

Recovery Update



Welcome to the fifth edition of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority's community newsletter, Recovery Update. This regular newsletter will provide important information for bushfire affected communities. We hope you find it useful and informative.

COMMUNITY NOTICEBOARD

Last Drinks

Friday 5 June, 7pm sharp
Marysville Community Golf & Bowls Club
956 Buxton-Marysville Road, Marysville
Phone: 5963 3241

The Criterion is a pub in the inner suburbs of everywhere. No pokies. No wine list. No front teeth and now...no customers! It had survived the wowsers, the yuppies, the health inspectors and the changing face of pub culture, but one night the underworld wandered in and pulled up a stool and it was time to call..... "Last Drinks".

Join dual Barry Award nominee Damian Callinan and his cast of regulars at The Criterion for plenty of laughs during a character-based pub crawl before closing time.

Free admission.

This show is presented by Marysville's Cultural Community Inc.

Community Recovery Comedy Night

Friday 12 June: Kernot Hall, corner Princes Drive and Monash Way, Morwell

Come and have a laugh at Relationship Australia's Community Recovery Night featuring comedians Nelly Thomas, Harley Breen, Christine Basil, Ethel Chop, Lawrence Mooney and Damian Callinan.

If you were affected by the bushfires and would like to attend, please call Relationships Australia (Victoria) on 5175 9500 for a free ticket.

Changes to BAL Assessment Rules

The State Government recently announced that volunteers who are registered professionals will be able to assess a property's Bushfire Attack Level (BAL), which is required before people can start rebuilding.

Currently about 1140 individuals or companies have volunteered some form of assistance with rebuilding devastated communities. However registered builders, surveyors, engineers, building inspectors, designers and architects are still needed as volunteers to conduct assessments of affected sites to help guide property owners through the design and rebuild stage.

Anyone wanting to volunteer services or assist with bushfire building queries should contact the Building Commission's Bushfire Building Advice Line on 1300 360 320.

Problem with your phone or internet provider?

Have you been affected by the recent bushfires and have a complaint that you cannot resolve with your phone or internet service provider?

If so, you can call the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's dedicated bushfire number on 1800 046 686, and your call will be put through to a disaster helpline team. Alternatively, you can email the team at bfa@tio.com.au

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is a free and independent alternative dispute resolution scheme for small business and residential consumers in Australia who have a complaint about their telephone or internet service.

Middle Kinglake Primary rises to the Challenge

Middle Kinglake Primary School is taking part in the Premier's Reading Challenge for the first time this year.

After the bushfires, the school thought it would have to abandon plans to take up the Challenge.

But with the help of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development who extended the deadline for the school's nomination for the Challenge, and through the generous donations of other various schools and publishers, the school was able to participate.

Janette Cook, Middle Kinglake's Principal said she believes her students will enjoy having a positive and fun challenge to focus on.

"The Challenge guides the children towards quality literature, encourages them to love reading and to read more frequently. We think this is a great goal and one that will be

a valuable activity for our students to focus on as we move forward after the fires."

A donation from the Mel Maria School Community in Western Australia included about 20 activity packs specially designed to support students with reading.

"We are grateful to all of the schools, publishers and the Department for their kind donations which will enrich our library as well as allowing us to take up the Premier's Reading Challenge for the first time," Ms Cook said.

The Challenge is held over three terms – starting this year on 2 February and finishing on 31 August.

Students are challenged to read up to 30 books, depending on their age, from a list of books provided, as well as books of their own choice. Students in Years 3 to 10 aim to read 15 books, while students in Prep to Year 2 are challenged to read or experience 30 books

Sympathy Letters from Australian Schools Students Published

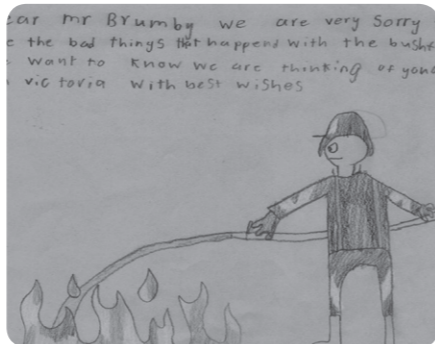
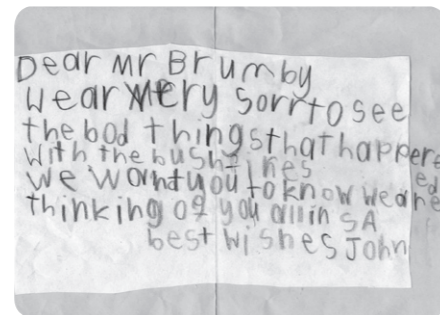
In the weeks since the fires students from across Australia and from New Zealand wrote hundreds of letters expressing their sympathy at the impact of the fires on schools and kindergartens.

The letters have now been published in a book which was presented to each bushfire affected school and kindergarten at the recent Education Week Awards.

The extraordinary care teachers and all staff in schools and kindergartens have given to

students and children in the aftermath of the fires was recognised at the awards on behalf of school and early childhood communities across the State.

The contributions of staff from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development – including those working in schools and in central and regional offices – who have supported school communities to recover from the events of 7 February was also honoured.



New Planning Laws to Streamline Rebuilding

The Victorian Government has introduced new planning laws that will streamline the approval process for replacement dwellings, and help fast-track the rebuilding of bushfire affected communities.

Victorian Planning Provisions and all planning schemes have been amended to make it easier to rebuild damaged or destroyed buildings as a result of the February bushfires.

Where people seeking to rebuild want to do so on the same location as their previous dwelling, the need to obtain a new approval will now be unnecessary.

The changes provide an exemption to planning scheme requirements for

replacement dwellings, dependent person's units and agricultural buildings. In most cases the exemption replaces the need for a planning permit.

Approval of a simple site plan would provide a streamlined process and ongoing security for future owners of land, as well as legal proof of the right to develop.

"This will save time and money for many residents looking to rebuild. All they will have to do is speak to their local councils about what is required and have their simple site plan approved over the counter," Planning Minister Justin Madden said.

Marysville Village Opening

Marysville residents are now able to return to the town while they rebuild, with a new temporary housing village opened on 17 May by Premier John Brumby.

The new village comprises a mix of single and double room accommodation as well as one and two-bedroom moveable units. It features temporary shared amenities, including toilets, shower blocks, laundries and communal kitchen facilities for use by village residents and the wider Marysville community.

"Marysville is an iconic part of Victoria's heritage and while the task to rebuild is challenging, I am

confident that this town can once again become the stunning tourist destination it was before these devastating fires," Mr Brumby said.

"The establishment of the new temporary housing village is an important step forward to recovery – it gets Marysville back up and running again and it provides people who want to live somewhere to live while they begin to rebuild their homes and lives," Mr Brumby said.

The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority has overseen the building and management of the Marysville temporary village.



The Recovery: First 100 Days

Monday 18 May marked 100 days since the 7 February fires, and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) has provided a 100 day progress report to the Prime Minister and Premier.

The report outlines the steps the Authority has taken in its first 100 days, including the distribution of grants and funding to people in need, the largest property clean up program ever undertaken in Australia, the construction of temporary villages in Marysville, Flowerdale and Kinglake, and the community plans for rebuilding and recovery that are well and truly underway.

* Progress in 100 days includes:

- \$235 million allocated from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund
- 1059 households and families assisted with housing by DHS
- 98 per cent of insurance claims for damaged residential properties completed
- 99 per cent of insurance claims for damaged commercial properties completed
- 385 case managers appointed to assist 5000 families/households
- 29 community meetings held by the Authority to directly listen to the concerns of 4400 people
- 26 Community Recovery Committees forming
- 10 Community Service Hubs established.

Clearly the recovery process is only just beginning. The Authority will be providing regular progress reports as it supports communities to rebuild after Australia's worst natural disaster.

To download a copy of the VBRRA 100 Day Report visit www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

* All figures current as at printing of VBRAA 100 Day Report on 14 May.



Message From Christine Nixon

Gaining Strength and Rebuilding

Since the last newsletter we reached the milestone of 100 days of recovery. The task is unprecedented, and so is the progress and commitment of many.

Across government, business and the whole community, so many people have helped, and so many remain committed to supporting communities - long after the headlines fade away.

The long-term recovery process is just beginning. As we move from the early, immediate needs stage to addressing longer term needs, we have more problems to solve.

People will face many challenges in this phase, and the Authority will be there to support them.

As people are getting stronger, they are doing more planning for the rebuilding of their homes and businesses. Many complex decisions and choices about how to rebuild, and where they will live in the meantime, need to be made.

For many, the onset of winter is bringing about a reassessment of their medium-term housing choices. Surveys are being conducted through Case Managers about people's current housing situation and their needs.

This information will help us support people to make decisions about temporary housing, whether it's in a caravan on their property, a shed that is later converted to a garage, or one of the temporary villages.

The Authority will be putting information out to help people make decisions about rebuilding. We will be working with other parties - builders, architects, councils and Building Commission Victoria - to help people build homes they can afford, whether they are using some of their own money, money from the Appeal Fund, insurance money, or a combination.

We will be setting up building display centres in areas to help people make decisions about the kind of houses they want to build.

I believe that if we work with people to find different solutions that suit them, then almost everyone who wants to will be able to rebuild.

We recognise that every community heals at its own pace, and in its own way. We are supporting communities through the 26 Community Recovery Committees that are gaining strength and starting to work on their plans for the future.

The rebuilding phase will be enormously challenging, but we will work with each community to get the job done as fast as possible.

Christine Nixon, APM
Chair, Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

Message from Appeal Fund Chair John Landy

In the 100 days since fires devastated parts of Victoria, the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Advisory Panel has worked hard to respond to the growing needs of affected communities.

During this time, the generous donations of thousands of people from Australia and around the world have continued to come in, with an unprecedented \$351 million now raised to assist the survivors of the bushfires to rebuild and recover.

An independent Advisory Panel is responsible for the allocation of this funding and has made available more than 10 types of grants worth over \$235 million.

From initial emergency payments, issued just days after the Black Saturday fires, to medium-term grants to repair and rebuild homes, more than \$66 million from the Appeal Fund has been disbursed to more than 7000 families and households in need.

Almost \$3 million is now being distributed to bushfire survivors each day.

We will continue to stand by communities and support them in the rebuilding and recovery effort now and as it continues into the future.

A public report outlining the first three months of the operation of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund has been released. I urge anyone wanting information about the Appeal Fund to access this report, which can be found on our website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal

John Landy
Chair, Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund



Clean up of Damaged Properties on Track

More than half of the properties registered with the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority to be cleaned-up have been completed.

Authority Chair Christine Nixon said 1744 of the 2951 registered properties had now been completed.

And the clean-up has now been completed in four areas - Mudgegonga, near Beechworth, the Bendigo/Redesdale area, Horsham and Kilmore/Wandong.

Resources in completed areas have now been moved to areas where there was more concentration of bushfire damage, such as Gippsland, Kinglake and Marysville.

There are now more than 150 Grocon contractor crews working throughout Victoria and the clean up rate is steadily increasing.

The overall clean-up is on track to be finished by September, within the original six-month timeframe.

Grocon and the Authority say they believe the clean-up is world's best practice.

"We will have cleaned around 3000 properties in six months, which we believe is world's best practice," Grocon CEO Daniel Grollo said. "After the Canberra bushfires, around 600 properties were cleaned in three months.

"But we have made sure that we take the time to deal appropriately with residents, who are still grieving and who have been going through a very difficult time," he said.

In the Kilmore/Wandong region, 192 properties were registered and 177 have been cleaned up. Eight are still being worked on, and the remaining seven will have their clean-ups completed at a later date due to the circumstances of the property owners.

Daniel Grollo said the number of properties registering for a clean-up increased once the clean-up teams started their work in the area.

"Originally there were only 90 properties registered in this area but that number has doubled since we have been here. The team has worked well with the local community and we are pleased to have completed our job here for the present, as per current registrations."

The clean-up and demolition operation, jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, is free, voluntary and open to any person who owns property affected by the February 2009 bushfires.

To register to have your property cleaned please visit www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

Destroyed Homes Grants and Financial Information Sessions

People in receipt of the Destroyed Homes Payment grant of up to \$90,000 are required to attend a financial information session in order to receive the grant.

The Appeal Fund Advisory Panel determined that this requirement was necessary because of the importance of treating such large amounts of donated funds responsibly.

Applicants for the Destroyed Homes Payment will need to have received free one-to-one financial information through a participating bank, or from their own financial adviser.

The information sessions are required to cover financial information topics, namely:

- Grants investment options
- Using the funds to rebuild and recover
- Getting advice you can trust
- Financial advice for you
- Insurance - protecting your assets
- Personal budgeting.

If you do not have your own financial adviser, you can receive free one-to-one financial information from one of six participating banks.

You have the choice of receiving this information over the telephone or face-to-face at a participating bank branch.

Participating banks:

- Bendigo Bank - 1300 366 666 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm Saturday and 10am to 4pm Sunday)
- NAB - 1300 558 863 (Monday - Thursday 8am to 8pm, Monday to Thursday and 8am - 5.45pm on Friday)
- ANZ - 1800 641 593 (between 9am to 5:30pm, Monday to Friday)
- Commonwealth Bank - 1800 241 996 (between 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week)
- Westpac - 1300 656 344 (between 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)
- St George Bank - 1300 309 907 (between 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

Applying for the Destroyed Homes Payment grant is simple. Just visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/em/bushfire-recovery, complete the Destroyed Homes Payment application form, lodge a statutory declaration form and you should receive your payment in a week.

Bushfire affected people have until 30 December 2009 to lodge a claim for the Rehousing and Recovery - Destroyed Homes payment. Applications beyond this date will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For further information or advice on the payment, please contact the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund on 1800 180 213.

Taking the next step after your property is cleared

With well over half of all registered bushfire affected properties now cleared, bushfire affected people should be planning for the next phase of reconstruction.

If your property has been cleared and you have received your Environmental Hygienist Certificate from Grocon, the next steps are:

- 1) Investigate what building grants you are entitled to by calling the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority information line on 1800 240 667, visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/em/bushfire-recovery or discuss the matter with your Case Manager. You should also be aware that some grants require attendance at a financial information session before being approved.
- 2) Finalise your site selection and submit your site plan for approval to your local council

- 3) Select your house design and builder, taking care to incorporate your preliminary Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) into your design selection. Under new Australian standards, there are six BAL categories from low to extreme, and these will determine construction requirements ranging from ember protection to direct flame contact protection
- 4) Obtain prices for building while engaging support and advice
- 5) Finalise design and building costs with builder
- 6) Appoint builder and obtain building approvals
- 7) Start building works on site.

For more information on rebuilding after the bushfires visit www.buildingcommission.com.au or call the Bushfire Building Advice Line on 1300 360 320.

Extra Cash for Winter

Money raised through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund will be used to help people keep warm this winter.

People who's homes were lost or damaged will be eligible for a \$2000 one-off cash payment from the Fund for heaters, clothing, blankets and to pay for winter energy bills, insulation and related improvements.

The \$2000 Winter Needs Grant will be automatically paid to people who have received payments for

destroyed or damaged homes.

It is expected that 4000 people will benefit from this grant.

Anyone impacted by the bushfires who has not applied for or received a Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund grant or believes they may be eligible for the \$2000 grant or any of the other assistance measures available through the appeal fund should contact 1800 180 213.

Getting through the three-month blues

Disaster trauma expert and Clinical Psychologist Dr Rob Gordon has been working with bushfire victims and survivors. He says that three to four months after a disaster is often the time when people slow down and begin to feel what has happened. Dr Gordon has prepared this column to help people through this time.

Three months after a disaster, the initial turmoil begins to settle into routine. In spite of life still being uncomfortable and uncertain for many, a normality develops. Day-to-day life becomes more predictable and problems are gradually solved. Other life experiences often make us expect to gradually feel better as time passes and we are worried when instead, new feelings emerge and we worry about different problems. Moods and energy become lower.

When people become tired, they start to have more feelings. They show up as frustrations and disappointments, anger and worry, irritability or avoidance of communicating with those closest to them and who may be feeling the same way.

Other feelings relate to what is lost: people, property, possessions, the environment and lifestyle. Sadness, periods of despondency, even wondering what is the point of it all come to the fore with the tiredness, perhaps with isolation from others and the opportunity at last to stop and think a little.

These are natural indications of the shift from survival mode to absorbing what has happened. This is the basis for accepting what cannot be changed, and the beginning of building a new life and regaining happiness even where things are permanently different.

Human nature is resilient and creative; history shows people rebuild their lives and communities. This period will pass, but needs to be understood. It is the transition from doing what is needed now to feeling what is gone, and this should lead to thinking about what is to be, how things will be different and creating a new life.

Strategies for getting through this time are:

- Accept that the shift from emergency activity to feeling is uncomfortable, but bad feelings have a job to do in the recovery cycle
- Thinking about that helps to bear it and get through it rather than just blocking it out with more activity, anger, alcohol, work, or other avoidance
- Consider getting specialist advice from those trained to help manage painful or worrying moods such as the local GP, counsellors or other support services
- Rest and relax, try to get away from the area for a bit, spend time with friends or family not affected as well as talking to those who will understand
- Involve yourself in sport, music, the arts, drama, or other activities that give you a lift
- Manage your moods and thoughts, be confident that how it feels now is not how it always will be - it is a part of a process which, if given the space it needs, will lead on to feeling better in time
- Remind yourself that however isolated you might feel there are many people and agencies who will be around for the duration wanting to help - just ask and see what happens.