

# Report for Wollondilly Shire Council

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY RECOVERY HUB MODEL  
JUNE 2020



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



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# 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. According to information provided by Wollondilly Shire Council, significant impacts of this fire included:

- 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

On 24 June 2020, Wollondilly Shire Council hosted three two-hour workshops to explore the experiences of those impacted by the Green Wattle Creek fire and the operation of the Community Recovery Hub. The purpose of the workshops was to identify future considerations and lessons learnt about supporting a community recovery hub model.

Workshop 1 comprised Hub staff and volunteers, Workshop 2 included service providers and agencies, and Workshop 3 comprised members of the community. All workshops included people who had been directly fire-affected and were conducted as a combination of socially-distanced 'in person' discussions and participation via the online Zoom platform, in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions.

This report provides a summation of the information generated by participants of the three workshops, together with recommendations and considerations to support the future establishment and operation of community recovery hubs within the Wollondilly Shire.

### Summary of recommendations (listed in priority order)

1	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.
2	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.
3	Mapping community capacity	Identify community strengths, capabilities, risks and challenges through the development of individual community profiles.
4	Community leadership	Identify and support community leadership in disaster recovery by establishing roles for individuals and groups to be involved in emergency management.
5	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.

Please see pages 7-9 of this report for detailed recommendations and considerations.

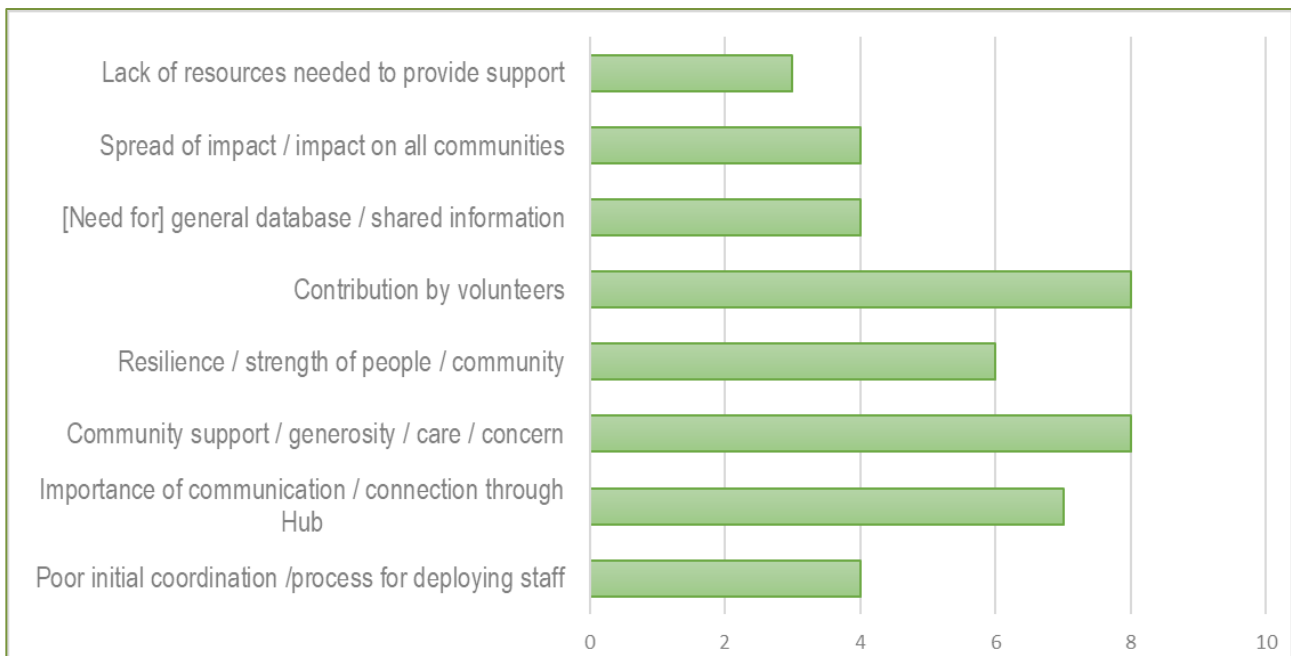
## Workshop Outcomes – Key Themes

In considering the operation of a community recovery hub model, workshop participants were asked to reflect on a series of questions:

- What has stood out for you the most in relation to the fires and recovery?
- What are the benefits of a community recovery hub?
- What are the challenges of a community recovery hub?
- What would you fix, change or improve for the future?
- What advice would you give another community wanting to establish a recovery hub?

Following is an exploration of the common themes to emerge from the workshop discussions. Council officers recorded participant responses and a full summary is included as Appendix 1 of this report (please see page 10) together with a submission to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry by the Co-managers of the Community Recovery Hub (Appendix 2, page 22). These provide important and detailed insights into the benefits and challenges of a community recovery hub model.

### What has stood out the most in relation to the fires and recovery?



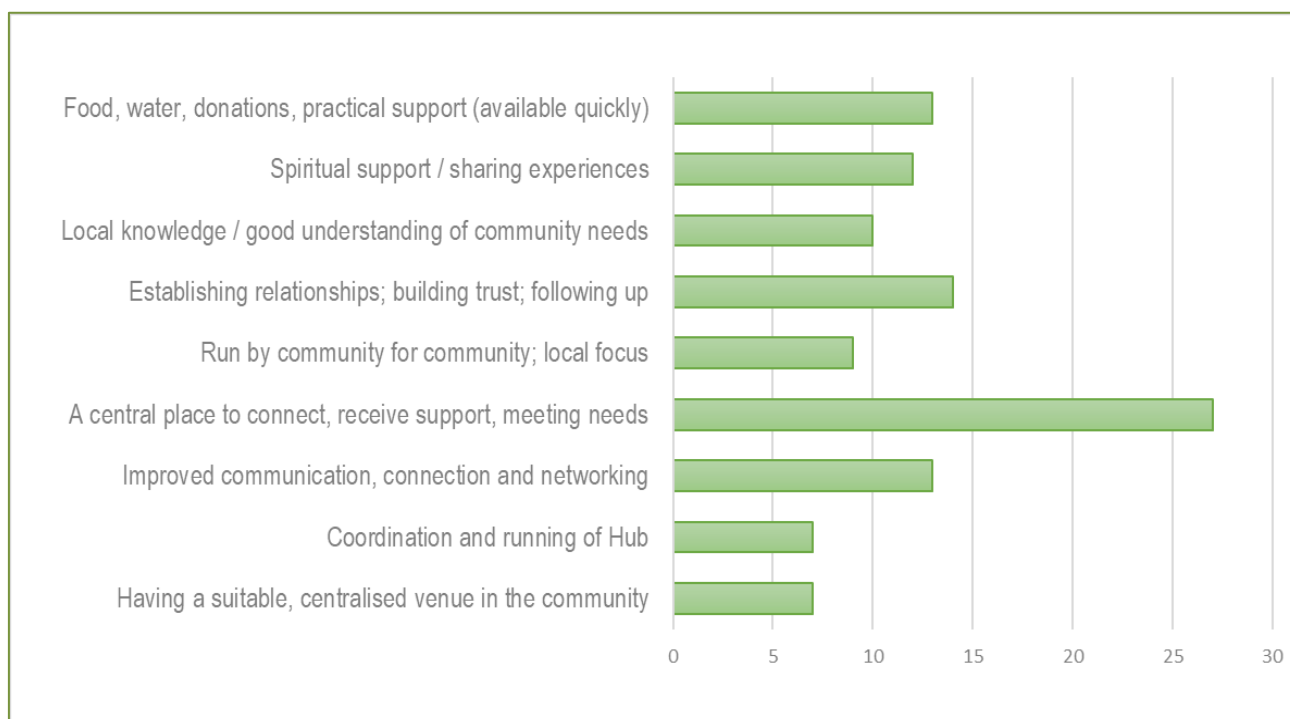
The most common responses from participants about what has stood out for them the most related to the contribution to recovery by volunteers and the significant amount of community support for those who were impacted. Participants spoke about how quickly volunteers came forward; there being 'so much kindness', genuine care and concern for affected people; the generosity of the community; and, 'the countless hours by volunteers.'

Other responses related to the strength and resilience of the community and the importance of the Hub in providing information and access to services. Many participants noted the importance of communication and identified the Hub as a place to connect and 'make sense' of the fire's impact, with one survivor noting, 'the Hub was crucial to keep us attached to the real world.'

For other participants, the challenges of response and recovery stood out most, including unclear roles and responsibilities and a lack of coordination in the initial stages and frustration at not having the resources needed to provide support. The lack of a shared database and information was a common theme, making it difficult to identify and support those needing help. A number of participants noted the scale and spread of the fires and the importance of recognising the impact across all communities.

### What are the benefits of a community recovery hub?

Workshop participants were asked to consider what has worked well in relation to the Hub; the ways in which the Hub helped service providers in their roles; and, how having access to a Hub has helped with recovery.



Acknowledgement of the Hub as a central place to connect and access recovery information, services and support was clearly identified as a benefit by more than 25 participants across the three workshops. People commented on 'seeing volunteers on a regular basis', and it being 'easier to access services in our own community'. Service providers acknowledge the Hub as a 'place of local knowledge', and a 'centralised point of contact' with a 'consistency of faces and agencies.'

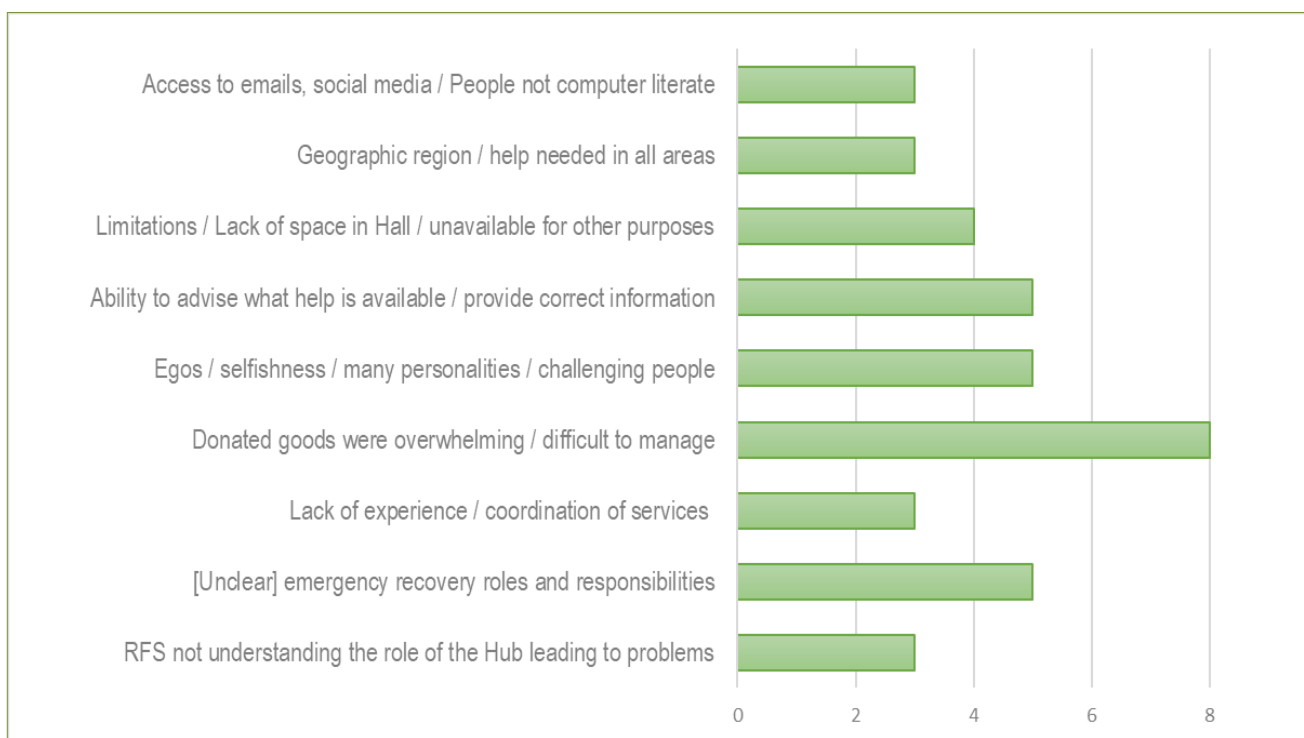
Other benefits of the Hub model included that supplies and practical support were able to be provided locally and were quickly available; that the Hub provided a source of spiritual support and a place where people could share their experiences; and, that it was 'run by community for community.' The centralised nature of the Hub was also acknowledged as helping to improve communication and networking between agencies, building relationships and trust and facilitating follow up on emerging issues.

Practical considerations included the value of having a suitable venue in the community; the smooth running and coordination of the Hub; and the capacity to tap into local knowledge and to better understand the impacts and recovery needs of the community.

Workshop participants spoke about having 'resources at your fingertips', help to apply for grants, access to clean water and essential grocery items, the ability 'to meet changing needs', and a space for people to be 'able to understand and process what's happened by talking with people.'

### What are the challenges of a community recovery hub?

Participants were asked to consider what did not work well in relation to the Hub, and the challenges encountered working with a Hub model.



A majority of participants identified 'donated goods' as a significant challenge, including receiving, storing and distributing the items provided. Similarly, people noted that there were some tensions relating to coordinating information and help, and managing expectations, particularly in such a rapidly changing situation. Unclear roles and responsibilities, and a degree of confusion about the role of the Hub added to the difficulties being experienced.

Having use of the Balmoral Hall was identified as an asset by participants, but there were also some challenges, including a lack of space and limitations of the venue and the fact that its use as a Hub meant that it was unavailable for other purposes. Further difficulties were encountered due to the size and scale of the fires and the need to respond and provide information and help to all affected areas, and to people who had been displaced by the fires to other locations. Challenges were further compounded by a lack of experience and poor coordination of services.

Finding information and connecting with services was difficult for 'people who aren't computer literate', or who 'struggled with forms' or 'access to the internet, emails and social media.'

A long delay in the provision of mental health services; a lack of help with administrative support; the very significant workload and risk of burnout for volunteers; and, not having access to a single database of information about who had been impacted and what help was available were all identified as challenges in running the Hub. Working within the distressing, emotionally charged and rapidly changing recovery environment compounded the difficulties being experienced by impacted people, service providers and volunteers.

### How can the Recovery Hub model be improved?

As a final activity, workshop participants were asked to consider what aspects of the recovery hub model they 'would 'fix, change, or improve for the future' and/or 'what advice they would give another community who was setting up a recovery hub?' Ideas and suggestions have been grouped into themes that align with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery<sup>1</sup>:

Recovery Principle	Ideas / Suggestions
<p><b>Understand the context</b></p> <p>Successful recovery is based on an understanding of community context, with each community having its own history, values and dynamics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of resources such as the Community Recovery Handbook</li> <li>• Listen to affected people – let them talk</li> <li>• Share information</li> <li>• Pre-identify locations for community hubs</li> <li>• Establish a governance framework</li> <li>• Up to date RFS or BIA lists of affected / impacted residents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recognise complexity</b></p> <p>Successful recovery is responsive to the complex and dynamic nature of both emergencies and the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis response teams</li> <li>• Dedicated disaster staff at Council</li> <li>• Council register for volunteers and agencies</li> <li>• Establish recovery and resilience committees in all areas</li> <li>• Structure needs to be adaptable</li> <li>• Expectations may become unrealistic</li> <li>• Link with Resilience NSW (formerly OEM)</li> <li>• Housing that accepts pets or livestock</li> <li>• Remuneration for volunteer expenses – fuel, etc</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> National Principles for Disaster Recovery, available at <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery/>



Recovery Principle	Ideals / Suggestions
<p><b>Use community-led approaches</b></p> <p>Successful recovery is community- centred, responsive and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community so as not to repeat the same mistakes</li> <li>• Identify 'can-do' people in the community and let them loose</li> <li>• Grassroots leadership is essential</li> <li>• Understand the timeframes of recovery process</li> <li>• Be respectful to everyone / a friendly approach</li> <li>• Identify emerging leaders</li> <li>• Be aware of others circumstances – fractured communities will exacerbate the disaster</li> <li>• Ensure the welfare of community leaders and volunteers</li> <li>• Home visits to identify loss and damage</li> <li>• Hold community recovery meetings</li> <li>• Don't make assumptions</li> <li>• Allow time to share and tell stories</li> <li>• Support, appreciate and feed volunteers</li> <li>• Be accessible</li> </ul>
<p><b>Coordinate all activities</b></p> <p>Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach, between community and partner agencies, based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One central database for agencies and survivors to access</li> <li>• Identify card for survivors</li> <li>• Coordinated Council and organisation responses built into workplans</li> <li>• Set up MOUs with key agencies</li> <li>• Council emergency management plan, reviewed monthly</li> <li>• Agencies must be available, including weekends</li> <li>• Share protocols, policies and procedures</li> <li>• Have all agencies at the community hub</li> <li>• Regulate donations</li> <li>• Work with local council and access their facilities and resources</li> <li>• List of volunteers and trades to assist [recovery]</li> <li>• Bring in resources to the hub</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communicate effectively</b></p> <p>Successful recovery is built on effective communication between the affected community and other partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of roles in emergency and recovery – who is responsible for what</li> <li>• Coordinated communication</li> <li>• Communicate with volunteer agencies</li> <li>• Register book for attendance [at hub]</li> <li>• List of mentors available</li> <li>• People are displaced by the disaster – keep them informed</li> <li>• Name tags for workers</li> <li>• Briefings for hub and agencies for tasks as they change</li> <li>• Communicate through different mediums</li> <li>• Letterbox drops in addition to social media</li> <li>• Establish a central website / web page</li> <li>• Create an e-newsletter</li> <li>• Radio networks providing updates</li> <li>• Use SMS to provide information</li> <li>• People running the hub to communicate with community beyond impacted area</li> <li>• Sharing information about what is and is not available</li> </ul>

Recovery Principle	Ideas / Suggestions
<p><b>Recognise and build capacity</b></p> <p>Successful recovery recognises, supports, and builds on individual, community and organisational capacity and resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better delineation between agencies</li> <li>• Transportable pop up recovery centre / service bus</li> <li>• Equipment and set procedures</li> <li>• Think about storage</li> <li>• Disaster manual and toolkit with key contacts</li> <li>• Recovery training for staff and community leaders</li> <li>• Embrace technology to support recovery</li> <li>• Identify state and federal funding</li> <li>• Provide emotional support for volunteers</li> <li>• Look for trained and skilled volunteers</li> <li>• Work with recognised community groups</li> <li>• Leadership - ability to manage a hub, to advocate</li> <li>• Understand people's strengths</li> <li>• Be involved – don't sit on the sidelines</li> </ul>

## Recommendations and Considerations

Based on information generated at the three workshops and national good practice in disaster recovery, the following are recommendations and considerations for Wollondilly Shire Council.

Recommendation	Considerations
<p><b>1. Framework for Community Recovery Hub</b></p> <p>Work with community leaders and recovery agencies to design a framework to support establishment and operation of a community recovery hub, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community governance and reporting</li> <li>- Criteria and triggers for establishment (i.e. scale/severity of event)</li> <li>- Key roles, responsibilities, position descriptions</li> <li>- Insurance and resourcing</li> <li>- Support to be provided by Council</li> <li>- Support anticipated from other agencies</li> <li>- Memoranda of understanding, as required</li> <li>- Alignment with Wollondilly Local Disaster Recovery Plan and Recovery Toolkit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decision to establish a community recovery hub will ultimately rest with the community given the voluntary nature of the model.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Considerations
<p><b>2. Community Recovery Hub Toolkit</b></p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication strategy, plan and templates</li> <li>- Protocols for managing and sharing information</li> <li>- Equipment checklists</li> <li>- Risk management matrix</li> <li>- Health and safety plan, including fatigue management, induction / debriefing and self-care</li> <li>- Complaints / grievance procedure</li> <li>- Roster templates</li> <li>- Attendance register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The toolkit should include strategies to support the welfare of community leaders and volunteers involved in disaster recovery.</li> <li>• A range of resources are available to assist with the development of toolkit components (please see the end of this section for links)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Mapping community capacity</b></p> <p>Identify community strengths, capabilities, risks and challenges through the development of individual community profiles, detailing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demographic and land use data</li> <li>- Critical infrastructure</li> <li>- Economic activities and influences</li> <li>- Community structures and networks</li> <li>- Culture, history and heritage</li> <li>- Disaster risk profile and history</li> <li>- Community values, priorities and aspirations</li> <li>- Community vulnerabilities and strengths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community profiles assist with preparedness and recovery planning.</li> <li>• Community profiles facilitate information sharing – particularly with external agencies that may be deployed during or following a disaster.</li> <li>• Developing community profiles in collaboration with the community can be an effective opportunity for community engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Community leadership</b></p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing local knowledge and input to preparedness planning and activities</li> <li>- Establishing and/or managing a community recovery hub</li> <li>- Coordinating spontaneous volunteers</li> <li>- Helping to regularly review emergency management plans and strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on existing community strengths by developing and implementing processes that support genuine community involvement.</li> <li>• Provide training and skill development opportunities to facilitate participation and increase community capacity.</li> <li>• Develop a strategy for spontaneous volunteering that incorporates community leadership and involvement.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Considerations
<p><b>5. Donations management</b></p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential partner agencies</li> <li>- Locations and processes for sorting, storage, transport and logistics</li> <li>- Key messages and communication channels</li> <li>- Templates for record-keeping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient management and equitable distribution of donated goods is a perennial challenge in recovery.</li> <li>• Effective partnerships and strategic pre-planning provide significant benefits and can help prevent communities becoming overwhelmed by donations.</li> </ul>

## Useful Resources

National Principles for Disaster Recovery

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery/>

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](https://dcsi.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1894/national-guidelines-for-managing-donated-goods.pdf)

# Appendix 1 – Workshop Responses

## Workshop 1

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

- Poor initial coordination response
- Lack of support for Kerrie and Kim from both councils
- Important for all to work together
- Support those with significant losses
- Lack of disaster planning
- How important communication is during the process
- Community support – generosity
- Resilience of people
- How proud people are and appreciative of support given
- Strength of people
- Genuine care and concern of people
- Resilience of people affected
- Generosity of community
- Difficulty in identifying people
- General database
- Countless hours by volunteers

Thinking about the Community Recovery Hub, what has worked well?

- Coordination of hub
- Well run at hub
- Centralized location at Balmoral
- People from different organisations worked as a team
- Communication
- A place to talk to someone
- Peoples needs are met
- Once central place for affected to go
- One place to donate help
- Run by community for community
- Ongoing centralized point
- Coordinators experience
- Organisation was spot on
- Networking
- Keep connection with community and each other

- Excellent leadership team
- Networking with community organisations
- Locals supporting locals
- Organised chaos
- Management structure
- Tap into CWA
- Commencement of relationships with victims
- Relevant experience of volunteers
- Records diligently checked
- Wingecarribee Council support
- Hub in central location
- Meeting changing needs
- Suitable venue
- Community members operating community hub
- Wollondilly Council disaster experience
- Lack of bureaucracy

#### What has not worked well in relation to the Community Recovery Hub?

- Dysfunction due to [lack of] understanding by RFS
- Emergency recovery roles
- Late arrival due to info
- Duncan Gair didn't know Balmoral was in Wingecarribee
- False promises by politicians
- Wingecarribee no emergency or recovery plans
- 6 weeks before support services arrived
- Mental health services
- Lack of experience for services
- Delays in action for people and their losses
- Unaware of problems as we were providing solutions
- Lack of support from Wingecarribee Council
- Should be a listing of local organisations updated every 6 months
- Not letting local agencies participate
- No central hub for information or communication
- List of issues from Kerry and Kim [see Appendix 2]
- Extent and length of section 44 declaration
- Complete confusion of agencies
- Donated goods were overwhelming

- Volunteers worked long hours
- Govt agencies turning up unannounced

What is the thing you would improve, fix or change for next time?

- One central data base for councils and victims to access
- ID cards for victims
- Recovery hub manual training
- Coordinated / council / org's response to disaster built into work plans
- Crisis response team
- Better delineation between agencies
- Definition of roles in emergency and recovery
- Transportable pop up recovery centre
- Coordinated communication
- Coordination between councils and volunteer agencies
- Equipment and set procedures

What advice would you give another community wanting to establish a community recovery hub?

- Disaster manual
- Dedicated disaster staff at Council
- Communicating with volunteer agencies
- Liaise with council officer
- Work with community so not to repeat same mistakes
- Don't do it
- Appropriate training
- Use of handbook
- Council support
- Council register for volunteers and agencies
- Council emergency management plan reviewed monthly
- Identify can do people in the community and let them loose
- Listen to affected people – let them talk
- Contact crisis response team
- Share information
- Manual to understand framework
- Be respectful to everyone
- Be aware of others circumstances
- MOU is great idea

- Identify who is responsible for what
- Use technology

## Workshop 2

What has stood out for you the most about the fires and recovery in relation to your role and responsibilities?

- Mittagong RSL coping with people and pets
- Lack of coordination and communication
- CWA members support throughout
- Privacy trust and familiar faces for victims
- Reluctance to ask for help
- Point of reference
- Lack if shared information
- No formal role at hub
- Lack of coordinated information
- Lack of process deploying staff
- Important to be ready for an emergency
- Advertising for victims
- Liaising with the locals was most effective
- No central coordination or plan
- No one person to liaise with at council
- Spread of impact
- What is councils role supporting a community hub
- Lots of smart people – things still don't go to plan
- Misconception with communication
- Resilience and strength of communities
- Impact of fires on all communities
- Need to provide support but no resources
- Not understanding what needs to be done

How has the Community Recovery Hub model helped you in your role / deliver your service?

- Central location
- Goods and services available at one place
- Connected community
- Sharing with locals



- Local understanding
- Builds relationships
- Local hub builds trust
- One place for all victims to seek help
- Ability for orgs to work together
- Central locations for both LGAs
- Victims recognise orgs by name and badges
- Place of local knowledge
- Centralised agencies
- Centralised point of contact
- Consistency of faces and agencies
- Sharing of important data
- Valuable connections in community
- Provided a central point to connect
- Food, goods, grants
- A place to talk
- A place bringing community together
- Central point for connections
- Central point for services, donations and events
- Meet with CFO members
- Relationships vital
- Good understanding of community needs
- Distribution of information
- Distribute info to community
- Safe haven for community
- Grass roots community in action
- Direct link to community
- Enabled connection
- Central point of coordination
- Listen to affected communities and respond
- Be with those who experienced similar things
- Understand needs
- Gain better understanding of community members

Were there any challenges you encountered working with the Hub model?

- Clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Operating in divided community
- Egos
- Selfishness
- Unwillingness of RFS to work with us
- Inability to see needs outside of village
- Negative comments and perceptions
- Advising community of what's available
- Donations to be made to hub and accounted for
- RFS to work with nor against hub
- Response time of services to come on board
- Lack of space in hall
- Geographic region
- Giving out of correct information
- Set up preparedness groups
- Allocate place
- Available to all areas of region
- Need specific contact at council to make decisions in timely manner
- Set of guidelines – who what when where
- Dissemination of info to people outside of area
- Doubling up
- Many personalities and challenging people
- Chaos
- Coordinating services
- Sharing
- Meeting needs of differing areas / villages
- Limitation of location
- Consistency of staff
- Removal of barriers
- Needed larger site
- Keep politics and media out
- Risk of stress and burnout
- Community conflict
- Data management and privacy
- Clarity of roles with council
- Support

- Documentation
- Complexities of recovery process
- Community resilience initiatives
- Language skills
- Eligibility requirements
- Checks and balances with distribution of donations
- Governance framework
- People's emotions and responses
- Early set up of services following the disaster

What is one thing you would fix, change or improve for the future?

- Have a disaster plan
- Identify locations of the hub
- Update every 6 months
- Nowhere to access containers
- Advertising register
- Agencies must be available including weekends
- Centralised data base
- Defined roles
- Sharing information
- Agreed way forward
- Share protocols
- Policies and procedures in place
- Common universal data base of victims and loss
- Recovery committees in all areas
- Funding state or federal government
- Service bus
- Victim ID card
- Training – resilience handbook
- Action on global warming
- Is there a better way to communicate
- No pandemic at the same time
- Toolkit with key contacts
- Roles / responsibilities
- Friendly approach
- Training for skill development for emerging leaders
- Welfare of community leaders

- Central data system
- Better coordination between services
- Connect to all available systems
- Protocols at the outset

What advice would you give another community wanting to establish a community recovery hub?

- Contact the community engagement / resilience officer at council
- Have all agencies come to hub
- Agreement by all agencies to share information
- Right people in the hub
- Long duration
- Register book for attendance
- Plan for council led recovery
- List of mentors available
- People fall through the crack – how to manage how they are covered
- People are displaced by impact
- Embrace technology
- Arrange emotional support for volunteers
- Home visits to identify loss and damage
- Name tags for workers
- Roles for agencies
- Briefings for hub and agencies for tasks as they change
- Set up reliable communication process
- Letter box drops rather than reliance on social media
- Hold community recovery meetings
- Clarity in communication
- Listen to the victims
- Don't make assumptions
- Structure needs to be adaptable
- Establish protocols
- Set up MOUs with key agencies
- Set up central website / webpage
- Create an e-newsletter
- SMS to announce information
- 2 staff to attend
- Identify key stakeholders

- Allow time to share and tell stories
- Be involved – don't sit on sideline
- Expectations may become unrealistic
- Grass roots leadership is essential
- Invite local Govt to help establish
- Appreciate and feed volunteers
- Set up data base
- Support community volunteers
- Governance framework
- Identify emerging leaders
- Establish recovery ad resilience committee
- Use social media
- Be accessible
- Spend time understanding toolkit
- Targeted support
- Assistance point
- Regulate donations
- Link well with OEM

## Workshop 3

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

- Contribution made by CWA
- Amazing support from volunteers t hub
- Kindness of strangers
- Community at time of crisis
- Amount of time it takes to get things done
- Promises not fulfilled – politicians / Blazead
- How quick volunteers came forward
- Donations and financial supports
- Impressed by communication
- Information on website
- Support from the hub
- Kindness of strangers
- Meetings and RFS calls keeping us abreast of what was happening
- Facebook posts keeping us informed

- Knowing my community and building networks
- Develop strategies to care and support
- No one told you what to do
- Didn't know our house burnt down – heard it on the news
- We live in the lucky country – everyone pulls together
- So much kindness
- Accessing the hub kept you in touch
- Closing of the hub was another hurt – came out of nowhere
- Hub was crucial to keep us attached to the real world
- Feeling connected
- Going to hub provided connectedness
- Good spirit of volunteers

### How has having a community hub helped recovery?

- Info regarding grants, counselling,
- Community connection with people from village
- Spiritual support
- Access to clean clothes, water, donations
- Access to practical support
- Support to fill out forms from services
- Seeing volunteers on a regular basis
- Easier to access services in our own community
- Services in the one place
- Locals helping locals
- Business gave donations through the hub
- \$15500 Bunnings vouchers distributed
- Faith in the community by the community
- Help with services
- Being with people going through the same thing
- Being with the community when you're not living in the community
- Meeting community members
- Getting essential grocery items
- Central location to access information
- Personal connections
- Apply for grants
- Council processes
- People felt valued
- Material assistance available immediately

- Having a hall – an asset to the community
- Access to clean water (bottled water)
- Space to share and listen to stories
- Able to understand and process what's happened by talking with people
- Counselling services
- Longevity of the hub being open
- People who were running it
- Resources at your fingertips
- Danger that people who handle trauma fall through the net
- Men's Shed being accessible
- Emotional recovery
- Practical information
- Sharing ideas

### Have you experienced any challenges with the community hub model?

- Lack of clarity in transition from response to recovery
- Nowhere to put donated goods
- Hard to keep up with changing info
- Services turned up unannounced
- People demanding access to goods and vouchers
- Fraudulent attempts to access donations and funds
- Dispute over management of donations
- Not enough media coverage of the hub to / for impacted people
- Clarity of who can access the hub
- People who relocated outside of region didn't know about hub
- Virtual hub for future disasters
- People who aren't computer literate struggled with forms and information
- Access to internet, emails and social media
- Help to navigate information and resources
- Food for people with dietary requirements
- Vouchers – limited places to shop
- not knowing people in your community
- No control over donations
- Provide WIFI services / library services at hub to access internet
- People not forthcoming to seek help – proud, people worse off

## What advice would you give another community wanting to establish a community recovery hub?

- o Go forward and collect a manual to set up a centre
- o Look for trained and skilled volunteers
- o Updated list of agencies
- o Sign in register
- o Work with local council and access their facilities
- o Work with recognised community groups
- o Storage
- o People running the hub to communicate with community beyond impact
- o Understanding of timeframes of recovery process
- o Tap into council resources
- o Someone to contact people placed in housing out of the area – keep them informed
- o Housing that accepts pets or livestock
- o List of volunteers and tradies to assist
- o Fencing for animals and livestock
- o Passing on information regarding resources in the village ie tank water, off grid power, sewerage etc
- o Sharing information about what's not available
- o Mobile networks
- o Radio networks providing updates
- o Communicate through different mediums
- o Updated RFS or BIA lists of affected / impacted residences
- o Assistance with fences
- o Trees – dangerous trees, felling of trees, council requirements
- o Donated goods – baked beans and 2 minute noodles
- o Leadership – ability to manage the hub, advocate
- o Bringing in resources to the hub
- o Understanding people's strengths
- o Remuneration for volunteer expenses – fuel etc



## Appendix 2 – Submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry: Community Recovery Hub, Balmoral Village Hall

### Questions and suggestions to the inquiry:

- Why are Evacuation centres locations identified in LEM plans but not Community Recovery Hubs (not recovery centres as run by Government)?
- AIDR – Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Handbook – why was this not available to CRH from the start.
- Why does it take 6-8 weeks POST disaster before mental health support was offered to victims @ CRH? I have been informed by several agencies Red Cross; Anglicare and others that they were not allowed into the disasters areas until RFS declared it to no longer be a fire zone/Section 44. Their MOU's require review. This lack of support not only left very traumatised victims vulnerable but also imposed unthinkable pressure on the volunteers who for 6-8 weeks were the face of support. This has greatly damaged all the volunteers and the images of the victims when they came through our doors is permanently burnt into our minds. We are not trained in trauma counselling and nor should we expected to be.
- Why did Government agencies take so long to get mobilised or assign people on a regular basis to CRH. A location where all fire victims attended daily initially and then weekly for months and months after and still are now 6 months post fires. The victims were clearly in no fit state to be tramping from one Gov't office to another they had enough trouble knowing what day of the week it was and absolutely no idea who; what or where to go for what.
- Why were volunteers allowed to work in the fire zone post fires coming through? No one advised us that this was not allowed and yet both councils were fully aware we were in there. Why are our lives any less important than those of other support agencies i.e. Red Cross, whose MOU's don't allow them to enter Fire areas until RFS give OK. The victims would not have survived if we had not gone in there immediately.
- Why are CRH not provided with administrative support from day 1 by local councils? Record keeping; registration; sourcing donors; donations records; preparation rosters; preparation templates; checklists for victims; contact registers.....and on and on it goes all essential for the operation of well managed CRH. This work fell to the two volunteers who took on Co-Management roles and meant working 7 days a week for months.
- Who is going to take overall responsibility going forward for united management of victim information; database management and sharing of information between approved agencies? If there was one very strong complaint very early it was the additional trauma suffered continually by our victims from having to retell their stories and prove their identity time and time again to each and every support agency that eventually appeared at the Hub. This total lack of shared information between ourselves and all other agencies meant that even to this day- nearly 6 months post fires coming through this area we are still locating people who have "fallen through the cracks." We are requesting that a designated agency be made responsible for collection, management and sharing of victim information (waivers by individuals can be completed) with approved supporting agencies and others organisations like ourselves to ensure all victims receive the support and entitlements due to them. Designated individuals within these agencies could be given login id to allow not only access to this database but to also allow updating information as it becomes available. We have spent literally weeks sharing information with both Councils; Red Cross; Anglicare and other support agencies to ensure "our" victims have not been missed or overlooked. An unnecessary waste of our time. If required have an MOU with all support agencies to allow this information to be shared. Whilst we appreciate the limits placed on all these agencies they all agree there MUST be a better way forward.

- Training for community volunteer groups in basic trauma counselling- how to recognise and how to respond. Like CWA; Men's' Sheds etc. as we have been the operational force behind the management and operation of this CRH and were the first responders after the fire.
- Requirement for consistent and truthful messaging from Government.
- Don't keep moving responsibility from one agency to another and then expect victims to reapply for grants and aid. Many just gave up and have consequently missed out on what is essential financial support.
- Why is it that 6 months after the fires that the Local Community Links organisation (Mental Health) are only now putting additional staff in place especially as this is the contracted Government agency to deliver these services. We had to make a hell of a noise to get one counsellor 1 day per week. This officer had no mobile phone provided and only worked P/T- really!!!! We would never use them again- absolutely useless. Their excuse was that they had to apply for additional funding- why is this not automatically part of the State plan? And why do these agencies not have a register of trained approved people on stand by for any such disaster?
- Victims would like to see a **VICTIM ID card produced**. This would clearly provide all information required by all agencies and remove the need for these traumatised victims to have to relive their stories over and over again. It would also allow for the correct level of support to be targeted to the right people.
- Why did CRH have to purchase its own brochure/leaflet stands to house information provided by Councils; agencies and other bodies???
- Why was Joint Recovery Task Force wound up so early? Why was their role not clearly defined from beginning?
- Total lack of clear messaging about role/responsibilities and support being offered @ CRH. Tired of being attacked and dealing with aggression and having to justify our actions to ill-informed Government agencies.
- Manual/model requires development for operation of **COMMUNITY RECOVERY HUBS** (separate to Recovery centres which run for very short period of time by Government). This will need to include description of what is required and capabilities of persons operating and managing these facilities. What and who will provide support and how?
- The important and essential role of COMMUNITY run recovery hubs needs to be acknowledged and supported by both local councils and State Governments and not just verbally.
- **Community Recovery committees:** ongoing roles in preparation; planning don't overlook the depth of knowledge and skills within these organisations. Local councils should create register of all supporting agencies and smaller bodies within the shires and regularly update the details for contact and support offered. We wasted so much time initially finding right people for right jobs. These will include CWA; Lions; Rotary; Men's' Sheds; Church groups (who have provided us with thousands of dollars in donations). CWA- can make sandwiches; run a Community Recovery Hub; supply goods; Men's' sheds- supplied tools and mental health support; Lions and Rotary have enormous network vital contacts. **YOU IGNORE THE LITTLE PERSON AT YOUR PERIL.**
- Provision of a Communications Officer to CRH: communications are an absolute essential to get our message out and updated on a very regular basis. To assist with preparation and distribution of our messaging across all communities at all levels. We were left to do this using CWA FB page and even regularly asked by local councils to share information from them as we had better reach.

- **CHECKLIST FOR VICTIMS:** Another very clear message is the need for the preparation of a checklist which can be provided to all victims to allow them to manage what donations/grants they have accessed and also to assist the volunteers to help them manage this process. So many of our victims were so traumatised that they had no memory of what they had applied for let alone what they should apply for it there for fell to us to remember who had applied for what. When we raised this with our victims they all agreed it would be invaluable for them. You must clearly understand even though a body walked through our doors there was very often and for many months NO ONE HOME MENTALLY. They relied solely on us to keep them across all the changes and new grants; this should not have been left to us. They wanted us to keep their copies in our register as they admitted they would put it down and have no memory of where it was left (fire brain as it was commonly referred to by them) - would you keep it safe for me please, I trust you to look after me. This was raised very early on with both Councils who agreed that it was a good idea and they were going to create a list with our support- well we're still waiting.
- Why did it take 6 weeks before a list from RFS to Council of effected / lost homes to be available
- Why is there no formal way of advising residents whom lost their homes via a call or contact from Police about their home, instead they found out their home was lost via Media. Many felt an invasion of their home and privacy as Media/ Reporters were allowed in to film their home burning down, yet they were not allowed back to see if they could salvage anything, which then resulted in looting. Many Media/Reporters had no empathy or regard for peoples loss, all they want is a story.
- Warehouse / Show Ground etc – there needs to be a allocated area that can be used for any Disaster to manage donations, and support. This needs to be on-going not just around for a few weeks. Many victims do not surface for a few months after due to their trauma.
- A Disaster does not stop just because it's a "Public Holiday" "Christmas" or it's a weekend etc.,. We all still were there to help every victim on these days, yet to get the help from agencies such as Service NSW and Mental Health was not possible as it was a Public Holiday or everyone was on holidays! NOT GOOD ENOUGH.
- Why don't agencies talk even within their own agency, we had people turn up to meetings from the same agency, they were in the same role and didn't even know each other, then the next week your told "oh sorry that person has moved to a new section". When someone is assigned to that position during a disaster they need to stay, otherwise we have to repeat the whole process again.
- This is not our FIRST disaster & won't be our last, why do we need to constant reviews that don't seem to have and recommendations put in place anyway

**Regards,  
 Kerrie O'Grady  
 President Picton Branch CWA and  
 Kim Hill  
 Co- Managers Community Recovery Hub at Balmoral**