

Community Resilience Newsletter

Wye River Fire

COMMUNITY
RESILIENCE

WYE RIVER | SEPARATION CREEK

2 MAY 2016

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

Free Health Checks available to the Wye River and Separation Creek Community

The Lorne Community Hospital is working in consultation with our local bushfire affected communities to improve access to health services.

Lorne Community Hospital is offering comprehensive medical health checks to all Wye River and Separation Creek community members.

This process will be reviewed and adapted in close consultation with the community.

All appointments will be completely confidential.

There will be no out of pocket expenses for community members who decide to take this positive step for their own health.

During the appointment additional ways to support your health can be discussed, and FREE Flu shots will also be offered.

Appointments will be available until Wednesday, 18 May.

Wye River and Separation Creek community members can make an appointment for the free service by phoning Lorne Medical Centre on 5289 4333.

CSIRO Report Released

The CSIRO report into the Wye River and Separation Creek Bushfire was released today.

The report identifies ignition of extensive surface litter and domestic fuels within the township as the main contributors leading to house loss.

The review, commissioned by the CFA, identifies the factors that led to the loss of and damage to more than 100 houses and the survival of others following the bushfires on Christmas Day.

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

CSIRO experts conducted surveys of houses within the fire footprint from January 6-8 as part of the study which highlights a range of weaknesses in building design and materials, vegetation management and the storage of heavy fuels as the main factors impacting house loss.

Other key factors identified in the report as contributing to house loss include:

- No distinct border between the forest and urban areas of the township with widespread established tree coverage spread across residential properties
- Extensive surface litter provided a near continuous flammable fuel bed
- Ignition of heavy fuels such as plastic water tanks, building materials, small garden sheds, boats and kayaks stored under or adjacent to houses
- Strong evidence of house-to-house fire spread despite the generally large distances between buildings of up to 12m
- Timber retaining walls provided a direct threat to buildings and adjacent fuel elements
- Positioning and storage of LPG pressure vessels

The report can be found on www.wyeseconnect.info/about

From the Mayor

Following the devastating Christmas Day Bushfires, the Victorian Government was required to develop a plan for the Resettlement and Reconnection of Wye River and Separation Creek.

The Initial Resettlement Plan was prepared by Emergency Management Victoria, in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, the Department of Health and Human Services, Major Projects Victoria and Colac Otway Shire.

The Resettlement Plan is like a roadmap to guide the State and Council's short term activities around the major project areas of Clean-up, Planning and Building, Infrastructure, Business & Tourism, Flora, Fauna & Beachscape, Community Connection & Wellbeing.

The Initial Plan for the Resettlement of Wye River and Separation Creek was presented to Colac Otway Shire Council last Wednesday.

Council resolved to endorse in principle the Initial Plan, noting that it will continue to evolve over time and in consultation with the community as it responds to emerging opportunities and issues.

Some actions in the Initial Plan had to be put in place very quickly, like the Clean-up, to ensure everyone is kept safe and out of danger from falling trees, debris or asbestos.

Similarly, the economic impacts to communities along the Great Ocean Road had to be addressed quickly. Did you know that the Great Ocean Road attracts more tourists than the Great Barrier Reef? This is why it was critical for action to be taken as quickly as possible for the benefit of all the communities along it and Victoria more broadly.

The recovery process is a marathon not a sprint and there are so many opportunities along the way for everyone to become involved in further developing and implementing the plan.

Your views, concerns, requests and ideas are welcome and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the future of their much loved Wye River and Separation Creek.

- **Frank Buchanan**

From the Emergency Management Commissioner

This week the CSIRO report into the Wye River and Separation Creek bushfires and house loss was released.

I have spoken to you previously about the initial findings, but in this report you will see that it identifies ignition of extensive surface litter and domestic fuels within the township as the main contributors leading to house loss.

While this information may not be a complete surprise, it is often difficult to read in-depth about key findings of a fire that has had such a major impact on a community.

I encourage anyone that is finding it difficult reading the report to use the emotional support services listed on the WyeSep Connect website and to view the videos produced by Dr Rob Gordon.

What we can take from this report is the key learnings about what we can do better in regards to community resilience and bushfire fuel management.

We can also reflect on just how lucky we were that no-one died or was seriously injured.

The report highlights the need to build to a certain standard and to also look at increasing the hardness to bushfire across the whole community.

This work is part of what the Expert Panel will be conducting, along with investigating the level and extent fuel management strategies, such as Asset Protection Zones (APZs), may have on altering Bushfire Attack Levels, and assess where this may be viable in Wye River or Separation Creek.

All of this work will involve strong community engagement, which is something that we will work through over the coming week.

There is now an online forum available to all community members at www.wyeseconnect.info.

This is a place where you can openly communicate with each other and the government agencies working through the resettlement process.

- **Craig Lapsley**

Wellbeing and Personal Support

Travelling the road to recovery: Clean-up, emotional impacts and looking ahead

Dr. Rob Gordon is a clinical psychologist who has been a consultant to the 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 second article in Dr Gordon's five part 'Travelling the Road to Recovery' series.

Where the Wye River Separation Creek community would be now, some months after the fire, is the point at which they made the transition from having re-entered and seen what's happening to the beginnings of clean-up. Clean-up is similar to going to a burial after a bereavement.

It's often the point where the full significance of the loss becomes really tangible in people's minds.

People will often say it might have just been a pile of junk, but it was my junk, and when it's gone, there's a sense of a real loss.

This is why people often find it so important to be able to go through and work out exactly what they want to retain, and why putting time and thought into how that clean-up will go is essential.

But I would say for most people, they're probably coming out of this period of distress, they are dealing with all the drama of it, and it's starting to really sink in.

The painful sense of loss is now replacing what might have initially been a sense of numbness and not knowing what to feel. So I think the clean-up is a really important point of transition for the community.

When we consider the recovery process, the whole cycle, we have to remember that for a successful recovery it is not about replacing what people have lost, because for many people the event is going to be the starting point of a lasting change in their life.

They may not for various reasons be able to recapture what they lost. Therefore the real essence of recovery is how do you make what happens now the foundation for a new future.

To do that people need to understand time.

To begin with, we would say recovery probably takes most people between three and perhaps seven years, depending on their circumstances.

It also depends how much time you have available to devote to it, the resources you have, other worries that may get in the way, and so on.

People will be varied and the details of rebuilding are going to be varied, depending on where your house is.

It's very important, I think, that people understand this variation is something that people shouldn't judge.

Some people feel ready to tackle the problem now, many might feel they're not emotionally in the right space to do it, and we would encourage them to take their time.

People who are experiencing high levels of distress should visit with their local GP or health care provider.

If urgent support is needed please don't hesitate to call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or BeyondBlue on 1300 224 636 or visit betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

Working on Weeds

A Scope of Works is currently being developed for a short-term weed control project in the Wye River/Separation Creek area.

The short-term works are being coordinated by the Southern Otway Landcare Network (SOLN), with support from a newly-formed Steering Committee which comprises members representing SOLN, Colac Otway Shire, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Parks Victoria, VicRoads, Otway Coast Committee, and community group Wye Weed Warriors.

These agencies and groups are contributing to the project either through funding or in-kind support.

Objectives of the project include controlling target weed species in identified priority locations, and the production of a "Landscaping for Bushfire" booklet to assist the community to design, develop and maintain their property to reduce fire risk.

A great deal of work has been done over the last few months to connect with and seek feedback from the Wye River/Separation Creek community regarding target weed species and priority locations.

This work has included Community Meetings, One Stop Shops, and online surveys facilitated by DELWP, as well as direct communication between Council and volunteer weed control groups in Wye River and Separation Creek.

SOLN will continue to work closely with the Wye Weeds Warriors via Rex Brown, and other community members who have an interest in weed management, and liaise with DELWP and Council staff with responsibilities for community engagement.

The Scope of Works document is currently in draft stage and will be discussed by the Steering Committee at their first meeting this week.

Clean-up

Grocon has cleaned 87 properties to date, which is more than half of the total number of bushfire-affected properties. Works are intensifying in Wye River as Grocon's clean-up crews prepare to brave the wet weather. Dunoon Road is almost complete with bushfire-affected tree works commencing in Iluka Avenue.

There are currently seven demolition crews, four Arborist crews, and two black waste crews operating in all bushfire affected areas.

One Stop Shop

The Wye River One Stop Shop will not be taking appointments for Saturday 7th May due to Community Meeting being held. Residents are invited to come and chat with staff at the meeting or during the Community Catch-Up afterwards.

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 June will be held:

Sunday 5th June

10:30 – 12 midday with a community catch up to follow.

Wye River SLSC

Thursday 9th June

5:30 – 7pm

Richmond Town Hall

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

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.

Run Forest Trail Run

100% Pure Trail Running in the Otways

The 4th annual Run Forrest, held from 9am – 5pm on 12 June includes 5km, 10km and 21km Trail Run offering runners the most picturesque trails in Australia

Staged in the hinterland township of Forrest, nestled in the heart of the Otway Ranges, Run Forrest will showcase the regions world class trails and breathtaking natural beauty – undulating hills, flowing rivers, dense fern gullies and the cool, fresh air of the Otway Ranges.