as registering using the Bushfire Recovery Information Line, will enable Grocon to get in touch with each property owner and discuss their clean-up needs.

Property owners, their insurers and Grocon will work together to develop a specific clean-up plan for their property, taking into consideration neighbouring properties and the broader township.

The clean-up registration process is critical and property owners are encouraged to register and discuss their needs with Grocon. Registering does not mean you authorise for the clean-up to take place, you are simply agreeing to have the discussion around what is needed on your property.

If you choose to proceed with the Grocon clean-up, you will meet with Grocon staff who will arrange a site visit with you to determine your specific needs. If you want to look through the debris, that can be arranged as part of the clean-up process.

If you decide not to participate in the Grocon clean-up, you will need to arrange your own clean-up. Colac Otway Shire will liaise directly with you regarding your Legislative requirement to make your property safe. This may involve a building order which will determine a timeline by which you must have cleaned up your site. If this clean-up is not completed by the set date, your property will be cleaned by Grocon and you will be charged for the costs. For more information, contact the Bushfire Recovery Information Line on **5232 9400** and select option 1.

Let's Band Together fundraiser a success

On Saturday 30 January, more than 2000 people gathered to support the Wye and Sep Let's Band Together fundraiser at the Wye Beach Hotel in aid of permanent residents affected by the Christmas Day bushfires.

There was live music, provided by 12 bands, good food and several big prizes up for auction on the day.

The event raised approximately \$60,000, and organiser Mark Stokes thinks it will come in a few thousands higher after the final count.

"Paul Greene, the owner of the pub was very supportive and the other members of the committee were instrumental in getting this off the ground," Mark said.

The event was organised by the Wye River & Separation Creek Bands Together group and the money will be used to help support permanent residents of Wye River and Separation Creek who lost their primary homes in the Christmas Day fires.

From the mayor

It has been a busy weekend in Wye River and Separation Creek! The Wye and Sep Bands Together event on Saturday was a huge success raising more than \$60,000 for the community. Congratulations to the organisers and a huge thank you to everyone who attended. This is another example of the community working together to move forward after the fires.

On Sunday, I, along with many others including Lisa Neville, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Craig Lapsley, Emergency Management Commissioner, Colac Otway Shire CEO Sue Wilkinson and various staff members from the Shire and Government agencies involved with the recovery, met at the Surf Life Saving Club for a Community Recovery Meeting. Attendance was high and it was great opportunity to discuss the next important phase of our recovery – the Clean-up.

Karl Sullivan from the Insurance Council of Australia, Tim Bradford from Major Projects Victoria and Brian McAdam from Grocon spoke about the Clean-Up and how things are coming together, how to engage in the process and the benefits of participating in the clean-up for property owners.

As a community, it is vital that we work together through this clean-up phase for the benefit of the entire community. I encourage all property owners to discuss their clean-up needs with the Grocon team and their insurer so that the complexity and enormity of the project can be accurately and fully assessed.

- **Cr Frank Buchanan**

From the Emergency Management Commissioner

February brings the pace back to normal as school returns and the summer holidays are over for most people.

A community event called 'Wye & Sep Bands Together' was held in Wye River on Saturday and was a huge success and thank you to all of those who attended. This involved 11 bands putting on a day of free music and entertainment to raise money for those who lost their homes in the fire.

The affected residents continue to be engaged and supportive of the recovery process and working together. This was evident at Sunday's community meeting, which was a chance for residents to hear from and talk to the Insurance Council of Australia and Grocon about issues relating to insurance and the clean-up.

Grocon has been appointed to undertake the clean-up in Wye River and Separation Creek. This was due to their experience in the 2009 bushfires and it was fantastic to have Grocon along to Sunday's meeting to

give some practical examples of how the clean-up will take place.

Currently, Grocon is undertaking assessments to get a feel for the site and the job ahead. We know this will be complex and a clean-up plan is being developed to ensure as little disruption as possible to residents, businesses and holiday makers. However, we all know this is a big task and unfortunately there will be some disruption.

More than 50 per cent of residents have registered for the Grocon clean-up to date and this is a great result.

The fence that was installed in the fire affected area for security reasons has now been removed. A second fence that encloses the burnt area still remains and we will continue to look at when and how this can be removed.

Your mental, physical and medical health is critical to your resilience. Look after yourself and others. If you need support, support is available.

- **Craig Lapsley**

Fence update

Over the weekend, the State Government authorised the removal of some of the temporary fencing, which was located at the front of a number of properties in Wye River and Separation Creek.

The fencing in front of properties in Harrington Street and Stanway Drive in Separation Creek is being removed, and the fencing in front of some properties in Wallace Street, The Boulevard, and the lower end of Karingal Drive in Wye River is also being removed. These portions of fencing should be completely removed by mid-week.

Temporary fencing and roadblocks will remain in place for the short term to restrict access to the fire affected areas due to public safety concerns arising from the bushfire.

Access to these areas will be constantly reviewed by the Government as the site clean-up progresses to ensure the safety of all concerned.



Community recovery committee

Nominations for the Community Recovery Committee have been received, and are currently being reviewed. The Community Recovery Committee will be chaired by the Mayor of Colac Otway Shire, and supported by Council staff and Emergency Management Victoria. The Committee will meet fortnightly for 12 months and they will assist with the ongoing recovery process, ensuring that the community's views are actively integrated across all recovery activities. The Committee members will be announced in the near future.

Help for businesses

Businesses affected by the Wye River - Jamieson Track fire can seek the assistance of a Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS), courtesy of Small Business Victoria and the Victorian Government.

If your business has been affected, an application form can be downloaded from www.sbms.org.au or by calling the Victorian Business Line on 132 215. On receiving your application, a mentor will contact you directly to see how they can assist.

The Victorian Government has established the \$1 million Great Ocean Road Economic and Community Recovery Fund. The Fund will enable implementation of medium to long-term recovery priorities and be informed by a recovery plan.

Detailed assessments will be undertaken to look into the impact and consequences which will inform the development of initiatives to assist the local economy. Applicants may include councils, community groups, and incorporated associations, government agencies such as committees of management or other similar bodies.

For more information on support for businesses, you can head to:

www.business.vic.gov.au

www.tourism.vic.gov.au

www.consumer.vic.gov.au

Insurance update

Karl Sullivan from the Insurance Council of Australia attended the Community Recovery Meeting to provide an update on the insurance process.

As the community moves from the relief to the recovery phase, the insurance process continues to move forward. More than 1200 claims have been lodged so far and it is expected that the value of the claims will be between \$150-200 million. We encourage anyone who hasn't yet contacted their insurer to get in touch and discuss their claim. There are 28 different insurance brands and a wide range of

policies, so it is also important to understand that your policy could be quite different to your neighbour's.

When a catastrophic event like a bushfire or flood occurs, all of the CEOs or Heads of insurance from each of the insurance companies involved form an Insurance Taskforce. If you have concerns or are not happy with how your claim is being processed, you can contact the Taskforce on 1800 734 621 for advice and they can then put you in touch with the Head of Claims from your insurer.

As we move towards the clean-up stage, it is important to discuss the clean-up process with your insurer. It is also important to remember that building costs increase, on average, by 6 per cent each quarter, so it is critical to factor this into your rebuilding timeframe if you are choosing to rebuild at a later stage.

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

Impacts from weather

The changes to the landscape following a bushfire are significant. Fire affected trees can become unstable and more prone to falling in wet and windy conditions. There is often increased run off from fire-hardened soil, possibly 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 things like broken septic tanks or burnt materials.

You can also:

- Tune in to ABC radio, commercial and designated radio stations or Sky News TV.
- Download the FireReady App – set up 'watch zones' to allow for push notifications for incidents and warnings.
- Add www.emergency.vic.gov.au to your favourites list on your internet browser.
- Enter the Victorian Bushfire Information Line 1800 240 667 and the Flood and Storm Information Line 1300 842 737 into your phone contacts.
- Connect with CFA and VICSES Twitter and Facebook accounts.

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.

Alternatively, 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.

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 Otway 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 www.facebook.com/colacotwayshirecouncil/

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

Colac Otway Shire is working to finalise arrangements for the 'One Stop Shop' which will include a presence at the municipal offices of one of the inner city councils. This is designed to assist home owners who reside in Melbourne.

There is a wide range of information available about the Bushfire Recovery process on the Colac Otway Shire website at www.colacotway.vic.gov.au.

If you have specific questions, please e-mail bushfire.recovery@colacotway.vic.gov.au or phone the Bushfire Recovery Information Line.