2020

Report for Wollondilly Shire Council

COMMUNITY BUSHFIRE FORUMS – OUTCOMES REPORT

DECEMBER 2020

Leadbeater Group PTY LTD

This report and the community forums that generated its content were developed by Leadbeater Group Pty Ltd for Wollondilly Shire Council. Sincere thanks go to forum participants for their time and for generously sharing their knowledge and experience.

Leadbeater Group PTY LTD

CONTENTS

Background 1

Summary of Recommendations..... 2

Workshop Outcomes – Responses and Key Themes..... 2

Recommendations and Considerations..... 9

Useful Resources..... 12

Appendices

Collation of Responses..... 13

Responses by Forum..... 17

Survey Responses..... 21

Forum Notes..... 23

Wollondilly Shire Council
Review of Community Recovery Hub Model

Background

From November 2019 to February 2020, areas of the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires were severely affected by the Green Wattle Creek fire. NSW RFS advise that this fire resulted in the death of two people, with 18 people injured and 17 people rescued. According to information provided by Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shire Councils, significant impacts of this fire include:

Wollondilly Shire

- 270,700 hectares of land burnt
- 19 homes destroyed
- 18 homes damaged
- 8 facilities destroyed and 3 damaged
- 66 outbuildings destroyed and a further 45 damaged
- 270 rural landowners impacted

Wingecarribee Shire

- 86 houses destroyed or damaged
- 2 facilities damaged
- 196 outbuildings destroyed, 70 outbuildings significantly damaged
- 39,600 hectares impacted across seven National Parks plus 5,582 hectares of State forest and Council reserves. (5,482 State forests and 100Ha of Council reserves)
- Fencing loss estimated at over 1000kms (private land)
- Disruption to businesses, industry, educational institutions and tourism operators

During September 2020, Wollondilly Shire Council hosted a series of community forums to examine emergency management issues and experiences relating to the 2019/20 fire season. Forums undertaken in Bargo, Buxton, Oakdale, Picton and Warragamba combined an in-person meeting at a local community venue and a simultaneous on-line session, while the Yerranderie forum was in-person only.

This report comprises a summary of data received from the community via six forums and an online survey. It identifies key themes and provides recommendations and considerations relating to emergency management and recovery. The outcomes detailed in this report support and build on those relating to the Review of the Community Recovery Hub Model undertaken in June 2020. The objective of both reports is to help guide the further development of Council's Long Term Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Summary of Recommendations

Following is a summary of the recommendations developed as a result of the six bushfire forums. The recommendations are listed in priority order, noting however, that some may be undertaken simultaneously. Please see pages 9- 11 of this report for more detailed information regarding recommendations and considerations.

1	Mapping community capacity	Identify community strengths, capabilities, risks and challenges through the development of individual community profiles.
2	Community leadership	Identify and support community leadership in disaster recovery by establishing roles for individuals and groups to be involved in emergency management.
3	Agency collaboration	Improve emergency management and resilience outcomes through a supported and collaborative approach to planning and service delivery.
4	Communication	Draw on local knowledge and experience to develop a communication strategy for emergency preparedness, response and recovery.
5	Building preparedness and resilience	Engage communities and key agencies on strategies to increase local disaster preparedness and resilience.
6	Framework for Community Recovery Hub	Work with community leaders and recovery agencies to design a framework to support establishment and operation of a community recovery hub.
7	Community Recovery Hub Toolkit	Drawing on previous disaster experience, design and develop a toolkit of resources to support the successful operation of a community recovery hub.
8	Donations management	Work with community groups, service clubs and recovery stakeholders to design a strategy for receiving, coordinating and distributing donated goods within the Wollondilly Shire.

Workshop Outcomes – Responses and key themes

Participants across all forums provided a wide-ranging assessment of emergency management and recovery arrangements. Participants at each forum were asked to consider:

- What has worked well in relation to the fires and recovery?
- What has not worked well?
- In terms of recovery, what should happen differently in future?
- What is your one wish for recovery?

Following is a collated summary of participant responses and common themes emerging from the forum discussions. These have been organised on the basis of those that pertain to the period before the fire (preparedness), during the emergency (response) and the period following impact (recovery).

It is important to note that all responses have been incorporated within this report, despite a number of identified themes and issues falling outside the remit of local government. Identified themes included within the summary relate to responses made by more than one person at one or more forums. A full list of responses across all forums is included as Appendix 1 of this report, and a breakdown of responses by forum is listed as Appendix 2 (please see pages 13-17)

Participant Responses: What has worked well

Preparedness	• Visits prior to the fire to check on preparedness which increased confidence • Make safer plans (trail construction) • Personal efforts to reduce hazards • Enough fire-fighting resources and backburning up to date
Response	• RFS incident management, including satellite teams, selection of staging areas, community liaison officers and overall coordination • Council support of The Oaks as a staging post • Help from neighbours
Recovery	• Rapid establishment of a recovery centre in Wollondilly Council foyer • Home visits by recovery support team • Balmoral Hub / Food Pantry / Buxton Community Centre – centralised locations for information, food and support services • A dedicated office for Services NSW • A focus on those areas most in need (Buxton, Bargo) • Waste collection, including bins for burnt items • Water tank refills at no cost • Timely removal of fallen / dangerous trees on roadsides by Council • Financial support and donations • Council clean-up work and repair of fire-damaged roads • Support from agencies, including Red Cross, Council and State Government • Communication up-dates – social media, internet and news outlets • Volunteering and community working together • State Government demolition program

Key themes for what has worked well in emergency management include:

- the spirit of community
- volunteers and community groups working together
- the rapid establishement of a recovery centre in the Wollondilly Shire Council foyer
- the establishment of the Balmoral Hub and Food Pantry
- support at the Buxton Community Centre
- access to financial support and donations
- support from agencies such as Red Cross, NSW Government and Council
- the timely removal by Council of fallen and dangerous trees
- repairs to fire-damaged roads

What has not worked well

Preparedness	• Insufficient hazard reduction / cool burns • Lack of maintenance of fire trails for RFS access • Lack of prevention and planning for future events • Lack of engagement with Aboriginal people for advice on risk reduction • No access to research being undertaken on fire and fire recovery
Response	• [Centralised] RFS management rather than local brigades • The unpredictability and duration of fires • Road closures for extended periods • Evacuations and an unwillingness of some to evacuate • Out of date information on the RFS website and issues with the App • Too much reliance on aircraft and technology • More needs to be done when fires first start • Need night monitoring of fires in remote areas • More line scan aircraft – high altitude drones • Coordination of resources for multiple fire grounds • Changes since RFS took over remote areas from NPWS • Need evacuation centres for animals - set up for long periods • Naming protocols with one name for fires covering a huge area – made it difficult to assess risk • Mulching of trees which compounded the impacts of flooding
Recovery	• Lack of a donations strategy and issues with dispersal of raised funds and donations • A focus on property loss and not disruption to life • Communication challenges including access to computers and websites difficult to navigate • Issues with data collection, information-sharing and a lack of role clarity between agencies • Dealing with utility providers (still receiving bills) • Lack of support and acknowledgement from Wingecarribee Council • The degree of impact and eligibility of residents using recovery centres • Personal conflict from Recovery Centre • Food available at recovery hub did not meet special dietary needs • Issues with insurance • The need to convince multiple agencies of impact / eligibility for support • Developmental Approvals process for rebuilding • Access to immediate support for victims including trauma support • COVID-19 delays • Concerns about looting • Loss of internet and telephone for months • Fundraising not reaching those affected and narrow grant criteria • No communication to residents about grants and recovery supports • No strategy for the recovery of wildlife • No local recovery plans • Need more emotional support for firefighters • Fundraising not reaching those affected

Key themes for what has not worked well include:

- lack of a donations strategy and issues with the dispersal of donations and funding
- inadequate, inconsistent, and/or conflicting information
- insufficient hazard reduction / cool burns
- lack of prevention and planning for future events
- immediate support for victims including trauma support
- lack of communication with residents re grants and recovery supports
- data collection and information-sharing between agencies
- eligibility / level of impact of residents using recovery centre
- RFS management (not local brigades)
- the need to convince multiple agencies about being affected
- road closures for extended periods
- Developmental Approvals process for rebuilding
- Issues with evacuation / unwillingness to evacuate
- RFS website out of date / issues with App
- lack of maintenance of fire trails
- no strategy for recovery of wildlife

What should be different in future

In considering opportunities for improvement in emergency management practice into the future, participants once again identified themes across the preparedness, response and recovery spectrum. These included:

Preparedness	• Clear fire tracks prior to fire season • Increased hazard reduction, especially around structures • Forward staged aircraft / strategic air attack • Pre-identify locations for evacuation and recovery hubs • Recovery Hub Toolkit and register of skilled volunteers • Better preparedness for evacuation point (Bargo Hall) • Need information and safe places for livestock and pets • Support for community preparedness (including volunteers to help elderly) • Encourage rainforest plantings to reduce fire risk and increase wildlife • Update fire and recovery plans and have available online • More fire trails on the edge of National Park – allows for fence repairs • Build dams in National Park for firefighting
Response	• Improved communication, incident management and fire surveys • Mini (local) incident management teams • Improved coordination of emergency and hand over for recovery • More communication and updates of fires • Pay RFS volunteers

Recovery	• Resources for a permanent Community Recovery Coordinator • Provide information and warnings about scams • Provision of a crisis response team for mental health • Proper ID card issued to identify those affected • Impartial and equitable management of recovery hub to ensure fairness • Immediate support for those who lost everything • Short-term housing on private land (supports care of animals) • Insurance for volunteers helping with response and recovery • Government to help with trees on people's properties • More time for demolition/clean-up for insurance issues • Coordinated community liaison and information-sharing • Replanting of trees • Timeframe for grants / donations could be longer (1 year+) • Clean up of properties, whether insured or not • Planned coordination to avoid duplication of services • Not everyone has computer skills to engage online • A donations strategy needed and vouchers to support personal choice • Less polluting options for post-fire clean-up of dead trees and fuel • Place community links information at post office

Key themes in relation to what should be different in future include:

- coordinated community liaison and information-sharing
- engagement with local knowledge, especially seniors and former RFS
- increased hazard reduction, especially around structures
- support for community preparedness, including volunteers to help elderly
- information and safe places for livestock and pets
- trained [strategic] coordination rather than duplication of services
- improved communication, management, surveys and 24 hour firefighting
- better coordination of emergency, then handover for recovery
- Recovery Hub toolkit / register of volunteers with identified skills
- more communication and updates of fire
- Recovery centre [to be] overseen by impartial body to ensure fairness
- timeframe for grants / donations could be longer (1 year+)
- more time for demolition / clean-up for insurance issues
- more information centres for questions re event and recovery
- update fire and recovery plans and have available online

How can future emergency management and disaster resilience in Wollondilly be improved?

Over the last decade, natural disasters in Australia have increased in both frequency and severity, as highlighted by the scale and impact of the 2019/20 'Black Summer' fires. A critical element in responding to this challenge is a collaborative 'whole of government – whole of community' approach to emergency management and resilience.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience describes a disaster resilient community as 'one that works together to understand and manage the risks that it confronts.[1]

According to the Strategy:

> *Disaster resilience is the collective responsibility of all sectors of society, including all levels of government, business, the non-government sector and individuals. If all these sectors work together with a united focus and a shared sense of responsibility to improve disaster resilience, they will be far more effective than the individual efforts of any one sector.*[2]

Engaging and working with the community is central to the philosophy of emergency management, recovery and resilience in Wollondilly Shire. A key motivation for Council to host this series of bushfire forums has been to hear directly from community members and service providers about their experiences during and after the 2019/20 fire season.

Emergency management policy and practice will involve a broad range of stakeholders. Suggestions from workshop participants about how resilience can be improved have been grouped based on the *Activate Wollondilly* project outcomes, as follows:

Principle	Ideas / Suggestions
Support capabilities for disaster resilience	• Insurance for volunteers helping with response and recovery • Recovery Hub Toolkit and register of volunteers with identified skills • Pre-identify locations for evacuation and recovery hubs • Information and safe places for livestock and pets • Provision of a crisis response team for mental health • More empathy from insurance companies (not a fight at every step) • Provide emergency housing on people's properties (would help with care of animals) • One road in – one road out is not good enough in 2020 • Quicker approval for rebuilding homes • Education on living in and being prepared in a rural setting [for new residents]

[1] Commonwealth of Australia, National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011), p. iv.
[2] Ibid.

Communicate with and educate people about risks	• Learn from experience and local knowledge • Increase preparedness to avoid recovery • Compassion and understanding that every recovery journey is different • Tolerance and support for individual journeys and help when needed • Creating 'circles of safety' – cleared land and community hubs • Support for community preparedness (including volunteers to help elderly) • Resources for a permanent Community Recovery Coordinator
Lead change and coordinate effort	• Encourage environmental solutions to reduce fire risk • Allow hazard reduction on private property • Enough fire trucks, resources and water for response • Take back vegetation for wildlife • Less polluting options for post-fire clean up • Strategic coordination of services • Immediate support for those who lose everything • A single team to visit affected properties and allocate assistance • More support and encouragement for mental health • Proper clearance of trees and maintenance of roadsides • Equitable help for all affected (even if their house is still standing) • Support clean-up of properties, whether insured or not • More communication and updates during emergency
Partner with those who effect change to reinforce the resilience and preparedness of the community	• Work to improve fire preparedness and response capability in national park • Impartial and equitable management of recovery services • Improved coordination of emergencies • Increased hazard reduction, especially around structures • Clear fire tracks prior to fire season • A 100-metre 'no fuel' barrier on land adjoining private property • Tree clearing without approval near homes • Donations strategy and vouchers to support personal choice • Timeframe for grants and donations needs to be longer (i.e. more than a year) • A more cooperative approach between emergency departments / services • Allow more time for demolition and clean up • Government help with [damaged] trees on people's properties

Recommendations and Considerations

Based on information generated by the community and national good practice in disaster recovery and resilience, the following are recommendations and considerations for communities within the Wollondilly Shire.

Recommendation	Considerations
1. Mapping community capacity Identify community strengths, capabilities, risks and challenges through the development of individual community profiles, detailing: - Demographic and land use data - Critical infrastructure - Economic activities and influences - Community structures and networks - Culture, history and heritage - Disaster risk profile and history - Community values, priorities and aspirations - Community vulnerabilities and strengths	• Community profiles assist with preparedness and recovery planning. • Community profiles facilitate information sharing – particularly with external agencies that may be deployed during or following a disaster. • Developing community profiles in collaboration with the community can be an effective opportunity for community engagement.
2. Community leadership Identify and support community leadership in disaster recovery by seeking expressions of interest from individuals and groups to be involved in emergency management, including such roles as: - Providing local knowledge and input to preparedness planning and activities - Establishing and/or managing a community recovery hub - Coordinating spontaneous volunteers - Helping to regularly review emergency management plans and strategies	• Build on existing community strengths by developing and implementing processes that support genuine community involvement. • Provide training and skill development opportunities to facilitate participation and increase community capacity and resilience. • Develop a strategy for spontaneous volunteering that incorporates community leadership and involvement.

Recommendation	Considerations
3. Agency collaboration Improve emergency management and resilience outcomes through a supported and collaborative approach to planning and service delivery that: - Involves all stakeholder agencies - Supports data collection and information-sharing - Establishes common goals and performance measures - Reflects community priorities and needs - Facilitates sharing of resources and minimises duplication	• Engage agencies who have a stake in preparedness, response and recovery and support them to work together. • Facilitate engagement between agencies and community so that emergency management and resilience building approaches are collaborative, locally relevant and reflect community values.
4. Communication Draw on local knowledge and experience to develop a communication strategy for emergency preparedness, response and recovery that engages with: - Local communication networks - Advice on community preferences for communication mediums and approaches - Specific needs of target audiences - Potential loss of communication technology and infrastructure following a disaster	• Ensure inclusivity and work to address communication inequities and barriers. • Consider the information needs of specific cohorts of people such as those living in close proximity to the national park; new residents to the Shire; elderly people or those from diverse backgrounds. • Ensure strategy can be utilised before, during and after an emergency, particularly in the early stages post-disaster when communication capability will likely be compromised.
5. Building Preparedness and Resilience Engage communities and key agencies on strategies to increase local disaster preparedness that: - Are locally relevant and achievable - Connect with and reflect community values and priorities - Build on local knowledge and experience - Address potential barriers to preparedness, such as those that may be experienced by older residents, people with a disability or people from diverse backgrounds - Embrace an all hazards – all agencies approach	• An important opportunity exists in recovering communities to build on the momentum of recent events to increase and enhance preparedness and resilience. • Planning with agencies and the community across the spectrum of preparedness, response and recovery will strengthen relationships, avoid duplication and maximise existing knowledge, experience and skills. • Consider how engagement with existing structures such as the Community Recovery and Resilience Committee and Local Emergency Management Committee can support increased preparedness and resilience.

Recommendation	Considerations
6. Framework for Community Recovery Hub Work with community leaders and recovery agencies to design a framework to support establishment and operation of a community recovery hub, including: - Community governance and reporting - Criteria and triggers for establishment (i.e. scale/severity of event) - Key roles, responsibilities, position descriptions - Insurance and resourcing - Support to be provided by Council - Support anticipated from other agencies - Memoranda of understanding, as required - Alignment with Wollondilly Local Disaster Recovery Plan and Recovery Toolkit	• The decision to establish a community recovery hub will ultimately rest with the community given the voluntary nature of the model. • Successful establishment and operation will rely on the availability of, and access to a suitable venue within the community; sufficient numbers of skilled volunteers with local knowledge and capacity; an existing or emergent community group to undertake governance responsibilities; and, strong support from and relationships with Council and key agencies.
7. Community Recovery Hub Toolkit Drawing on the experiences of the 2019/20 fire season, 2016 floods and lessons from disasters in other communities, design and develop a toolkit of resources to support the successful operation of a community recovery hub, including: - Communication strategy, plan and templates - Protocols for managing and sharing information - Equipment checklists - Risk management matrix - Health and safety plan, including fatigue management, induction / debriefing and self-care - Complaints / grievance procedure - Roster templates - Attendance register	• The toolkit format and contents should support a consistent approach to the operation of a community hub, but be sufficiently flexible, adaptable and scalable to support tailoring to specific local conditions and events. • The toolkit should include strategies to support the welfare of community leaders and volunteers involved in disaster recovery. • A range of resources are available to assist with the development of toolkit components (please see the end of this section for links)
8. Donations management Work with community groups, service clubs and recovery stakeholders to design a strategy for receiving, coordinating and distributing donated goods within the Wollondilly Shire, including: - Potential partner agencies - Locations and processes for sorting, storage, transport and logistics - Key messages and communication channels - Templates for record-keeping	• Efficient management and equitable distribution of donated goods is a perennial challenge in recovery. • Effective partnerships and strategic pre-planning provide significant benefits and can help prevent communities becoming overwhelmed by donations.

Useful Resources

National Principles for Disaster Recovery
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery/

Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-engagement/

National Community Recovery Handbook
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-2-community-recovery/

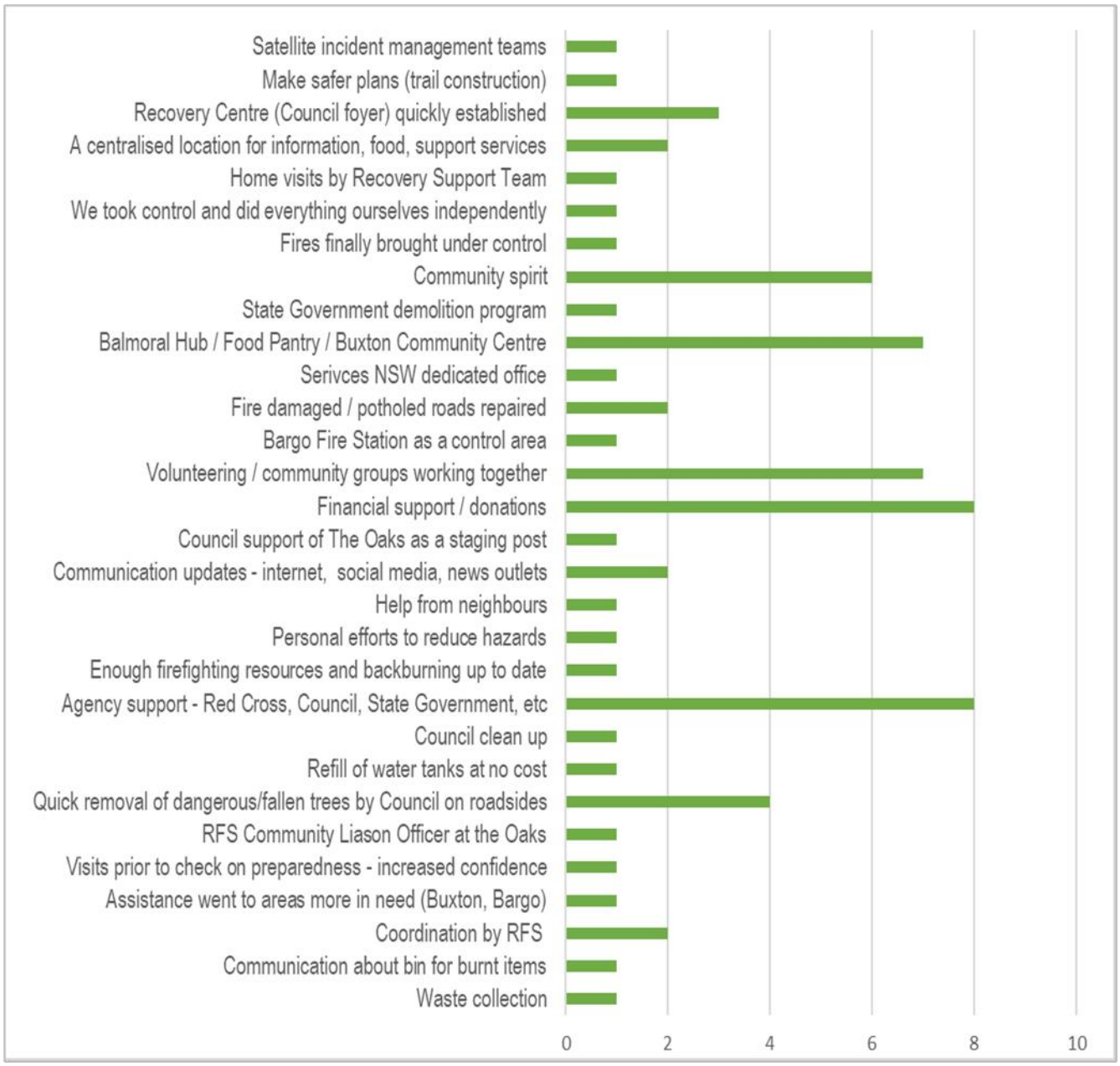
Resilience NSW (formerly Office of Emergency Management) Recovery Tool Kit
https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/publications/guidelines-legislation-policies/recovery/community-recovery-toolkit.aspx

Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for spontaneous volunteers handbook
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-spontaneous-volunteers/

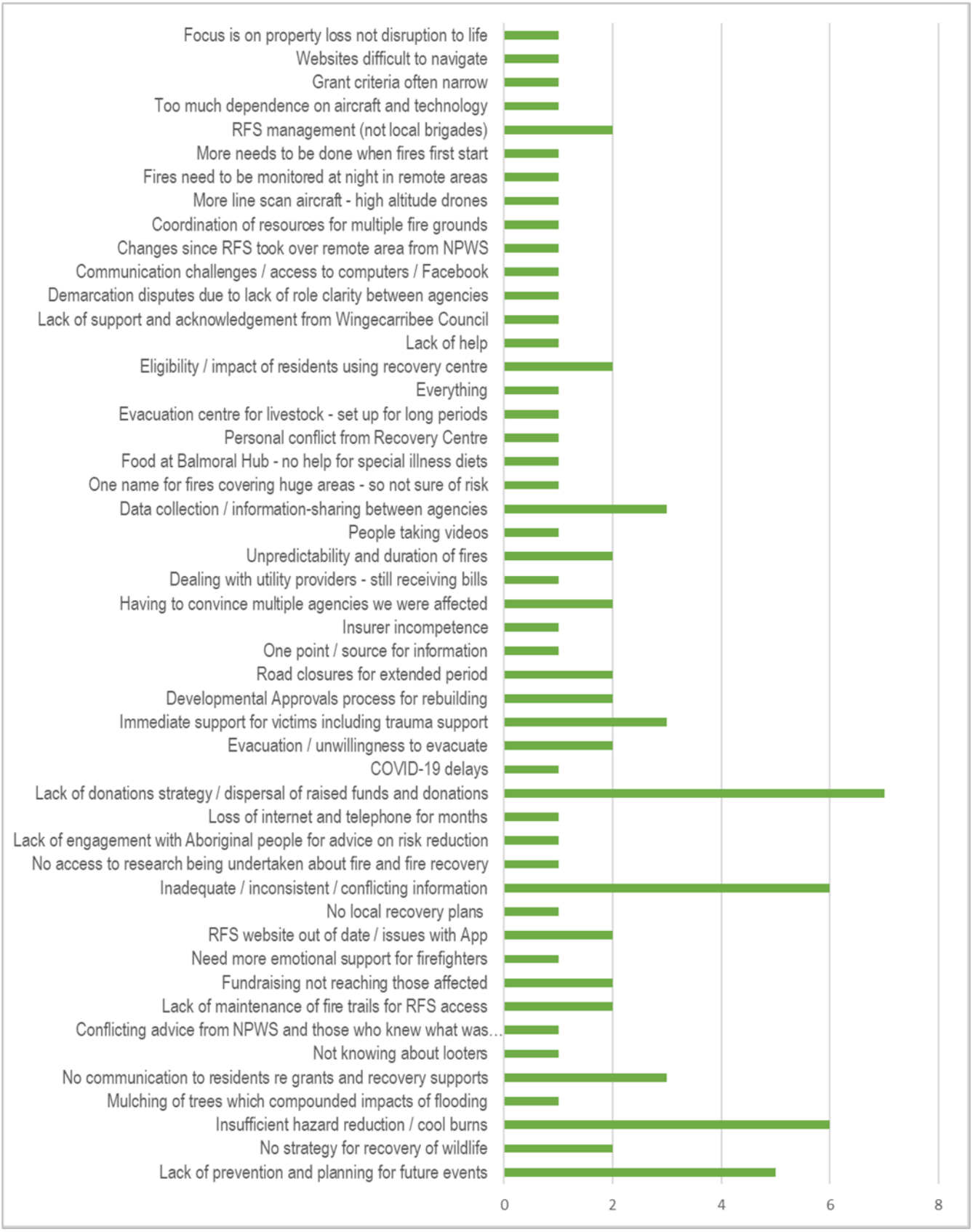
National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods
https://dcsi.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1894/national-guidelines-for-managing-donated-goods.pdf

Appendix 1 – Collation of responses across all forums

What has worked well:

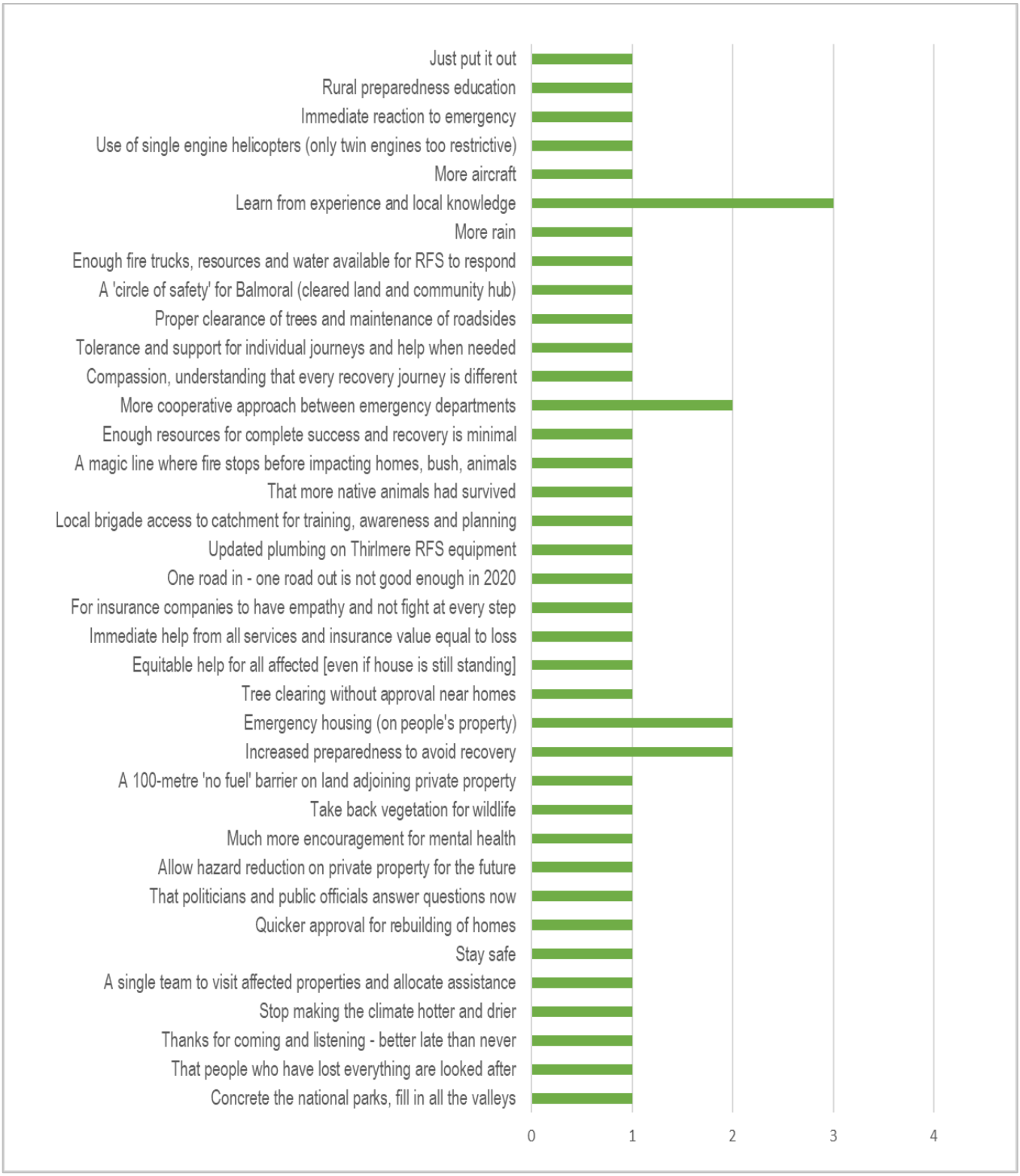


What has not worked well:



What should be different in future:

A wish for recovery:



Appendix 2 – Breakdown of responses by forum

What has worked well	Oakdale	Bargo	Warragamba	Buxton	Picton	Yerranderie
Waste collection	1					
Communication about bin for burnt items	1					
Coordination by RFS	1	1				
Assistance went to areas more in need (Buxton, Bargo)	1					
Visits prior to check on preparedness - increased confidence	1					
RFS Community Liaison Officer at the Oaks	1					
Quick removal of dangerous/fallen trees by Council on roadsides	2	1				1
Refill of water tanks at no cost	1					
Council clean up	1					
Agency support - Red Cross, Council, State Government, etc	1	3	3	1		
Enough firefighting resources and backburning up to date	1					
Personal efforts to reduce hazards	1					
Help from neighbours	1					
Communication updates - internet, social media, news outlets	1			1		
Council support of The Oaks as a staging post	1					
Financial support / donations		2	2		3	1
Volunteering / community groups working together		4	2		1	
Bargo Fire Station as a control area		1				
Fire damaged / potholed roads repaired		1				1
Services NSW dedicated office		1				
Balmoral Hub / Food Pantry / Buxton Community Centre		5		1	1	
State Government demolition program		1				
Community spirit		1	2	1		2
Fires finally brought under control			1			
We took control and did everything ourselves independently				1		
Home visits by Recovery Support Team					1	
A centralised location for information, food, support services					2	
Recovery Centre (Council foyer) quickly established					3	
Make safer plans (trail construction)						1
Satellite incident management teams						1

What has not worked well	Oakdale	Bargo	Warragamba	Buxton	Picton	Yerranderie
Lack of prevention and planning for future events	4					1
No strategy for recovery of wildlife	2					
Insufficient hazard reduction / cool burns	5	1				
Mulching of trees which compounded impacts of flooding		1				
No communication to residents re grants and recovery supports	2	1				
Not knowing about looters	1					
Conflicting advice from NPWS / those who knew what was happening	1					
Lack of maintenance of fire trails for RFS access	1					1
Fundraising not reaching those affected	1	1				
Need more emotional support for firefighters	1					
RFS website out of date / issues with App	1		1			
No local recovery plans	1					
Inadequate / inconsistent / conflicting information	1	1	3		1	
No access to research being undertaken about fire and fire recovery	1					
Lack of engagement with Aboriginal people for advice on risk reduction	1					
Loss of internet and telephone for months		1				
Lack of donations strategy / dispersal of raised funds and donations		3	1	1	2	
COVID-19 delays		1				
Evacuation / unwillingness to evacuate		1	1			
Immediate support for victims including trauma support		1	1		1	
Developmental Approvals process for rebuilding		2				
Road closures for extended period		1	1			
One point / source for information		1				
Insurer incompetence		1				
Having to convince multiple agencies we were affected		1			1	
Dealing with utility providers - still receiving bills		1				
Unpredictability and duration of fires			2			
People taking videos			1			
Data collection / information-sharing between agencies			1	1	1	
One name for fires covering huge areas - so not sure of risk			1			
Food at Balmoral Hub - no help for special illness diets				1		
Personal conflict from Recovery Centre				1		
Evacuation centre for livestock - set up for long periods				1		
Everything				1		
Eligibility / impact of residents using recovery centre				2		
Lack of help				1		
Lack of support and acknowledgement from Wingecarribee Council				1		
Demarcation disputes due to lack of role clarity between agencies					1	
Communication challenges / access to computers / Facebook					1	
Changes since RFS took over remote area from NPWS						1

Coordination of resources for multiple fire grounds						1
More line scan aircraft - high altitude drones						1
Fires need to be monitored at night in remote areas						1
More needs to be done when fires first start						1
RFS management (not local brigades)						2
Too much dependence on aircraft and technology						1
Grant criteria often narrow						1
Websites difficult to navigate						1
Focus is on property loss not disruption to life						1

What needs to happen differently	Oakdale	Bargo	Warragamba	Buxton	Picton	Yerranderie
Build dams in national park for fire fighting	1					
Place community links information at post office	1					
More communication to those living along the edge of National Park	1					
Less polluting options for post-fire clean-up of dead trees and fuel	1					
More fire trails on edge of National Park - allows for fence repairs	1					
Misinformation leading to community panic	1					
Update fire and recovery plans and have online	2					
More information centres for questions re event and recovery	1			1		
Encourage rainforest plantings to reduce fire risk / increase wildlife	1					
Support for community preparedness (inc volunteers to help elderly)	1				3	
Donation strategy needed / vouchers to support personal choice	1	1		1		
Need information / safe places for livestock and pets	1	1		1	1	
Not everyone has computer skills to engage online		1				
Engage with local knowledge, especially seniors and former RFS	1		1		1	2
Trained coordination not duplication of services		3			1	
More time for demolition / clean-up for insurance issues		2				
Pay RFS volunteers		1				
Clean up of properties whether insured or not		1				
Timeframe for grants / donations could be longer (1 year+)		2				
Replanting of trees		1				
Impartial and equitable management of community recovery hub				1		
Coordinated community liaison, information sharing		5		1	1	
Government to help with trees on people's property		1				
Insurance for volunteers helping with response and recovery		1				
Short-term housing on private land (to help care for animals)		1				
Better preparedness for evacuation point (Bargo Hall)		1				
Immediate support for those who lost everything				1		
Recovery centre overseen by impartial body to ensure fairness				2		
Proper ID card issued to identify those affected					1	
More communication and updates of fire					2	
Recovery Hub toolkit / register of volunteers with identified skills					2	

Pre-identify locations for evacuation and recovery hubs					1	
Provision of a crisis response team for mental health					1	
Communication via mediums other than social media					1	
Better coordination of emergency then handover for recovery					1	1
Resources for permanent Community Recovery Coordinator					1	
Warn about scammers - Balmoral has been defrauded over $1m					1	
Mini (local) Incident Management Teams						1
Forward staged aircraft / air attack (strategic)						1
Improved communication, management, surveys, fight the fire 24/7						3
Increased hazard reduction, especially around structures						5
Ground crews to mop up after arial water drops						1
Clear fire tracks prior to fire season						1

Wish for the future	Oakdale	Bargo	Warragamba	Buxton	Picton	Yerranderie
Concrete the national parks, fill in all the valleys	1					
That people who have lost everything are looked after	1					
Thanks for coming and listening - better late than never	1					
Stop making the climate hotter and drier	1					
A single team to visit affected properties and allocate assistance	1					
Stay safe	1					
Quicker approval for rebuilding of homes	1					
That politicians and public officials answer questions now	1					
Allow hazard reduction on private property for the future	1					
Much more encouragement for mental health	1					
Take back vegetation for wildlife	1					
A 100-metre 'no fuel' barrier on land adjoining private property	1					
Increased preparedness to avoid recovery	2					
Emergency housing (on people's property)		2				
Tree clearing without approval near homes		1				
Equitable help for all affected [even if house is still standing]		1				
Immediate help from all services and insurance value equal to loss		1				
For insurance companies to have empathy and not fight at every step		1				
One road in - one road out is not good enough in 2020		1				
Updated plumbing on Thirlmere RFS equipment		1				
Local brigade access to catchment for training, awareness and planning			1			
That more native animals had survived			1			
A magic line where fire stops before impacting homes, bush, animals			1			
Enough resources for complete success and recovery is minimal			1			
More cooperative approach between emergency departments			1			1
Compassion, understanding that every recovery journey is different			1			
Tolerance and support for individual journeys and help when needed					1	
Proper clearance of trees and maintenance of roadsides					1	

A 'circle of safety' for Balmoral (cleared land and community hub)					1	
Enough fire trucks, resources and water available for RFS to respond					1	
More rain						1
Learn from experience and local knowledge						3
More aircraft						1
Use of single engine helicopters (only twin engines too restrictive)						1
Immediate reaction to emergency						1
Rural preparedness education						1
Just put it out						1

Appendix 3 – Survey responses (3 responses received)

What has stood out for you the most about the fires and recovery?	Respondent 1 • General feeling in the community that fire would not impact – no heightened level of awareness or preparation despite imminent risk. Hopefully a renewed attitude to preparedness as a community for future occurrences • Amount of work and effort required to be fully prepared • Latency in information from Fires Near Me App – more effective to access actual fire comms • Too much paperwork required to apply for recovery assistance, then to discover ineligibility for support – a waste of valuable time Respondent 2 • Lack of community infrastructure in Warragamba/Silverdale • Review the safe places to go because they are not safe Respondent 3 • We still don't know about fire activity, particularly the bushfire conditions in the current climate
Thinking about Council's response, what has worked well?	Respondent 1 • The ease of accessing funding once the relevant documents were sourced • Availability of hampers in the days after the fires which helped connect community to Council • Waiving of tip fees for fire-damaged items / green waste Respondent 2 • Not much! Respondent 3 • Getting information out about fire safety plans, and grants and relief afterwards to help rebuild
What has not worked well in relation to Council's response?	Respondent 1 • The tip fee waiver all though extended could have run longer given time constraints and the volume of material • Finding easily what help is available to fire impacted residents - it was not prominently advertised as to what Council could assist with

	• There should be further emphasis on communication via non-social media platforms as well, as not all the community want to be involved with Facebook, etc • A resident should be able to click on a link to register for the bushfire recovery workshop from the events calendar page. Further to this it should not be that difficult to provide an active zoom link on the night for people that cannot make it to the meeting but may be able to offer some constructive input. Too many of these events are treated like a closed shop and not a forum to listen and possibly discuss the various topics raised. The more hoops you make the public jump thru to be part of it then the less participation you are likely to get. • A lack of further discussion on fire zone ratings and areas of concern Respondent 2 • Slow to communicate and respond Respondent 3 • Better traffic management and planning of road management out of town during bushfire alert – both roads out of town jammed with traffic at the same time during crisis
What is the thing you would improve, fix or change for next time?	Respondent 1 • Further fire training and strategy (RFS Bushfire Awareness Training or similar) • Further investment to monitor RFS communications as hearing the appropriate information in real time I believe helped in preparing, staying informed and defending our property • Basic first aid course - training • Trying to co-ordinate who are the key people to operate as a team in the next event • Fine tuning of personal firefighting equipment and systems • Further discussion on fire zone ratings and areas of concern should be sent out with residents rates notices concerning what zone or area they reside in and what minimum preparations are recommended for that zone. If this is a mirror from the RFS then so be it - use this resource as this will help contain the cost to the ratepayer. I do have a map that shows some of this for my town (Buxton Bush Fire Prone Land Map - 2015), • Provide updated maps [of fire zones / risks] accessible either via council website or we can purchase a paper version thru council at our own cost. This is applicable to all areas within the shire • A publicly accessible and easy to find table of major fire instances that have occurred combined with the weather for each incident as a tool for looking at trends within the shire in relation to fire. (This may already exist?) Respondent 2 • Traditional burning of the landscape Respondent 3 • Consider alternative accommodation out of bushfire prone areas well in advance. After activating fire plan of leaving early, didn't really know where to go and ended up 1.5 hours north with young children at short notice

Appendix 4 - Forum Notes

Oakdale

What has stood out most for you about the bushfires and recovery?

- Devastation
- PTSD
- Psychological damage
- Community members support of our firies
- No easy answer
- Sense of community
- Bush regeneration
- Good community support
- Community support fantastic
- Donations to fire service
- Emergency muster point
- Community hall is condemned
- Differences in attitudes between emergency response agencies
- Fuel loads not reduced
- Lack of preparedness, hazard reduction not happening
- Skip provided by council
- Evacuation concern heavy traffic
- Aussie spirit
- More burn off needed
- Cut the red tape
- Lack of markings for water
- Low water pressure
- Community spirit
- Fire appliances and helicopters helped a lot
- Speed of the clean-up – people still waiting
- Recovery hall being moved to Balmoral
- The way everyone looked after each other
- No ongoing counselling support
- First responders

What has worked well?

- Waste collection at Oakdale
- Communication between emergency services
- Community liaison officer
- Attempts at hazard reduction
- Letters telling everyone of skip bin
- Tree removal
- Neighbours helped
- Refilling of water tanks
- Recovery plan
- Council clean up
- Agency support
- Red cross
- Updates via RFS, social media
- Oakdale had resources
- Soil conservation
- Loss of wildlife lessoned
- Recovery committee
- Council response
- Mayoral relief fund
- Coordination of services
- Information available
- Outreach
- Bush telegraph
- RFS equipment
- Information
- Funding for counselling

What didn't work well?

- Recovery communication
- Communication to residents re grants and resources
- Lack of maintenance to fire trails
- Access for RFS
- Lack of prevention
- EPA flora / Fauna
- Mental Health recovery plan
- Recovery plan not enacted
- Misinformation re evacuation
- Fire triangle – fuel
- Looters
- Coordination of wildlife
- Not consulting Aboriginal community
- Conflicting advice
- Hazard reductions cancelled
- Lack of information re community links
- Emotional support for firies
- Cold burn in winter
- Fundraising not reaching those affected
- Chasing insurance
- People re-telling their stories
- Apps crashing
- Water tanks
- Evacuations centre in more locations

What should happen differently?

- Communication
- Planning
- Better organisation of donations
- Recovery framework
- More recovery centres
- Places for animals
- More information
- Traffic management
- Public panic – miscommunication
- Social media
- Dams for fire use
- Treatment of waste
- Up to date fire plan
- Information at post office
- More fire trails
- Donation strategy
- Planting of rainforest trees

What is your one big wish for the future?

- Money / funding / grants
- More resources for prevention
- Risk minimisation
- Concrete national parks – fill in all the valleys
- Stop climate change
- Politicians here and on zoom answer questions now
- Decent no fuel barrier
- Clearing areas
- Single team to offer assistance
- Preparation
- People who have lost everything are looked after
- Stay safe
- Focus on prevention
- Quicker approval for building homes
- Vegetation for wildlife

Bargo

What has stood out for you the most about the fires and recovery?

- Aussie community spirit
- Poor notification by RFS Community Liaison
- Frustrating
- How good Bargo RFB did
- Every step has been a battle
- Community help that continues today
- How long the impact has been for people
- The desire of people to donate and help
- The enormity and fury of the fires

What has worked well?

- Help from agencies, Council, Services NSW
- Volunteering
- Community groups working together
- Balmoral Fires Station coordination
- Community help
- Response of Bargo Food Pantry
- Balmoral Recovery Hub
- Trees on roadways cleared
- Bargo Fire Station used as control for area (not possible 18 months ago in old station)
- Buxton Community Centre
- State Gov demolition program
- Community spirit
- Donations
- Pot holed roads repaired
- Team work at evacuation centres and support offered
- Council's commitment and involvement in a wide range of support
- Mayoral relief fund and help with food and accommodation
- Mittagong RSL brilliant team generous and caring
- Agencies and services working together, thinking outside of the norm
- United community with a common sense of purpose
- Recovery centre established in Council foyer within 24 hours of the impact
- The initiative and generosity of people who ran and who donated to the Recovery Hub and others involved in the villages
- Offers of support and assistance from within and outside the community

- Anglicare and Chaplaincy teams were terrific
- Community Led Recovery Hub where the community could seek support and information
- Care of pet animals by Local Land services brilliant
- Picton Bowling Club and Library in Picton offering place for support and sanctuary

What has not worked well?

- Dispersal of funds raised
- No donation strategy
- COVID delays
- Evacuation
- Donation money not reaching people who lost property
- Immediate support for victims
- DA process for rebuilding
- Not knowing everything available, e.g. free birth certificates
- Hazard reduction
- Road closures – had to decide to stay or leave with no re-entry
- Insurer incompetence
- One point / source of information
- S. Creek Road not being repaired
- Having to convince multiple agencies we were affected
- Dealing with utility providers – still getting bills
- Rebuild process
- Confusion and lack of coordination regarding to role of community volunteers and official agencies involved in recovery
- The overall recovery phase took too long
- People unprepared for the psychological impact of the fires
- People impacted having to verify numerous times and retell their stories to get assistance
- Communication on how to access assistance and from whom
- Trees being mulched and left in the stormwater -picked up by the floodwater and took out remaining fences
- No internet or phone for months
- Confusing information and multiple agencies with different grants and support
- Overwhelming amount of donated goods and the logistics in sorting and distributing

In terms of recovery, what should happen differently next time?

- Coordination, not duplication of services
- Dedicated animal safe place
- Demolition timeframe could be longer
- Pay our RFS volunteers
- Timeframe for grants could be longer
- Replanting of trees that were lost
- Pay for support services
- Community liaison officer
- Assess damaged properties so they know what help is available
- One central agency
- Emergency coordinator per Council area
- Government to help with trees on people's property
- More immediate information on services
- Help people stay on their properties – short term housing on their land
- Central donations place
- One coordination point or agency
- Emergency management coordinator, trained, works on preparedness
- Donations could be available for one year or so when people move back into their house
- Community evacuation point Bargo Hall (fire pump locked, gutters full of leaves)
- Clearing up of properties whether insured or not, to assist with the mental health
- No silos between agencies
- Better ways and systems (all set up in advance) to harness all the great community good will/volunteering/gifts etc and direct it all efficiently and effectively to where it is needed
- Some older people not able to submit applications on line
- One point of truth for information
- More coordinated approach to what people need
- A register of volunteers with skills identified
- Permission to share information about those impacted, captured early

- A definite plan on what steps are taken as a priority and who is responsible. What agencies are involved and what training / exercising will be under taken
- Ensure all involved in emergencies are trained and know who they are working with within their areas
- Insurance for all volunteers

What is your one big wish for recovery?

- Available emergency housing
- Tree clearing without approval near homes
- That everyone who cannot live on their property (even where house is still standing) gets treated the same
- Immediate help from all services
- For insurance companies to have empathy
- Up to date plumbing on Thirlmere RFS machines
- It's not 1976 – one road in and one road out is not good enough
- Five Cat 9s but a Cat 1 would be great
- Streamlined assistance for everyone impacted
- That people would have the wisdom and foresight of being well prepared
- Coordination of recovery
- Workable temporary accommodation on site as soon as possible
- Funding the gap of what insurance pays and what is needed
- Understand everyone's role in being prepared
- Detailed plan for recovery
- That life could go back to normal quickly
- Understanding, patience and compassion for everyone's journey

Warragamba

What has stood out for you the most about the fires and recovery?

- Support of local brigade
- Road to Yerranderie
- Volunteering
- Community spirit
- Support of RFS
- Community Support

What has worked well?

- Fires coming under control
- Tenacity of fire fighters
- Families coming together
- Emergency centre at council
- Donations from community
- Mayoral support fund
- Support
- RFS community officers
- Council resources being made available
- Outside help and resources

What has not worked well?

- Unpredictability of fire
- Time to get response to communities
- Inconsistent info
- Fires near me app crashing
- Sharing of information
- Length of fires
- Communication
- Donations
- Animal safe place
- Fire spread – geographic area

What needs to be different next time?

- Moving people out of area quicker
- Up to date info
- Community meetings
- Connecting with agencies
- Register of volunteers
- Fire trails
- Sharing of information
- Infor re recovery contacts
- Knowing who to contact
- Connecting with families
- Needs assessments
- Social media
- Improve community knowledge
- More clearing of land
- Less red tape for rebuilding

Sharing / expanding of issues

- Community services – people wanting help
- Weed infestation
- Positive support from Council staff
- Warragamba not directly impacted – are a part of a wider community, can be just as bad as experiencing a fire hit
- Surviving
- COVID-19 stopped / had huge impact on recovery
- Elongated fire
- Connectedness and support
- Environmental impacts
- Loss of social activity and support
- Mental health recovery on hold due to COVID
- Kids acting out – impact on kids
- PTSD
- Government resources
- Mental Health resources
- Emerging issues
- Psychological impact particularly around triggers
- Tapping into services
- Ongoing commitment to support young people and families
- Preparing properties – lots of information available
- Inspection support for preparedness of residential properties – how do we get advice?
- Pre-incident planning

What is your one big wish for recovery?

- Local RFS access to catchment areas
- Training, awareness and planning
- Line before impact zones
- More native animal survived
- More resources
- More cooperative approach by repose services

Buxton

What has stood out most for you about the bushfires and recovery?

- Support
- Lack of ethical behaviour at community hub
- No support from Wingecarribee Council
- Wollondilly council fabulous response
- Rural area lack of resources
- Lack of animal evacuation support
- Support from community
- Complex recovery centre
- Issues continuing months on from fire
- COVID directly following the fires

What has worked well?

- Took control and did everything independently
- Communication from Wollondilly Council
- Community so helpful
- Information through the Hub
- Mayoral relief fund
- Emergency response centre in council foyer
- Goodwill
- Red cross and Community Links Wollondilly
- Assistance from volunteers
- Councils overall response

What has not worked?

- Food in Balmoral hub
- Haphazard record keeping
- Lack of help
- Recovery centre open to all
- Conflict in community hub
- Animal evacuation
- Lack of Wingecarribee council support pre and post fires
- Data sharing
- Data integrity
- Donations – volume of goods
- Coordinating community good will
- Information dissemination

What should have happened differently?

- More information for impacted people
- Property assessment assistance
- Livestock evacuation
- Recovery centre – conflict of interest
- Clothing vouchers
- Accommodation
- Agency to offer immediate support to fast track recovery
- Register of volunteers skill set
- Awareness of response plan
- Preparation re property assistance
- Grant announcements
- Confusion of grants
- Tool kit / guide for recovery centre

What is your one big wish for the future?

- To go home
- Turn back time
- Recreation park for Balmoral
- Be recognised by Wingecarribee Council
- My livestock be brought back to life
- Beautify the rail corridor
- Tree removal
- Caring compassion and understanding to the recovery journey
- Identifying affected people early for supports

Discussion points

- Loss
- Livestock
- Fencing
- Loss of feed for livestock
- Access to feed for stock
- Access to properties after the fire
- Quick access to livestock on your property
- Return to properties fast tracked
- Recovery Centre at Balmoral – poor control procedures and distribution
- People from non-impacted areas accessing donations and presents at community hub
- Access to community hub
- Conflict of interest with recovery centre
- Impacted residents denied access to community hub
- Following the fire we moved 6 times in 5 weeks – no emergency accommodation available
- Stable accommodation
- Thanks to Wollondilly and Wingecarribee staff over Christmas

Picton

What has stood out most for you about the bushfires and recovery?

- Time recovery takes
- Process
- Preparedness
- Lack of community perception

What has worked well?

- Centralised support location
- Council Support hub
- Access to financial support – i.e. Mayors relief fund
- Balmoral hub set up and reach
- Communication from Council
- Waiving of council fees for clean-up assistance
- Supportive agency cooperation

What did not work well?

- Ability of sharing the overwhelming donation
- Having to prove impact continually
- Communication to bushfire victims – especially without technology
- COVID Impact on recovery
- Lack of training for volunteers
- No Local victim register or register of services
- Recording and sharing of information of impacted communities

In terms of recovery, What should happen differently next time?

- Emphasis on prevention
- Community Engagement
- All should have access to personal firefighting gear along with water tanks
- Making preparedness knowledge readily available to people
- Australian standard now available regarding misting systems
- Recommendation of Joan Websters – Complete Bushfire Safety Book
- Less Red Tape for building
- Money to go direct to impacted victims
- Review Section 64 listing – prevented services being unable to be in the areas and hub to assist victims

- Fires near me app needs work to better update and inform
- Support for rebuild process and financial decisions
- Proper ID card to assist with identifying and assisting victims
- Better level of communication
- List of register of essential services
- Place for residents with pets
- Resources for community recovery officers
- Assistance for the elderly and those who are without technology
- Handbook or resource guide from the community hub

What is your one big wish for the future?

- Education of people of all ages about disaster preparedness
- Circle of safety around Balmoral but really a safe evacuation area for all towns
- Band aid to help everyone who is hurting

General Feedback

- Less than 1% of people really have engaged in the forums?
- Some people are hanging back to see the outcomes or are not ready to engage as yet
- These Forums have highlighted big differences between Wollondilly and Wingecarribee
- Suggestion of letterbox drops to assist getting messages out about forums and communication options.
- Identification of danger and high risk zones by residents to council

Yerranderie

What has stood out most for you about the bushfires and recovery?

- Length of time the fires burnt
- Length of disruption. Recovery ran into COVID
- Volunteers
- The unprecedented impact- ok this year but what happens in the future with continuing climate change?
- About fires- RFS not utilising knowledge of locals for fire control/ management
- About recovery- appears good
- Community dedication
- Frustration of/ at processes for recovery
- Extent of fire ground and not knowing whether we were impacted for weeks
- Sometimes very slow
- How the fire burnt. Slow in areas and very intense in other

What has worked well?

- Better distribution of funds raised in the following months to aid the property victims
- Make safer plans (trail construction)
- Satellite Incident Management Teams
- Need air support coordination and forward staging
- Road clearing
- Community Spirit
- Money from Government
- Roadwork

What has not worked well?

- Changes since RFS took over remote area from NPWS
- Coordination of resources for multiple fire grounds
- More line scan aircraft- high altitude drones
- Fires need to be monitored at night in remote areas
- More needs to be done when the fires first start. Don't let them get away
- Liaising with on-ground local knowledge is crucial. Landowners/ farmers knew/ know the path of fires
- RFS Management (not local brigades)
- Lack of fire track maintenance leading into fire season
- Too much dependence on aircraft and technology
- Better organisation from RFS
- Grant criteria often narrow
- Websites difficult to navigate
- Often focused on property loss not disruption to life
- What went wrong? No one could anticipate the sudden total problem. We can only look into the future – develop complete early prevention

What should happen differently next time?

- Mini (local) Incident Management Teams
- Forward Staged aircraft/ air attack (strategic)
- Next time: improved communication, surveys, fight the fires 24/7
- Follow-up practices now to continue fuel reduction
- Review management
- Hazard reductions to be done more often
- Better management
- More hazard reduction around built up areas
- More cleaning around structures
- Better coordination among all the authorities and hit the fires hard when they start to put them out
- Ensure ground vehicles mop up areas where aircraft have dropped water
- Take notice of local knowledge
- Clear fire tracks prior to fire season
- Utilise hazard reduction areas

What is your one big wish for the future?

- More rain
- Learn from experience
- Put it out. Learn from locals and experience
- More aircraft
- Being able to use single engine helicopters (RFS policies state that helicopters must have twin engines. This is too restrictive)
- Immediate reaction to an emergency
- Rural preparedness education
- United agency effort to combine knowledge, experience and resources
- Learn lessons from the past