

Community Resilience Newsletter

Wye River Fire

COMMUNITY
RESILIENCE

WYE RIVER | SEPARATION CREEK

26 APRIL 2016

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

Victorian Building Authority at the One Stop Shop

Residents researching information about building materials, construction to meet BAL ratings and how these apply to their house design and site will be able to access assistance from the Victorian Building Authority.

VBA experts will be available via teleconference and in person (by appointment) at One Stop Shops and can provide tailored information about rebuilding that is specific to individual designs.

This will include advice on building products, materials, and construction based on the design to meet BAL ratings.

To make an appointment or find out more, contact the Bushfire Recovery Information Centre on 5232 9400 and select 1.

Community Resilience Committee Planning Workshop

Last Friday, the Community Resilience Committee met for a day long planning workshop to discuss the Initial Resettlement Plan for Wye River and Separation Creek.

This initial Resettlement plan focuses on the major project areas of: Community Connection and Wellbeing; Planning and Building; Flora, Fauna and Beachscape; Business and Tourism; Infrastructure; and Clean-up.

The CRC will be meeting again on 7th May to further discuss implementation of the many projects and opportunities for wider community input.

The initial plan will be available on WyeSep Connect later this week.

What's On

Thursday 5th May

Community Meeting

5:30 – 7pm Richmond Town Hall

Saturday 7th May

Community meeting

10:30am – 12 noon Wye River SLSC

12 noon Community Catch-up

Survey works under way

The Surveyor general has commission is a local surveyor to identify surviving ground survey marks and reference points in local properties.

Using historical information obtained from title surveys recorded by Land Victoria, the surveyor is recovering and recording as many surviving ground survey marks (datum point) as possible.

These reference marks will inform future surveying work being conducted by licensed surveyors engaged by property owners.

While this project is expected to be finish by 1 June (depending on access arrangements as part of Grocon's clean-up efforts), owners will still need to engage a licensed surveyor to re-establish the boundaries of their own properties.

These surveys will be required to form part of a planning permit application, or as part of design and construction work during the building process.

Title boundary surveys performed by licensed surveyors may be carried out at any time, once Grocon has advised that it is possible and safe to do so.

It is important to note that if any surveys are undertaken before the Government's project is completed, there is an increased likelihood that the reference marks required to assist in the survey will need to be recovered and identified by the consulting surveyor, which may duplicate effort and incur additional costs to the landowner.

From the Mayor

On Friday, the Community Resilience Committee met for a day long planning workshop to discuss the initial Resettlement Plan for Wye River and Separation Creek.

Project leaders from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Major Projects Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services and Colac Otway Shire presented to the Committee on the major project areas detailed in Plan.

The Initial Resettlement Plan is a 'live' document which will continue to evolve as the resettlement process continues to unfold.

The Initial Resettlement Plan identifies and implements a range of actions that are being delivered, now and into the future.

One of the significant discussions during the workshop was to further investigate ways we can work with the community to ensure that your needs are being met.

The community will have the opportunity to input into their future and will be essential in developing a shared vision for the future of the settlements. They will also influence priorities

It is important that Council and the State keep going on delivering the activities outlined in the Plan and not stop what they are doing to undertake wide consultation.

Some of the actions of the Plan are underway or have been completed, some are statutory responsibilities or essential to manage risks to public safety and others are or will be consulted on separately.

The Community Resilience Committee is there to represent you and you can share your thoughts, ideas, concerns and suggestions in a range of ways.

You are invited to phone or e-mail the Bushfire Recovery Information Centre, add your input on WyeSep Connect and connect via Facebook and attend community meetings

I continue to welcome feedback from the Community and we will continue to work together to resettle and reconnect Wye River and Separation Creek.

- **Frank Buchanan**

From the Emergency Management Commissioner

I had the pleasure of spending last Friday with the Community Resilience Committee (CRC) and program leads from multiple departments, agencies and the shire.

It was great to have the time to discuss the resettlement of Wye River and Separation Creek, and how we can best work with the community to achieve a positive outcome for all involved.

Resettlement takes time and there are many phases and aspects to consider.

The Leadership Team is looking at options to assist the CRC to support community understanding of the resettlement program, its progress, the challenges and the opportunities.

We also had the opportunity to hear from Dr Kevin Tolhurst, Associate Professor, Fire Ecology and Management, University of Melbourne and Justin Leonard, Bushfire Expert, CSIRO.

They are considering the feasibility for an Asset Protection Zone and presented briefly on the complex options of increasing community resilience and reducing direct fire impact.

Further information about their work will be presented to the community in the next round of community meetings and via the WyeSep Connect website.

Following feedback from the community, the WyeSep Connect website has been updated to include a section dedicated to the CRC, and a separate forum for community members to use as a discussion zone.

Hopefully this will provide you with the space to openly discuss your resettlement, and will act as a conduit to further build community connections.

On Friday night I also had the pleasure of joining the Wye River CFA Brigade and community volunteers for a dinner and chat.

The role these community members have played following the fires cannot be underestimated, and I would like to thank them for inviting me to be part of their special night.

- **Craig Lapsley**

Wellbeing and Personal Support

Dr Rob Gordon is a clinical psychologist who has been a consultant to the Victorian Government's Department of Health and Human Services since 1989 for disaster recovery.

Over the next few weeks he will share insights into the emotional journey many affected residents of Wye River and Separation Creek currently face and may encounter in the future.

He will also explore why you may be feeling the way you do and provide tips for your emotional recovery. This is the first article in Dr Gordon's five part 'Travelling the Road to Recovery' series.

The Wye River and Separation Creek fire has got a number of interesting characteristics that are somewhat different to many of the other fires we've been involved in in recent years.

Although it was a very violent and dangerous fire, the community evacuated, and so that spared the community from the high levels of trauma that is often experienced when people feel their lives to be in immediate danger.

There may have been some people in that situation, but we understand that most people left before that.

The second characteristic is that although there was a very large loss of houses in the community, many of them were second dwellings.

They were holiday houses, and I think this is a really important characteristic, because holiday houses are often a very important and long-standing part of people's lives and family histories.

While the loss is not so acute in terms of material property; often the loss is very significant in terms of history, identity, past memories and a lot of less tangible things.

We therefore have a significant number of people who have indeed lost their principle place of residence, but a large number of other people have had varying levels of other kinds of loss.

This makes for a more complex community experience.

Like many bushfire-affected communities there were areas that were completely destroyed, and other areas that were untouched.

There's no logical reason to that. It appears to be absolute chance.

However we know from other events that a tension can develop between those differently affected

groups and it's very important that we see this as an entire community event.

You don't have to have lost a house to have your life profoundly affected by this fire, because it has affected the whole community.

People may well have been through experiences where they were reliably informed that they probably had lost their house, to find out they hadn't.

That's a very disturbing experience, and so therefore I think it's most important that people – even if they don't normally get involved in community events – try to come out and engage and participate.

This helps hold the whole community together, and the community is its best resource provided it's supportive.

Don't underestimate your ability to actually do something constructive in the community to help your friends and neighbours.

People who are experiencing high levels of distress should visit with their local GP or health care provider. If urgent support is needed please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or visit betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

Clean-up heading to half way mark

The Clean-up continues to progress well with almost half of the registered properties now cleaned up.

Grocon has completed 78 properties and minor works continue in Separation Creek to reinstate roads and ensure all bushfire affected trees are made safe.

The majority of properties in Iluka Avenue have now been cleaned and it is anticipated that tree works in Iluka will be undertaken within the next fortnight.

Owners of completed properties will be contacted by Grocon in the near future and issued environmental certification and a formal confirmation of completion.

If any property owners have any questions, please contact the Bushfire Recovery Information Centre on 03 5232 9400 (select 1) or visit Grocon's on-site team, located near the Wye River CFA Station.

Power restored in Separation Creek

Power has now been restored to Separation Creek and the last sections of fence will be removed shortly.

Powercor is still working to restore power in Wye River.

Water Quality Warning in Wye River

This unseasonably warm weather is perfect for a swim. However, residents and visitors are reminded to take care in the water, particularly in the Wye River.

Colac Otway Shire continues to conduct water quality testing in Wye River and EPA is conducting water quality monitoring at Wye River following the Christmas Day Bushfires to assess risks to water quality.

The initial monitoring indicated that water quality was good and there was no impact from the fires, however EPA and Colac Otway Shire continue to advise people **not** to swim in the lagoon due to poor water quality.

There may be a higher risk of illness to swimmers from increased bacterial levels in the water which can lead to gastroenteritis.

EPA always advises people to avoid swimming near stormwater or river outlets 24-48 hours after rain or in areas where water is discoloured, or debris, oil and scum is visible.

If you have been swimming in the river and you are feeling unwell, you should visit your Doctor.

EPA and Colac Otway Shire will continue to monitor the affected water and investigate contamination causes.

Warning signs will be removed when it is safe to swim in this area and residents advised.

Economic and Community Recovery Grant Applications open

The Great Ocean Road Economic and Community Recovery Fund will help attract more visitors back to the region, support businesses and help grow economic and community resilience.

Businesses and community groups in Wye River and Separation Creek are encouraged to apply for grants for future projects.

Eligible projects may include:

- New tourism promotion opportunities;
- Events that encourage increased visitation;

- Small infrastructure projects, particularly those that enhance the visitor experience;
- Community-led recovery initiatives supporting ongoing sustainability of key community organisations in Wye River, Separation Creek and Kennett River; and
- Other projects that stimulate economic activity in the Region

To discuss your idea, phone Regional Development Victoria's Geelong office on 5215 6015 or visit www.rdv.vic.gov.au to learn about eligibility and submit your application by 13 May, 2016.

Upcoming Events

Community Meetings

The Community Meetings for May will be held:

Thursday 5th May 5:30 – 7pm

Richmond Town Hall

and

Saturday 7th May 10:30 – 12 midday with a community catch up to follow.

Wye River SLSC

Community members are invited to submit questions or topics they would like covered at Community Meetings.

Please phone the Bushfire Recovery Information Centre on 5232 9400 and select 1 or e-mail bushfire.recovery@colacotway.vic.gov.au

Mother's Day

Sunday 8th May is the day to spoil your Mum or other mothers in your life. We will be holding the Community Meeting on the Saturday to make sure Sunday is free to celebrate our wonderful mums!

Great Ocean Road Marathon

The GMHBA Great Ocean Road Marathon is coming up and will be held on the weekend of 14th-15th May.

The Great Ocean Road will be closed on the Sunday, from 7am – 2:30pm so please factor this in if you are coming to Wye or Sep for that weekend.