

SHOALHAVEN CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE NSW INDEPENDENT BUSHFIRE INQUIRY



Mayor's Message

I am pleased to present Shoalhaven City Council's submission for the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. The submission, although from an organisational perspective is compelling reading and as community leaders, we need to work together to instigate the learnings from the bushfire crisis of 2019/2020.

We can erase the physical scars on the landscape and the built environment in a reasonably timely manner. But, the human suffering and misery that the Currowan Fire has inflicted on my community will have far reaching impacts, that could have intergenerational implications in respect to mental health and wellbeing. In holding ourselves accountable to make changes to improve outcomes for future generations we need to have empathy for and understanding of the suffering of the people who were at the frontline of the impact. As leaders we need to take forward the wicked problems of Climate Change and the flow on impacts on Bushfire in this instance, but also coastal flooding which we also experienced in the short period after the fires. To that end there is a high expectation from the community that government will act swiftly on the best advice this time around and not leave recommendations on shelves for future contemplation.

I am immensely proud of the work that Shoalhaven City Council undertook during the crisis, immediately afterwards in the early recovery phase and now ongoing as we try our very best to support and recreate our communities amid the global crisis of COVID-19.

I draw your attention to the many votes of thanks placed throughout the document and assure you that these sentiments are deeply felt across our Local Government Area.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to thank two people who are seldom recognised for the work they have also contributed during this very trying period for our City, Mr Vince Di Pietro our Recovery Coordinator for his unshakeable commitment to the people of the Shoalhaven and his determination to work through some enormously complex and difficult issues, and to Mr Stephen Dunshea CEO of Shoalhaven City Council who has been a source of great leadership and steady direction to this organisation which has faced the most turbulent of times in its history.

We are all living through a point of history that will be reflected upon for years to come, let's make that reflection a promising and positive one for the future.

I commend the submission to you.



Foreword

Vincenzo E. B Di Pietro AM, CSC.
SHOALHAVEN RECOVERY COORDINATOR

Background

The Currowan bushfire commenced on the 26 November 2019. In the period leading up to Christmas and New Year period, fires combined and spread across the neighbouring Local Government Areas (LGA). The Currowan fire, having initially been managed as a single entity, spread across neighbouring City and Shire LGAs and saw the fire being remapped delineating areas of responsibility into LGAs for ongoing response and recovery management.

Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) response was immediate and continued throughout the bushfire emergency period, the declaration of the State of Emergency under Section 44, and the extinguishing of the fire. SCC direct involvement is ongoing as is its active engagement in the recovery in partnership with the NSW State Government.

After an approach in mid-December, I was invited by the Mayor and CEO of SCC to consider being the Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC) which I commenced, initially in a voluntary capacity, on 3 January 2020. SCC endorsed and ratified unanimously at its Extraordinary Meeting of 20 January 2020, both my appointment as LRC and the Recovery Action Plan. I maintain links to Council, affected communities, NSW State Government and Federal Government recovery response and engaged agencies – government, private, NGO and individual members of the community.

A copy of the SCC Recovery Action Plan and the first two monthly reports to SCC of the progress of our City's recovery are attached to this submission.

Observations – Governance

In broad terms, the City of Shoalhaven covers 4,600 square kilometres of which 82% was burned by the Currowan and Compton Grange Fires of 2020. 80% of the City of Shoalhaven is occupied by the Morton National Park, Foreshore, Crown, and Public Reserves. The remaining 20% is for human habitation and ongoing development.

The complexity of overarching government legislation (Local Government Act 1993), policy and planning legislations is contributory to many of the challenges presented by the bushfire. Challenges which manifest themselves in practice with the sorts of planning and development shortcomings which underpinned the effects of the fire.

It is my understanding that the guidelines for planning and development that are prepared and administered by the Council are guided by advice coming from the NSW Government via the NSW Department of Planning, Infrastructure & Environment and the NSW RFS. The key Council land use planning document for Shoalhaven is the Shoalhaven Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2014 and it is supported by the lesser order, more detailed and discretionary Shoalhaven Development Control Plan (DCP) 2014 of land within Shoalhaven is assessed and determined in accordance with these two plans and the relevant strategic guidance within them.

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) is responsible for bushfire planning and provides advice to Councils where required on strategic planning matters and also more directly is

required to provide detailed feedback or 'concurrence' for certain forms of actual development in identified locations. Their key piece of guidance to Councils is the Planning for Bushfire Protection (PBP) Guideline. Given the nature of the NSW planning system this guideline and associated legislative support takes precedence over Councils LEP and DCP. As a result, Councils LEP and DCP are largely silent in terms of detailed bushfire planning requirements for development applications in Shoalhaven. The DCP does require that all 'new' development comply with PBP and also AS3959 (both documents work in tandem). As such my sense is that the landuse planning functions may not be well understood or be as well aligned as they could be. Integrated development requirements further complicate planning and development decision making generally. It is also important to note that a lot of the towns and villages in Shoalhaven were largely established and developed prior to the development and release of the current bushfire planning requirement and as such do not necessarily comply with the current requirement. The current bushfire planning system is perhaps most effective when considering brand new greenfield development and not necessarily for historic situations that are evident in large parts of Shoalhaven.

It is within this governance and legislative landscape that regulatorily agnostic bushfires attacked the Shoalhaven and within which will be driven recovery and re-development even if rebuilding on some land makes little sense in the wake of the recent bushfires and other crises. In the absence of review and simplification, the risk posed by future emergencies will be largely unmitigated.

It is this complexity which drives the following observations and perceptions gained in the process of bushfire and emergency recovery. Additional perceptions, appropriately identified, are more generic, of relevance to the broader community and have been further amplified by the ongoing and current challenges of COVID19 in the wake of the bushfire.

Observations and Overarching Concerns.

'One road in, one road out'. The South Coast of NSW has many roads which are single lane into, and single lane out of each coastal village. For the majority of its length between Nowra and Gippsland in Victoria, the Princes Highway is of a similar single lane configuration. Such road design configuration is a deficiency which presents significant risks, dangers and failures. By way of example, a 12 metre wide road, flanked immediately by trees very much higher than the road is wide, and within which trees are positioned, power poles and cables are single points of failure for power, evacuation, and entry/exit by emergency services. This single point of failure is not bushfire specific: strong wind/storms, car accident or mischief potentially deliver the same outcome.

- *Mitigation: Future planning should ensure roads cannot be blocked, and power poles and lines cannot be downed by adjacent trees.*

Power. Most villages and remote dwellings are dependent on single power line transmission of electricity. The risk of power loss needs to be mitigated in future planning. A possible secondary mitigation might include rooftop/solar farm feeds into battery storage to a micro-grid powering each village or aggregation of dwellings. A necessary and tertiary mitigation might be the requirement for diesel back-up generation and a mandated minimum supply of fuel. Existing billing legislation and practices do not accommodate the utilisation of local harvested power for local

consumption needs and need to be reviewed and adapted to suit the diversity of community configurations accordingly.

- *Mitigation. Power assurance for villages and isolated dwellings needs three levels of provision: main grid, solar /battery/microgrid, and diesel generator.*

Telecommunications. The area of coverage and number of telecom masts is primarily a commercial return on investment decision based upon projected usage and customer base. While a reasonable business decision, single, multi-user towers whose coverage area does not overlap adversely affects isolated communities and aggregations of dwellings. Areas within the City of Shoalhaven suffered service outage and severe disruption when both copper and fibre optic telecommunication service to outlying dwellings in Kangaroo Valley and Nowra Hill was out/disrupted from late November to mid-March. To amplify the relatively short distances between full coverage and 'isolation', both of these areas are within a two hour drive of the Sydney GPO.

- *Mitigation. Telecommunications and digital access minimum footprint and restoration obligations on providers needs to be regulated, checked for compliance and enforceable by legislation. Customers must have Government advocacy to represent their service failures, billing and customer service concerns.*

Water. In our LGA, access to primary and essential water switching controls and facilities were seriously affected by fire whether by damaging the controls or by denying access for servicing/technical personnel. This obstruction was in proximity of, or in access paths to the amenity. This had a direct impact (loss of water) in areas where hours later, bushfire attacked and destroyed residential dwellings.

- *Mitigation. Access paths and adjacent areas surrounding essential controls for LGA utilities and services must have better and more generous clearance areas, accessible and physically secure from any potential for unauthorised interference.*

Diesel fuel: Access to fuel, diesel fuel in particular, is a matter of national resilience and community security. Along the South Coast, apart from individual farm holdings and that which is held in retail outlet tanks, there is no reserve fuel storage. An urgent assessment of potential fuel needs assuring adequate supply should access be denied or constrained during peak times of tourism and known disaster danger such as bushfire season must be legislated. Compliant fuel reserves should be held and managed in stowages at strategic locations between main urban centres and major cities. This mitigation will address a significant vulnerability to both national reserves and availability during emergency.

Population/Planning Alignment. Census data is gathered in the winter months/mid-year. It fails to address the surge in population in isolated villages during holiday season. This leads to a significant underestimation of service and amenity requirements and community facilities at times when population can multiply significantly. By way of example, the population of Bendalong/Manyana is multiplied five-fold in holiday season. During the non-holiday periods, only one in five dwellings is lived in. This proves to be a significant failing in understanding minimum road requirements, service provision (doctors, ambulance, hospitals, retail) and other amenities consistent with the population.

- *Mitigation. Emergency planning, procedures and social awareness of area specific procedures in emergency through to failing to surge and provide sufficient primary emergency coverage in peak times needs to be planned and prepared.*

Response Concerns/Improvements

Multiple Points of Contact. From the start of the emergency, there was no single number or website to visit. Points of Contact for each and every agency was a separate number and website. Put simply, “I am burnt out and am suffering, who do I call?” This measure could have been a real comfort for bushfire affected people in the intervening period before the setting up and opening of the Recovery Centre.

- *Mitigation/Recommendation. An emergency Hotline should be established as soon as an emergency of any significant dimension is apparent. From this hotline, callers can be directed or invited to approach relevant agencies that can assist. Internet availability, access or familiarity for all citizens whether affected directly or not, must not be assumed.*

Recovery Centres. The establishment of the Recovery Centre at Ulladulla and Nowra in the early days of the fire response was much appreciated and welcomed. It did however, have some flaws and regrettably, significant shortcomings. The Recovery Centre was described as a ‘one-stop shop’. In effect it was one geographic location (Ulladulla Civic Centre) with over 20 ‘shops’ representing multiple State (and some Federal) Government agencies, NGOs, supporting organisations and Council. Each organisation was responsible for their own work routine and attendance. In some instances, participation was manpower and finance resource sensitive/constrained leading to no presence in the Recovery Centre. Each had their own laptop/connectivity to their respective registration databases and it was not possible to cross reference with any other agency. This placed the customers and clients under significant, and often, very frustrating pressure. For those who had suffered great loss, the daunting tasks of registering multiple times – at each and every station/desk in the Recovery Centre was debilitating. In effect, we failed to utilise the advantages of digital technology and reverted to using the laptop or digital connection in no more advanced a way than a quill and ledger. It would have been useful to have some definition of “what success looks like” to know when to revert to business as usual or alternative mechanisms.

- *Mitigation/Improvement. A simple, single registration shared by all attending agencies is not difficult to achieve and should be introduced before the next emergency/disaster. Follow-up to each registrant is also essential. Call back was promised to all who attended but anecdotally failed to occur and much feedback to this effect continues to this day.*

Registration. Two observations/recommendations regarding Registration: If the purpose of registration is to obtain collection data for the number of persons visiting the Recovery Centre then the current practice may well meet requirements. If however, the purpose of registration is to acquire the data necessary for government agency support and waste and land clearance, then the process needs to be revisited and refined. By way of example, the early registration process failed to identify home ownership/ratepayer detail. Consideration should also be given to seeking LGA assistance from the earliest time and utilising LGA records and rate records to facilitate home ownership identification significantly sooner than was achieved relying on

ServiceNSW registration and sifting through thousands of registrations to identify home/land ownership.

Mail Out. The Shoalhaven Recovery Centre recorded just short of 1,500 registrations. SCC does not have access due to privacy provisions to ServiceNSW registrations but presumably the numbers are similar. In order to complement the registration process and expedite owner approval for the clean-up, SCC conducted a mailout to all registered landowners of fire destroyed dwellings. Registered owners were identified comparing the completed Building Impact Assessments of all destroyed dwellings, the Council records/rates records and the SCC cadastre. Of the known 309 dwellings destroyed in the Shoalhaven, 261 letters and reply paid envelopes were mailed to each registered landowner. The rate of return has been pleasing noting the diversity of dwellings – from holiday homes, rentals, through to primary residence.

Opt In versus Opt Out. The registration for property clearance and debris removal is run as an 'Opt In' system – a landowner must opt in for the property clearance. As the clearance is funded jointly by the State and Federal Government this approval by the owner must occur. This is turn, in the event of late advice or no advice, delays clean up for those that have opted in. 'Opt In' also places no onus or 'social contract' on the client to respond with any urgency. This is especially the case when most landlords in coastal villages are absentee landowners and the urgency for clearance is not as pressing as it most certainly is for primary dwelling landowners. 'Opt Out' places an onus on ALL owners to respond within a specified timeframe to elect to opt out of the clean-up.

- *Recommendations.*
 - *Utilise the available and readily accessible data of LGA Councils early to identify targeted results such as registered homeowners.*
 - *Mail is still a highly effective method of communication. Not all citizens are connected to the Internet. Mail assures contact with many residents whose digital/internet access may be from non-existent, through disrupted and not reliable, to fully effective.*
 - *Future multiple relief efforts should be Opt Out to ensure 'social contract' with clients and place some onus on landowners to make contact with authorities charged with effecting the required outcome.*

Like for Like Replacement. Fire damaged bridges and facilities have been addressed with a 'like for like' replacement policy. This policy is in need of review. If a facility was destroyed by fire due to its lack of fire resilience or age, replacing like with like is reinvesting in future failure. There needs to be an application of improved fire resilience and compliance with contemporary fire-resistant construction. This will most certainly be more costly than 'like for like' but must be given due reconsideration.

Locally organised community recovery. Community-led recovery occurred across the LGA to varying degrees. The breadth of LGA smaller village community activity was/is from little or local group effort and activity, through to some small communities which were highly organised and effective in organising themselves and satisfying immediate needs. This level of self-help is to be encouraged and promoted wherever possible because it is healthy and reassuring to the local community. There is however an inherent risk to recovery and future safety in the more active communities. Efforts towards greater independence from the LGA by delaying early engagement to

the main recovery effort and its network may not be as helpful to resident recovery and confidence as would otherwise be the case. Other cautionary activities are the local progress and promotion of improved community amenities such as village halls and remote self-help service delivery to facilitate a perceived greater independence and safety in the future. Established Local Emergency Planning processes and the messaging language during emergency must be adhered to and reinforced. A false perception of safety or independence during emergency can lead to disregard of evacuation and emergency direction in times of crisis. If the primary cause of the emergency has not yet been treated and residual and secondary risk remains (e.g. one road in, one road out; power outage) the community is at serious risk if it fails to respond to authority direction and advice.

Announcables and Delivery. During the emergency there have been many announcements of initiatives by State and Federal governments to lessen the harm and effect on the community. All have been well received and much welcomed. Implementation of each has suffered varying degrees of delay or amendment in implementation. By way of example, the publicly announced and reaffirmed government assurance of clearance of all fire damaged property has not translated into clearance of all fire damaged property and buildings in practice. Put simply, the announcement in this instance did not match the contract/scope of works agreed with the primary contractor. This in turn has caused significant mental anguish for many citizens in our LGA.

- *Recommendation. Thorough scrutiny of consequences of proposed relief must be tested at desktop before announcement. I am sufficiently experienced in government service to understand the reality of pressure under which senior levels operate, but in disaster and emergency, all announcements must be viewed through the lens of the recipient before any attraction to satisfy the false urgency of the majority's expectation for government action.*

Conclusion

The good in humanity is always best amplified during the worst that nature can deliver. This was very evident during the fires of the 2019/2020 summer in the Shoalhaven LGA. There is an extraordinary amount of positive outcome for which to be grateful. There is also much unsung work and dedication to be recognised and acknowledged.

The strongest acknowledgment possible for the efforts, challenges and disruptions of the fire is to realise what remains to be done, and that recovery will be lengthy and a significant drain on many people, councils and agencies. Identifying the cause underpinning the lessons learned and mitigating them accordingly is the greatest achievable outcome of recovery regardless of the primary cause of any future crisis whether it be storm, fire, flood, disease, mischief, or war. Lessons relate mostly to the inadequacy of market driven service provision, planning and underpinning statistical evidence to provide for regional communities' needs. All demand improving resilience logically and methodically to address vulnerabilities so that future threats look after themselves.

Vincenzo E.B Di Pietro, AM, CSC
Shoalhaven Recovery Coordination

North Nowra, NSW, 2541
8 April 2020

Contents

Fuel loads	11
CSIRO.....	11
Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC	12
Hazard reduction – where it matters	12
Critical Infrastructure.....	14
The Princes Highway	14
State Highways and Regional Roads.....	16
Electricity.....	17
Telecommunications	17
Protection of critical infrastructure – an economy of effort	19
How many people? Is Census data enough?	19
Mixed messaging.....	20
The use of emerging technology	22
Digital Evacuation Technology.....	22
Remote sensing	22
Post recovery.....	23
Building Impact Assessment Teams	23
Donations.....	24
Disaster Recovery Centres	25
Council assets	28
Roads.....	28
Timber Bridges.....	28
Boat Ramps and Wharves	29
Runways	30
Waste impacts.....	30
Telecommunications connectivity and social responsibility– pre, during and post recovery	31
Building community resilience	33
Micro grids and preparation for the next event.....	33
Diesel and logistics	34
List of Recommendations and Inquiry Terms of Reference	35
References	44
Attachment 1	46
CL20.31 Bushfire Recovery Update Report from Local Recovery Coordinator – Mr Vince Di Pietro	46
Attachment 2	51

CL20.53 Bushfire Recovery Update Report from Local Recovery Coordinator – Mr Vince Di Pietro	51
Attachment 3	60
Shoalhaven City Council Resolution	60
Attachment 4	61
Acknowledgements and thanks.....	61
Attachment 5	62
Shoalhaven Local Government Area Recovery Action Plan	62

The speed of the fires was appalling. They leaped from mountain peak to mountain peak, or far out into the lower country, lighting the forests 6 or 7 miles in advance of the main fires. Blown by a wind of great force, they roared as they travelled. Balls of crackling fire sped at a great pace in advance of the fires, consuming with a roaring, explosive noise, all that they touched. Great pieces of burning bark were carried by the wind to set in raging flames regions not yet touched by the fires.

There have been no fires to equal these in destructiveness or intensity in the history of settlement in this State, except perhaps the fires of 1851, which, too, came at summer culmination of a long drought.

(Victoria Parliament 1939 p.5,6)

Shoalhaven City is located on the South Coast of NSW and was one of the local government areas severely affected by the 2019-2020 Currowan bushfire. The fire burnt through over 320,000 hectares in the Shoalhaven over 74 days. 311 houses, 26 facilities and 585 outbuildings were destroyed and another 173 houses, 28 facilities and 265 outbuildings were damaged. At the time of writing additional damage in isolated areas is still being identified.

Tragically 3 lives were lost.

The Shoalhaven is naturally beautiful with extensive wilderness areas, stunning escarpments and pristine beaches. The Shoalhaven is a holiday mecca and the population can easily swell threefold during the peak tourist season which runs from the October long weekend, through December and January, and then on to Easter. All of these positive attributes have significant impacts on the management of people and land during bushfires and in the recovery phase.

Shoalhaven City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry.

Fuel loads

Bushfire, and even catastrophic bushfire, is a not unexpected experience in Australia. This inquiry, like so many before it, seeks to understand how Australian communities can better respond to these disasters. Shoalhaven City Council will not comment on the impact of climate change, nor on the weather patterns that preceded the disaster as these issues are the subject of ongoing research as recommended by previous inquiries.

Shoalhaven City Council would, however, like to point out the work of two respected Australian institutions being the CSIRO and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

CSIRO

The CSIRO has been undertaking bushfire research for almost 70 years and has recently produced a factsheet explaining the cause and contributing factors of the 2019-20 bushfires (CSIRO 2020a). The CSIRO “has performed post-bushfire surveillance and research in every major fire event in Australia since the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. It provides very valuable information on how fires start, what influences their spread, and how they can be stopped” (CSIRO 2020b).

Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

From July 2013, \$47 million over eight years in Australian Government funds under the Cooperative Research Centres Program have been matched by support from state and territory government organisations, research institutions and NGOs to fund the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC. This CRC is arguably one of the preeminent bodies conducting research into the causes, consequences and mitigation of natural disasters, including bushfire. The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC publish the Australian Seasonal Bushfire Outlook in August every year.

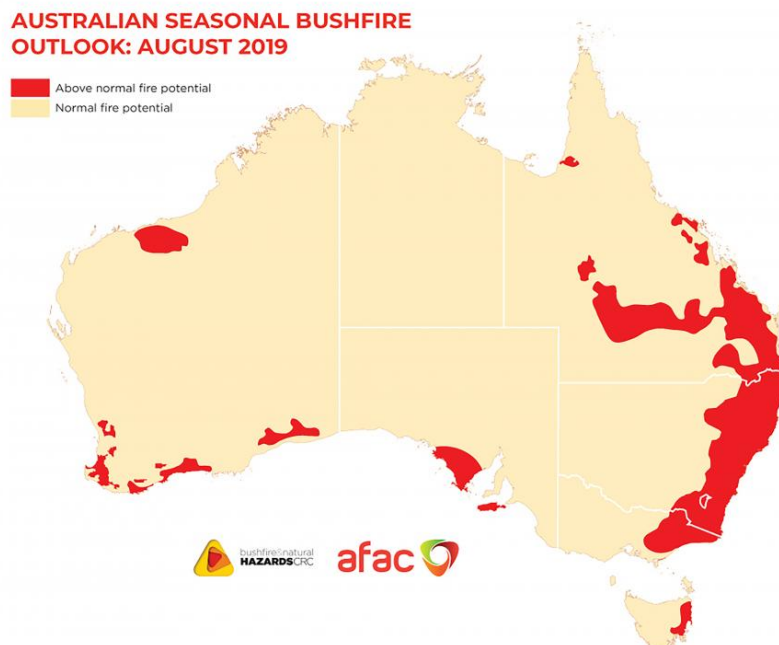


Figure 1: Australian Seasonal Bushfire Outlook: August 2019. Source Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

It is unfortunate that the Federal Government has not committed to funding this organisation past 2021.

1. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the Federal and State Governments continue to invest in bushfire research including prevention and post fire recovery.

Hazard reduction – where it matters

The endless catch cry of “burn more hectares” is not the solution. The catchcry should be “burn where the risk is”.

(Prior. 2019)

Fuel loads have been identified as a major contributor to the severity and manageability of bushfire and it is generally acknowledged that, due to a changing climate, there will be shorter and shorter windows to conduct hazard reduction burns to reduce fuel loads. Concern about the need for protective burning has been a consistent theme in all inquiries conducted since the 1939 Victorian Royal Commission

(Ellis, Kanowski & Whelan 2004, p.254). It is therefore imperative that hazard reduction burns are seen as a priority mitigation measure and actioned accordingly.

The evidence satisfied the Court conclusively, that throughout NSW during the period 1989-1993, the fuel was not managed as intended by Parliament and high fuel loads were principally responsible for the intensity of the uncontrollable fires.

(NSW Coroner in Joint Select Committee on Bushfires 2002, p.33)

The Shoalhaven is characterised by its largely natural state. 80% of the 4,660km² of the Shoalhaven is in Crown Land or National Parks and Wildlife control. It is not feasible, and potentially ridiculous to think that hazard reduction can occur throughout this rugged landscape. What can be achieved is hazard reduction around critical infrastructure, key assets and towns and villages. The State Government needs to, as a matter of urgency, undertake a committed approach in land management for fuel reduction. It is acknowledged that the State Government is not the only landowner in the Shoalhaven and other landowners need education, guidance, support and permission to make their land safe for themselves and for the communities in which they live. Priority sites for fuel reduction need to be identified, not only by temperature, wind speed, humidity and drought as in the Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI), but by their proximity to towns and villages and critical infrastructure.

...fuel reduction burning at the interface or immediately around an asset—say, within a few hundred metres of an asset—is a vastly different process or has a vastly different outcome for that building or that small community from a broadacre burning process, which would have some impact in determining the rate at which a fire would move through the landscape and its chance of arriving at a point in the landscape that would have an impact on a structure. But it is only the last few hundred metres of a fuel load that has an impact on the magnitude of the impact of that fire and its potential outcome for the actual building. Separating those two issues is quite important.

(Mr Justin Leonard, CSIRO cited in Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries, 2010, p.55-56)

Falling trees and fire along the Princes Highway, and on each and every road into the coastal hamlets and villages, were responsible for the loss of power as they often fell across power lines thereby isolating the villages even further.

On the 21st January 2020 Shoalhaven City Council resolved to seek to have the NSW or the Commonwealth Government carry out a number of actions with regard to hazard reduction. The full resolution is attached in Attachment 3.

The “Public Estate” is quite extensive in Shoalhaven. Some 440,000 hectares is in various ownership as shown in the table over page. This represents about 96% of the Shoalhaven local government area.

Table 1: Land ownerships in Shoalhaven and percentage burnt in Currowan Fire 2019-2020 (Source: Shoalhaven City Council)

Ownership	Hectares in Shoalhaven	Hectares burnt in Shoalhaven	% Burnt
NSW FORESTS	51,833.30	49,789.30	96.1%
NATIONAL PARKS	230,204.43	207,704.67	90.2%
CROWN LAND	31,849.30	24,329.80	76.4%
SYDNEY WATER	922.00	579.20	62.8%
COUNCIL LAND	3,390.30	412.80	12.2%
AUST GOVT LAND	4,325.30	98.00	2.3%
ANY OTHER PUBLIC OWNERSHIP	116,731.13	40,519.70	34.7%

Of this Public Estate, 73.6% was in the defined fireground and this represented 65% of the total Currowan fireground. Although a major bushfire predominantly in rugged country, the importance of fuel load management is evident in managing a fire of this intensity and it is highly dependent on Government agencies being adequately resourced and environmental authority to undertake this management.

2. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that ALL levels of government and their agencies commit the necessary resources to reduce fuels loads in their estate especially where they border vulnerable towns and villages, critical infrastructure and key assets.
3. Shoalhaven City Council also recommends that Government agencies should review and amend policies that impinge on the management of fuel loads being achieved.

Critical Infrastructure

The Princes Highway

On that day it appeared that the whole State was alight. At midday, in many places, it was dark as night. Men carrying hurricane lamps, worked to make safe their families and belongings. Travellers on the highways were trapped by fires or by blazing fallen trees and perished. Throughout the land there was daytime darkness.

(Victorian Government 1939, p.5)

The South Coast of NSW, and north eastern Victoria, is characterised by local government areas that support numerous coastal towns and villages. These towns and villages are generally accessed by one key road in and out linking to the Princes Highway. The Princes Highway is the main, and only connecting road linking the South Coast. During the bushfires the Princes Highway was at times overloaded with people looking to escape the South Coast or was closed for extended periods of time due to fire, and then due to falling trees, some of which continued to burn for days and even weeks after the fire front had passed.



Figure 2: North bound traffic chaos on Princes Highway as people evacuate area. (Source: A Current Affair/ 9 Now)

The Princes Highway needs to be recognised as the most vital transport link in south eastern NSW. Figure 2 was taken on 2 January 2020 and note the proximity of the trees to the Highway, the limited space and the number of people trapped on the Highway. This vital transport link, and the people using the link, need to be protected at all costs.

It should also be noted that the Princes Highway corridor contains significant infrastructure such as gas, power and telecommunications that also require protection from bushfires in order to keep residents and visitors of the South Coast of NSW safe.

4. Shoalhaven City Council strongly urges the State Government to recognise the primacy of the Princes Highway and instigate a program of roadside vegetation clearing to ensure that this vital link is not cut, and people's lives put in danger, due to burning and falling trees.

The Princes Highway remains a single accessway for much of its length. The recent installation of safety barriers is welcomed. However, for some sections of the Highway there is no room to manoeuvre or change direction in times of emergency.



Figure 3: A1 Princes Highway looking south at Tullarwalla, in the Shoalhaven, NSW (Source: Google Maps)

5. Shoalhaven City Council urges the State and Federal governments to fast track the construction of dual lanes on the Princes Highway between Nowra and Bairnsdale in Victoria.
6. Shoalhaven City Council, as a member of the South East Australian Transport Study (SEATS) endorse a SEATS recommendation, in relation to the NSW Government being:

That SEATS strongly requests that the governments of NSW and Victoria combine with the Australian government to roll out as a matter of urgency those elements of improvement within the local government areas of Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley and East Gippsland that can be planned, designed and delivered over the next 5 years to be packaged up into a “Princes Highway Resilience Program” to deliver a highway network that will provide safer connectivity for the communities in this part of Australia in all weather and environmental conditions.

State Highways and Regional Roads

The Princes Highway is not the only piece of critical road infrastructure that needs protection. There are numerous other key links, predominately those linking the coast to the inland. At one point during the 2019-2020 Bushfires ALL of these links were closed. The Monaro Highway, Snowy Mountains Highway, Imlay Road, Kings Highway and Main Road 92 are all key escarpment crossings and were all closed on

11 January 2020. Numerous other roads were also closed, including the Princes Highway and this effectively isolated numerous communities.

7. Shoalhaven City Council strongly urges the State Government to recognise importance of other State Highways and Regional Roads and instigate a program of roadside vegetation clearing to ensure that these vital links are not cut due to burning and falling trees.

Electricity

Electricity is critical for the continued operation of numerous assets and needs to be protected from disaster.

Endeavour Energy says it has on Wednesday restored power supply to more than 11,000 customers affected by the South Coast bushfires.

This includes getting power back to community facilities such as Milton Hospital, the Ulladulla Civic Centre and local sewerage treatment plants.

According to Endeavour Energy, approximately 7000 customers are without power in Sussex Inlet and many of the isolated communities dotted along the South Coast.

Power has been down since yesterday for a 180km stretch of coast from South Nowra to Moruya. In many cases, with the power goes phone and internet communication.

Police have estimated the power outages are affecting 46,000 people but this could be more given the number of holidaymakers in the area.

(Langford 2020)

The fires caused not only direct damage to electricity infrastructure, but infrastructure was subsequently damaged by falling trees. The damage was extensive.

Telecommunications

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank and acknowledge the amazing work undertaken by the ABC in emergency broadcasting. The ABC continued to update the south coast community throughout the unfolding of the disastrous 2019-2020 Currowan fire. Broadcasts were informative and timely and perhaps more importantly, delivered by a trusted Australian organisation and this could not have been possible without the valued input of the Senior RFS Controllers for the Currowan fire.

Telecommunications are another piece of key infrastructure that needs protection, and, in many places, enhancement. Telecommunications are never more vital than in times of emergency. Residents and tourists alike relied on information provided on a number of platforms such as the "Fires Near Me" app, and when this crashed, turned to the RFS scanner. Emergency texts were also sources of critical information. All of which rely on a working telecommunications network.

8. Shoalhaven City Council, as a member of the South East Australian Transport Study (SEATS), endorse a SEATS recommendation in relation to the NSW Government being:

That SEATS strongly urges the various road, electricity supply and telecommunication agencies to provide easement buffers around all assets to provide continuity of the availability of assets to regional communities in all weather and environmental conditions. Governments and their agencies should review and amend policies that impinge on this outcome being achieved.

Telecommunications need to be enhanced. Mobile phone coverage along the Princes Highway is spotty at best. While many mobile phone networks become overloaded in peak tourist periods affecting the connectivity and livelihood of people in coastal towns and villages.

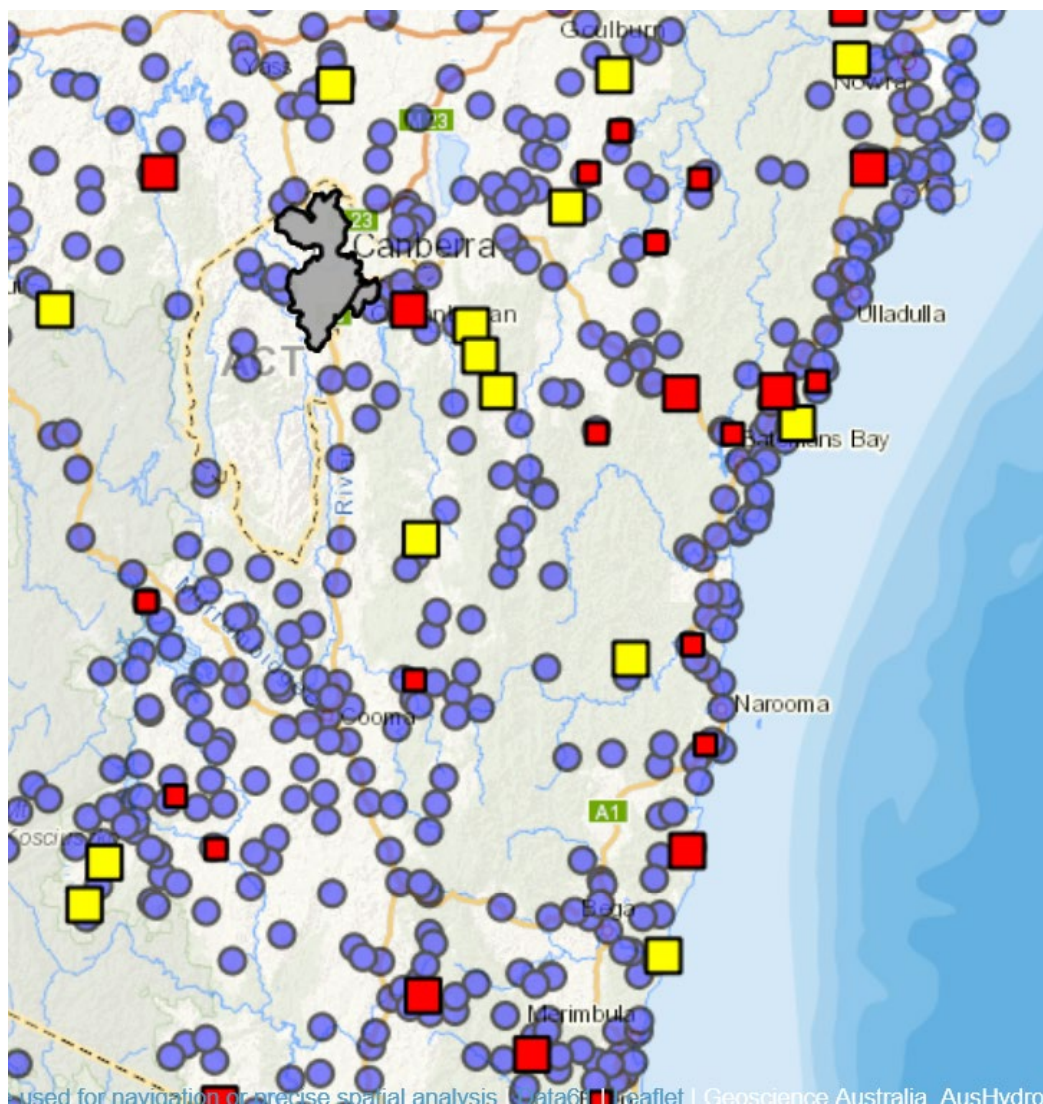


Figure 5: Community identified mobile black spots. (Source: Australian Government 2020) (see text above for types)

Figure 5 (p.16) demonstrates the extent of the issue with blue circles representing community reported mobile phone black spots. The Federal Government is addressing this through the roll out of the National Mobile Black Spot Program. Squares represent funded base stations with yellow being Small Cell Base Stations and red representing Macrocell Base Stations. Shoalhaven City Council would like to acknowledge the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program and encourage its continuance.

The mobile telephony coverage for the "travelling community" needs to be robust and resilient. This is also important for HML (higher mass limits) vehicle tracking.

For the purposes of informing this inquiry, Shoalhaven City Council, as a member of the South East Australian Transport Study (SEATS) has endorsed a SEATS recommendation being:

That SEATS strongly requests the Australian government ensure that within 5 years all national and state highways achieve a 95% mobile telephony reception coverage and that the rollout commence on the Monaro Highway and the Princes Highway between Sydney and Melbourne.

9. Shoalhaven City Council urges the NSW Government to encourage the Federal Government to continue to roll out the Mobile Black Spot Program as a matter of urgency.

Protection of critical infrastructure – an economy of effort

Electricity and mobile telecommunications infrastructure, gas pipelines and even water and sewer are often located along road corridors. A coordinated approach from government and industry is required to create safe and fire resilient corridors.

10. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW Government investigate the feasibility of overseeing a coordinated approach to asset protection involving government and industry bodies to protect infrastructure corridors and the assets therein.

How many people? Is Census data enough?

The ABS Estimated Resident Population (2018) of the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Councils is 104,371, 38,288 and 34,348 respectively totalling 177,007 persons. This population is estimated to swell threefold in peak tourist season. In addition, this increase is not experienced in a uniform fashion. Small coastal villages could experience an even greater population increase.

11. Telecommunications is an essential service and coverage is critical in times of natural disaster. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that planning for mobile phone coverage should be based on the peak population of South Coast towns and village and not on Census data.

Bushfires of such a disastrous nature traditionally occur in the height of summer. This also coincides with the peak tourist season of the Shoalhaven, the South Coast of NSW and north eastern Victoria. Census data is collected in August and is aimed at gauging the resident population of an area. This is to plan for schools, health facilities etc. The Census is a valuable undertaking and Shoalhaven City Council is not criticising this very valuable data set.

However, Census data is not an appropriate dataset to use in times of bushfire when many coastal villages experience an approximate threefold swelling of the population.

Lake Conjola – 437 people, 196 occupied dwellings, 182 unoccupied dwelling, and Dwelling statistics do not include visitor only or other non-classifiable households.

(ABS 2020)

Emergency management planning needs to consider the needs of an increased population, and a transient one at that. This transient population is unaware of local roads and alternative ways to evacuate and unaware of safe areas in times of fire. They also tax local resources such as communications (mobile), food, fuel, water and waste.

12. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that a study be undertaken to estimate the peak tourist season population of all NSW coastal areas to better inform planned responses to disaster.

Mixed messaging

A "tourist leave zone" has been declared for a 14,000-square-kilometre area between Nowra and the edge of Victoria's northern border.

(Nguyen. & Elsworthy 2020)

Shoalhaven City Council wants to acknowledge the brave decision to create a "tourist leave zone". Tourism is a significant contributor to the economies of the South Coast of NSW. This was a difficult decision due to the impact to the economy, but this action most likely saved many lives and assisted our emergency services with improved access to towns and villages under threat during the bushfire disaster.

Despite the clear and concise messaging from official sources, a small minority of businesses added to the confusion by encouraging tourists to come to the region.

Additionally, in the confusion in recent days, some accommodation businesses in relatively unscathed areas had been posting to social media that they have vacancies and are safe on Wednesday.

(McIlwain 2020)

13. Shoalhaven City Council recommends, that in preparation for the next disaster, that educational material outlining business responsibilities in terms of communication be developed and made available so that messaging is consistent with official directions.

The mass evacuation that occurred in early January caused significant delays on the Princes Highway with a whole community of travellers stuck for hours on end. Many papers referred to this event as a 'humanitarian' crisis (Sutton, C. 2020)

As the bushfire emergency unfolded the Princes Highway was cut in many areas. Tourists heading south, instead of being turned around, chose to divert to the nearest coastal village. For example, when the Princes Highway was closed at Jerrawangla many chose to descend on Sussex Inlet, a village with an estimated resident population of 4,506 (Profile id. 2020). The town was overwhelmed with the influx to the extent that the evacuation centre only had capacity for the tourist population with residents being told to go home.



(Source: Illawarra Mercury, Karleen Minney)

When people evacuated from the south coast, they also took food and fuel as was recommended by emergency services. However, this resulted in vulnerable towns and villages being left without. This became a significant issue when these towns and villages were then cut off from further supplies (eg Sussex Inlet, Lake Conjola) leaving traumatised and taxed communities without food and fuel.



(Source: ABC News, Jonathan Hair)

14. Shoalhaven City Council recommends an education campaign for evacuees about 'take what you need but leave what you don't'.

The use of emerging technology

Digital Evacuation Technology

There are rapid advancements in the development and application of emerging technologies. Evacuations could be better improved through technology identifying who needs to evacuate, where to go, which route to follow and what resources to take. Technology could allow evacuees to better plan for the evacuation route by identifying locations that have power and fuel meaning that they can plan to take only the resources they need. However, digital evacuation technology is predicated on access to reliable connectivity.

15. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW and Federal Governments invest in the development of digital evacuation technology that can send evacuation directions directly to the end user to aid our emergency services in the orderly evacuation of large populations.

Remote sensing

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre establish, as part of its program to implement a single fuel classification system, a national database that provides information on current levels and rates of accumulation of fuel loads that takes into account vegetation type and climate across all tenures of land, including private land where data is available.

(House of Representatives Senate Committee into the recent Australian bushfires 2003)

Remote sensing is one way of dealing with the effect of the fire. The causes ought to be given primacy as that is needed to be dealt with first.

The sensitivity of remote sensing equipment is advancing so rapidly that sensors have multiple capabilities even beyond that of which they are currently being used. Improved remote sensing, especially by aerial mapping, could help prioritise areas for hazard reduction burning and subsequent monitoring of regrowth. This could occur over vast areas.

16. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government partner with research organisations and private businesses to invest in research to determine the applicability of aerial mapping and remote sensing in prioritising areas for hazard reduction and post reduction monitoring.

Post recovery

Shoalhaven City Council would like to acknowledge the work of government, emergency services, volunteers and the community in general in pulling together to address the fallout from the 2019-2020 Currowan fire.

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank the countless offers of support and donations for our community.

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank the vital support that we received from other Councils, being Kiama, Shellharbour, Wollongong, Sutherland, Blacktown, Woollahra and Waverley, who supplied staff and equipment to help with the massive clean-up and to get communities up and running again. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the Office of Local Government and the City of Sydney for their significant role in coordinating support efforts for regional councils.

As with any natural disaster, hindsight is 20/20 and there are some aspects of post fire recovery that worked and there are some suggestions for improvement.

Building Impact Assessment Teams

The support to the RFS Building Impact Assessment (BIA) teams by including Shoalhaven City Council Environmental Health Officers (EHO's), Police, NSW Fire and Rescue personnel was a new initiative that had not happened before in NSW. The local assistance was integral with not only the navigation of local roads and fire trails, but it also gave Council a presence on the fire ground as a first responder. Being visible to the local community early is very important in the support and recovery role moving forward. Council involvement also assisted with understanding the scale of the recovery and the extent of the potential impact on the environment (waterways and wildlife). This has greatly assisted Council to be on the front foot to respond to the immediate needs (sediment and erosion control for example). Also having the Environmental Health team on the ground as trained 'generalists' was valuable because of the team's ability to pick up on a range of issues from trees/ septic/ drinking water/catchments/chemicals and pollutants/ asbestos etc.

The impact of the Building Assessment Teams could be improved by taking relief supplies, and potentially medical supplies, to affected properties in remote locations and to consider including Local Land Services Officers in the teams to assess veterinary and other needs of stock and wildlife.

17. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the role of the Building Assessment Teams be expanded to include additional emergency support personnel and to services such as water, food and medical deliveries.

The ability to distribute essential supplies is predicated on the ability to access supplies. There needs to be some thought locally around what, where and when to stockpile essential goods for emergency distribution.

Donations

In the immediate aftermath, and the following weeks and months, Shoalhaven City Council and Shoalhaven community and religious organisations have been overwhelmed by the generosity of others. The most difficult aspect of this was the lack of coordination of the delivery and storage of goods. The generosity of the wider community is welcomed but the Shoalhaven could not cope with the logistics of moving and storing goods. The community of the Shoalhaven and the South Coast needed an established and advertised organisation that is set up specifically to cope with the massive influx of goods.

GIVIT was established in 2008 and was integral in aiding recovery of the Queensland flooding disaster in 2011.

During times of disaster and emergency, GIVIT Listed Ltd works with government agencies, local councils and not-for-profit organisations to identify the immediate and long-term needs of the affected community.

We then match offers from individuals and businesses to ensure those who need assistance get exactly what they need, where and when they need it most.

Donations are pledged online, eliminating the need for storing, sorting and disposing of inappropriate, unwanted donations. The GIVIT platform maintains the privacy and dignity of all recipients, ensuring they receive only quality items and only those that they require.

(GIVIT 2020)

18. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there is an established agreement in place with GIVIT, or a similar organisation, to manage all offers of donated goods and that the selected organisation has systems and process in place for storage and distribution to collect donations and vet their suitability at source, receive and process requests for assistance and, materials; store and distribute with urgency donated materials to where they are needed. A communication/educational campaign is required so that it is widely known where and how people can donate to such an organisation.

Shoalhaven City Council and other organisations located on the NSW South Coast have also received numerous offers of access to professional services and

volunteering. Linking, and vetting, offers of professional services and putting volunteers in touch with established organisations takes an enormous amount of time.

There were also many offers of assistance from trades people and businesses wishing to help with rebuilding. Shoalhaven City Council is not in a position to pass on these offers of assistance because Council is unable to vet them and is legislated to remain impartial.

19. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there needs to be a NSW wide platform for people to register to assist with Bushfire Recovery, much like GIVIT but for professional services, trades and for volunteering.

There were so many offers of assistance from the public that some members loaded up trucks with goods to distribute to people in need. These activities were extremely generous however they were undertaken with no communication with emergency services, community groups or Council. This resulted in these generous offers not being delivered to those in need as in many cases roads were still cut. Communities were grateful for this support but there was no physical way in which this support could be delivered. This resulted in angst among the disaster affected communities and from the people who donated and transported the goods.

20. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there is early national messaging regarding provision of physical donations and dissuading people from spontaneously driving down to active fire areas with items that cannot be used or aren't required.

Disaster Recovery Centres

Disaster Recovery Centres were established early and are an integral mechanism for recovery. The centres were staffed by people from government and non-government organisations. The aim of these centres was to be a one stop shop for information about available assistance. Their role became much more important as they were where affected community members could talk to someone and get guidance as to what they should do. The affected community was overwhelmed with what had occurred and then were overwhelmed with the amount of information. The community needed someone that they could talk to in person.

The NSW Government Recovery Centre was intended to be a 'one stop' shop but the registration process across all government departments and NGOs proved otherwise. In effect what was established was one geographic location with upwards of twenty shops to visit, each with their own registration and forms to complete. Follow up was assured by all stations visited but feedback was often that little, if any, follow up action took place. Often 'announcables' were not forewarned nor clear on detail and this caused much confusion in the community and among the people working in the recovery centres. This information/registration/poor dissemination of knowledge and interpretation of broad statements was to the detriment of affected persons whose needs post fire were often second place to the registration process. Regrettably, the 'independence' of each station also led to uncoordinated closure/uncertain opening hours/access.

Local government is the level of government closest to the community. One of the functions of local government is to coordinate the implementation of Federal and State Government laws and regulations and so is used to disseminating information from a wide variety of sources in a cohesive manner. Therefore, local government is the best placed to manage the delivery of a variety of services and support from the start. However, there needs to be a willingness among agencies and NGO's to support Council as a coordinating body. Without exception recovery is a local condition to manage and see to completion.

21. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW State Government review the role of local government in disaster recovery and that they work together to develop a coordinated approach and associated communication plan (including registration system).

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank staff and volunteers who manned the Disaster Recovery Centres and supported the community in such a compassionate way.

The Federal and State Governments were very quick to announce a variety of financial assistance those affected by the bushfire. Unfortunately, the roll out of the grants was confusing and the naming of the assistance was in some instances misleading.

Shoalhaven City Council thanks the State and Federal Governments for the speed in which assistance was made available. The trade-off is that there were some teething problems in accessing the assistance. For instance, the Disaster Recovery Grant for Small Business was originally administered by the Rural Assistance Authority. It then moved to ServiceNSW with a totally different application form. In addition, with ServiceNSW it was determined that you needed to submit a Certificate of Business Registration rather than supplying an ABN. This meant that Sole Traders at that stage weren't eligible. This situation was quickly rectified once it became known. The point of this is that these issues were identified by Shoalhaven City Council early on because our staff were sitting down with applicants and helping them fill and submit applications. Our staff did this, as did many other members in the community, because fire affected business owners are too traumatised to work their way through funding applications, are not familiar with funding applications and in some instances had no access to a computer and internet. Online applications are helpful but it is quite likely that disaster affected people are not able to access online support.

Shoalhaven City Council has an extensive community engagement program beyond the Disaster Centres. Council has deployed Mobile Recovery Hubs to provide support to towns and villages; has delivered a number of Community Recovery meetings and has supported Small Business Regional Recovery Roadshows. It must be understood that most Council staff live in the affected communities and are known to the

22. Disaster affected communities need additional support to access available funding, often in terms of internet connectivity and a support person to assist in filling out applications. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW Government work with local government and other service agencies to identify local staff that could be made available to assist the community in readiness for the next natural disaster.

community. Council is at the coal face of this disaster and can offer unique insights about the impacts of the fire and about how the community is coping with the disaster.

The NSW Government then set up ServiceNSW to become the one stop shop for all bushfire assistance. The amount and variety of financial and other assistance that was available was extremely confusing and Shoalhaven City Council thanks the State Government for trying to make this process easier for applicants. However, Council has received little feedback on how this system is working. This means that our staff are less able to identify issues and identify gaps in what support has been offered to people. Service delivery should be in partnership with local government.

23. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the State and Federal Government for their speedy response to the bushfire disaster but recommends that they work together to develop assistance packages and that funding guidelines be developed prior to, and in readiness of, the next natural disaster.

Another cause of concern, for example, was in relation to the naming of assistance. The announcement of the Small Business Grants package was welcomed by small business. However, on closer inspection this package is essentially a rebate program to cover costs for clean-up and reinstatement of the small businesses. While the funding is welcomed, the misnaming of the program as a 'grant' raised certain expectations among the business community. The business community was disappointed to find out the limitations of the program. The business community is traumatised by the impact of the fire, and impact on their livelihood, and do not have the emotional reserves to cope with any additional disappointments.

24. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that messaging about grants and other financial assistance is clear and states from the onset what the financial assistance is for and who is eligible.

Council assets

Roads

Councils on the South Coast of NSW have suffered significant damage to infrastructure.

In the Shoalhaven 84 roads, totalling 316km, have been damaged. Damage to roads has occurred as a direct result of the fire, but also through firefighting efforts. Larger vehicles, excavators and other equipment were used in the firefighting effort and driven on roads that are not suitable and have suffered damage as a result.



Figure 4: Burnt out School Creek Bridge, Budgong (Source: Shoalhaven City Council)

25. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that eligibility guidelines in existing funding packages, such as the NSW Fixing Country Roads and NSW Fixing Regional Roads, be expended to include repairs to bushfire damaged roads and that this funding is fast tracked to provide economic stimulus to the region.

Timber Bridges

Shoalhaven City Council has submitted applications to the NSW Natural Disaster Essential Public Asset Restoration Fund and has received funding to replace four bridges and works are underway. Shoalhaven City Council would like to acknowledge and thank the Office of Emergency Management for the extremely quick assessment time that has enabled Council to restore these essential public assets in such a responsive and timely manner.

The Shoalhaven sustained damage to seven timber bridges. During the emergency Council approached the RMS and requested assistance in the form of temporary bridges. Temporary units were available to hire but the hire and install cost was equivalent to full reconstruction cost and was not pursued for this reason.

26. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the provision of temporary bridge units from the NSW Government should be an affordable short-term option.

Shoalhaven City Council's Works and Services team responded both during the event and following the event to make areas safe where possible and closing damaged areas that needed repair. This involved significant tree damage and burnt bridges.

Council co-operated with other agencies and Australian Defence Forces (ADF) personnel to carry out emergency repairs where resources were available.

Shoalhaven City Council is thankful for the support made available from other agencies and the ADF. However, there were some inefficiencies when working with the ADF teams in that Council had received limited notice of the teams' arrival and therefore needed to spend time to determine where and how those resources were to be used.

27. Shoalhaven City Council recommends more advanced notice when ADF teams are coming into an area without specific projects to facilitate identification of appropriate projects, particularly in the recovery phase rather than during the event.

Funding 'like for like' is an investment in a repeat of failure in the future. Inadequate infrastructure needs to be replaced with resilient and bushfire resistant alternatives.

Shoalhaven City Council has the funding to replace damaged timber bridges, with timber bridges. Council would like to future proof these assets by constructing new bridges in concrete. Construction costs for concrete bridges is generally double what it would cost to build a timber bridge. The assets are only insured for a like for like replacement, if they are insured at all. Council needs financial support to upgrade and future proof these assets.

28. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that eligibility guidelines in existing funding packages, such as the Bridges Renewal Program and NSW Bridges to the Bush be expanded to include repairs to bushfire damaged bridges, as well as replacement to a more resilient structure, and that this funding is fast tracked to provide economic stimulus to the region.

Boat Ramps and Wharves

To access some communities in Shoalhaven when they were under threat or when access roads were closed, the only access was via the water, the Tasman Sea or other water bodies. What came to light was that some of these facilities were inadequate for the task or were fenced and locked off from volunteers seeking to launch craft or embark/disembark passengers.

This "Blue Highway" became the access for food, medicines and other essential commodities.

Shoalhaven City Council will need to look at these assets as effective interfaces for watercraft in emergency situations. In the 2001 Hyland Fire, the fire ran in an easterly direction toward Jervis Bay at Woollamia/Huskisson and at Sussex Inlet. To evacuate the people from Sussex Inlet, many craft were used including surf boats from the Wollongong area. In 2020 similar craft were assembled for use but facilities on the northern side of St George's Basin were similarly not easily accessible by vehicles with trailers.

Runways

Shoalhaven has two military airfields, HMAS Albatross and Jervis Bay Range. HMAS Albatross was extensively used for air operations and was up to the task under the control of the Royal Australian Navy. The pavement was such as to not suffer damage, unlike what happened at the Mallacoota airfield where the runway pavement was damaged by aircraft operations. This consequence can be expensive for a local government authority and needs to be considered in any review of a major incident.

Waste impacts

In preparation for fire mitigation, and in the recovery, Shoalhaven City Council has waived fees for the disposal of green waste and spoiled food which was caused by numerous power cuts in the Shoalhaven. This cost Council approximately \$630,000 for processing the green waste and \$193,600 for landfilling the spoiled food.

Council provided a Clean-up and Recovery Plan for Bushfire Waste to the State Government on 7 January 2020, which incorporated a recycling facility to recover as much reusable material as possible with the remainder to go to landfill. The recycling area was ready to accept waste within three weeks of the proposal. The State Government agreed to the proposal on 24 March 2020 whereby they will pay Council to recycle non-ACM (asbestos-containing materials) waste and the government contractor will remove the residual for disposal at Woodlawn. The time lag for approval of the plan is too long when impacted communities are looking for action in terms of clean up.

29. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that in future disasters the NSW State Government reviews subsequent Clean-up and Recovery Plans in a timely manner with the understanding that this action is key in getting the community up and running as soon as possible.

The NSW Government has committed up to \$25 million towards the cleanup of properties damaged and destroyed by the recent bushfires.

The funding will help pay for the cleanup of hazardous materials. This includes the removal of asbestos-contaminated material released as a result of the bushfires, concrete slabs and all dangerous debris including destroyed homes and trees.

(NSW Government 2019)

The Bushfire Recovery Clean-Up package announcement by the NSW Government is a much needed and welcomed initiative. However, communications need to be clear about what landowners can expect. During the fire the SES and RFS felled numerous trees on private properties in their efforts to stop the spread of the fire and to save lives and properties. Their efforts were amazing and could be described as heroic. However, after the fire many landowners had the expectation that these trees would also be included as part of the clean-up package and are now discovering that they are outside the scope of works. The Bushfire Recovery Clean-Up package is generous. The issue is that without clear and concise messaging community expectations are raised to the extent of rather than being thankful for what is on offer, many are disappointed to discover a more limited scope of eligible activities. This

could be avoided in the future by having a suite of funding packages with clear funding guidelines ready to go at the onset of the next disaster.

30. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the NSW State Government for funding for our communities made available through the Bushfire Recovery Clean-Up package but recommends that clear and consistent messaging is developed in tandem with the development of funding packages.

Telecommunications connectivity and social responsibility– pre, during and post recovery

Telecommunications Act 1997

(1) The main object of this Act, when read together with Parts XIB and XIC of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, is to provide a regulatory framework that promotes:

- a) the long-term interests of end-users of carriage services or of services provided by means of carriage services; and*
- b) the efficiency and international competitiveness of the Australian telecommunications industry; and*
- c) the availability of accessible and affordable carriage services that enhance the welfare of Australians.***

(2) The other objects of this Act, when read together with Parts XIB and XIC of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, are as follows:

- a) to ensure that standard telephone services and payphones are:*
 - i) reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business; and***
 - ii) are supplied as efficiently and economically as practicable; and***
 - iii) are supplied at performance standards that reasonably meet the social, industrial and commercial needs of the Australian community;***

(Emphasis added by Shoalhaven City Council)

It is reasonable to expect that in 2020 every person living in any township in Australia, which is a first world country, would have access to adequate telecommunications being the ability to make and receive phone calls and have internet connectivity. Shoalhaven City Council is located a two-hour drive from both Sydney and Canberra and has a resident population of in excess of 100,000 people. Shoalhaven City Council has 49 towns and villages and unbelievably there are communities that do not have adequate access to telecommunications.

In peak tourist times mobile phone access is constrained to the point that it can become impossible to make a phone call. Optus recently (October 2019) switched on two new mobile towers to improve coverage and capacity in Manyana and Ulladulla (Optus 2019). It is difficult to gauge the impact of these as Manyana and Bendalong lost power, phone reception and only had occasional internet coverage during the

disaster. Council has also had reports that some villages lose internet connectivity when it rains.

Residents of Jack's Corner, located near Kangaroo Valley NSW, have complained of a loss of telecommunications since November 2019. This is before the fire ripped through this part of Kangaroo Valley. Shoalhaven City Council had been told by members of the community, in Jack's Corner, Nerriga and other locations, that when reporting faults to call centres, who are often located offshore, they were often told that services had been restored despite this not being the case.

Post fire residents of Jack's Corner were still without telecommunications in late March 2020 when services were restored. This means that they are unable to stay informed about support or even access support further isolating isolated people. It should be a priority to get telecommunications restored to all areas impacted by disaster.

When queried about why their telecommunications have been out for so long the response was 'we aren't a priority. There aren't that many people that live down there'. However, there are people that live in Jack's Corner, and there were people living there when the fire came through.



Figure 5: Internet access in the North-Western Himalayas bordering Tibet. (Source: Wi-Fi Now (Hetting, 2017))

31. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government request information from all carriers as to how they prioritise remedial actions and if they understand their social responsibilities and legal obligations of providing telecommunications to vulnerable communities.

Building community resilience

Micro grids and preparation for the next event



(Source: Adam McLean, Illawarra Mercury)

Power and telecommunications are two exceptional needs for communities during times of crisis. The Currowan Bushfire disaster rapidly destroyed and disrupted power and communications. It was distressing for the whole community, but even more so for those in villages and settlements that are accessible by one road only. Shoalhaven City Council recognises the importance of building resilience in these communities and that that responsibility should be a collaborative effort by all levels of government and by the community itself.

Electricity was cut to numerous areas during the fire disaster. Once the access roads had been cleared of fallen trees the level of destruction was apparent. Power poles were down for kilometres in some areas. It is suggested that small pockets of communities could have been serviced better if a grid separation point that gave the ability to connect a generator were in place and could have provided emergency power much quicker while the repairs to the power lines were underway. Generators may not have the capacity to provide a full power service but may have been enough to run domestic fridges, battery chargers and vital medical equipment and, more importantly, provided a better sense of security for the community. It could also have helped in reducing property losses as many have had to abandon their fridges and freezers altogether. Those who had invested in standalone power systems with solar PV and batteries were relatively unaffected.

In preparation for the next natural disaster there could be opportunities in investigating standalone power systems and micro grids and a greater appreciation of building redundancy into the electricity system. The first 'normal' level of service is the grid. The second layer could be community-based power collection and storage feeding a

switchable 'microgrid' and the third is the onus on each and all dwellings to have serviceable and fuelled diesel generators AND a supply of stored diesel in safe, approved/compliant storage.

The level of destruction to electricity infrastructure is such that it might even be economically feasible to provide standalone Solar PV systems (with backup generators) instead of replacing costly poles and wire solutions that take long periods of time to fix and are located in rugged terrain in remote locations. This opportunity would need to be assessed and done in consultation with dispersed affected communities.

32. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government investigates the applicability of micro grids and other stand alone electricity systems to future proof vulnerable communities.

Diesel and logistics

The damage to the electricity network was unprecedented, causing power outages for over 37,500 customers at the peak of the emergency. – Essential Energy (17 February 2020)

Endeavour Energy said 17,000 of its customers would be without power for up to 48 hours after major extra high voltage transmission lines were damaged. – Canberra Times (31 December 2019)

The extent of the electricity outage was massive. Numerous facilities then needed to rely on generators; generators that rely on diesel fuel. This, coupled with the closing of the Princes Highway, and the need for the mass evacuation of tourists in the leave zone, meant that many regional towns ran out of fuel. Diesel was required to power anything from hospitals to evacuation centres, from supermarkets to ironically petrol stations, as well as being needed by the transport industry and fire fighting vehicles and equipment. This latest disaster demonstrated the folly in not having a regionally located fuel depot. Instead the regions need to rely on transport of fuel from Sydney, which was not possible due to the closure of the Princes Highway and other main routes.

Leaving our fuel supply to 'market' has demonstrably and seriously failed to meet requirements. Fuel storage and stockpiling the length and breadth of our nation is a national resilience and infrastructure problem that needs serious attention and urgent remedy.

Eden is the nation's premier weapons storage facility. It has no rail head, one road in and one road out (Princes Highway) and is poorly supported infrastructurally. In terms of access from the north it has a single point of failure at the bridge across the Shoalhaven. This is worthy of urgent attention by the appropriate agencies responsible and accountable for national security.

33. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government investigate the feasibility and need for a fuel storage facility located on the South Coast of NSW.

List of Recommendations and Inquiry Terms of Reference

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
1. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the Federal and State Governments continue to invest in bushfire research including prevention and post fire recovery.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.
2. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that ALL levels of government and their agencies commit the necessary resources to reduce fuels loads in their estate especially where they border vulnerable towns and villages, critical infrastructure and key assets.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices. 9. Coordination and collaboration by the NSW Government with the Australian Government, other state and territory governments and local governments.
3. Shoalhaven City Council also recommends that Government agencies should review and amend policies that impinge on the management of fuel loads being achieved.	2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.
4. Shoalhaven City Council strongly urges the State Government to recognise the primacy of the Princes Highway and instigate a program of roadside vegetation clearing to ensure that this vital link is not cut, and people's lives put in danger, due to burning and falling trees.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices.
5. Shoalhaven City Council urges the State and Federal governments to fast track the construction of dual lanes	2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
on the Princes Highway between Nowra and Bairnsdale in Victoria.	<p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p> <p>6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices.</p>
<p>6. Shoalhaven City Council, as a member of the South East Australian Transport Study (SEATS) endorse a SEATS recommendation, in relation to the NSW Government being:</p> <p><i>That SEATS strongly requests that the governments of NSW and Victoria combine with the Australian government to roll out as a matter of urgency those elements of improvement within the local government areas of Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley and East Gippsland that can be planned, designed and delivered over the next 5 years to be packaged up into a “Princes Highway Resilience Program” to deliver a highway network that will provide safer connectivity for the communities in this part of Australia in all weather and environmental conditions.</i></p>	<p>2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.</p> <p>3. Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings ○ resourcing, coordination and deployment ○ equipment and communication systems. <p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p>
<p>7. Shoalhaven City Council strongly urges the State Government to recognise importance of other State Highways and Regional Roads and instigate a program of roadside vegetation clearing to ensure that these vital links are not cut due to burning and falling trees.</p>	<p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p> <p>6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices.</p>

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
<p>8. Shoalhaven City Council, as a member of the South East Australian Transport Study (SEATS) endorse a SEATS recommendation, in relation to the NSW Government being:</p> <p><i>That SEATS strongly urges the various road, electricity supply and telecommunication agencies to provide easement buffers around all assets to provide continuity of the availability of assets to regional communities in all weather and environmental conditions. Governments and their agencies should review and amend policies that impinge on this outcome being achieved.</i></p>	<p>3.Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings ○ resourcing, coordination and deployment ○ equipment and communication systems. <p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p> <p>6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices.</p>
<p>9. Shoalhaven City Council urges the NSW Government to encourage the Federal Government to continue to roll out the Mobile Black Spot Program as a matter of urgency.</p>	<p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p> <p>11.Public communication and advice systems and strategies.</p>
<p>10. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW Government investigate the feasibility of overseeing a coordinated approach to asset protection involving government and industry bodies to protect infrastructure corridors and the assets therein.</p>	<p>9. Coordination and collaboration by the NSW Government with the Australian Government, other state and territory governments and local governments.</p>
<p>11. Telecommunications is an essential service and coverage is critical in times of natural disaster. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that planning for mobile phone coverage should be based on the peak</p>	<p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p> <p>11.Public communication and advice systems and strategies.</p>

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
population of South Coast towns and village and not on Census data.	
12. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that a study be undertaken to estimate the peak tourist season population of all NSW coastal areas to better inform planned responses to disaster.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.
13. Shoalhaven City Council recommends, that in preparation for the next disaster, that educational material outlining business responsibilities in terms of communication be developed and made available so that messaging is consistent with official directions.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
14. Shoalhaven City Council recommends an education campaign for evacuees about 'take what you need but leave what you don't'.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
15. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the Government invest in the development of digital evacuation technology that can send evacuation directions directly to the end user to aid our emergency services in the orderly evacuation of large populations.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
16. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government partner with research organisations and private businesses to invest in research to determine the applicability of aerial mapping and remote sensing	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 6. Land use planning and management and building standards, including appropriate clearing and other hazard reduction, zoning, and any appropriate use of indigenous practices.

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
in prioritising areas for hazard reduction and post reduction monitoring.	
17. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the role of the Building Assessment Teams be expanded to include additional emergency support personnel and to services such as water, food and medical deliveries.	8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.
18. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there is an established agreement in place with GIVIT, or a similar organisation, to manage all offers of donated goods and that the selected organisation has systems and process in place for storage and distribution to collect donations and vet their suitability at source, receive and process requests for assistance and, materials; store and distribute with urgency donated materials to where they are needed. A communication/educational campaign is required so that it is widely known where and how people can donate to such an organisation.	8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing. 11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
19. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there needs to be a NSW wide platform for people to register to assist with Bushfire Recovery, much like GIVIT but for professional services, trades and for volunteering.	8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing. 11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
<p>20. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that there is early national messaging regarding provision of physical donations and dissuading people from spontaneously driving down to active fire areas with items that cannot be used or aren't required.</p>	<p>3. Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings ○ resourcing, coordination and deployment ○ equipment and communication systems. <p>8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.</p> <p>11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.</p>
<p>21. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW State Government review the role of local government in disaster recovery and that they work together to develop a coordinated approach and associated communication plan (including registration system).</p>	<p>9. Coordination and collaboration by the NSW Government with the Australian Government, other state and territory governments and local governments.</p>
<p>22. Disaster affected communities need additional support to access available funding, often in terms of internet connectivity and a support person to assist in filling out applications. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the NSW Government work with local government and other service agencies to identify local staff that could be made available to assist the community in readiness for the next natural disaster.</p>	<p>8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.</p> <p>11. Public communication and advice systems and strategies.</p>
<p>23. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the State and Federal Government for their speedy response to the bushfire</p>	

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
disaster but recommends that they work together to develop assistance packages and that funding guidelines be developed prior to, and in readiness of, the next natural disaster.	8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing. 11.Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
24. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that messaging about grants and other financial assistance is clear and states from the onset what the financial assistance is for and who is eligible.	8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing. 11.Public communication and advice systems and strategies.
25. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that eligibility guidelines in existing funding packages, such as the NSW Fixing Country Roads and NSW Fixing Regional Roads, be expanded to include repairs to bushfire damaged roads and that this funding is fast tracked to provide economic stimulus to the region.	2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect. 5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.
26. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the provision of temporary bridge units from the NSW Government should be an affordable short-term option.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks. 8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.
27. Shoalhaven City Council recommends more advanced notice when ADF teams are coming into an area without specific projects to facilitate identification of appropriate projects, particularly in the recovery phase rather than during the event.	3.Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings o resourcing, coordination and deployment o equipment and communication systems. 8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
<p>28. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that eligibility guidelines in existing funding packages, such as the Bridges Renewal Program and NSW Bridges to the Bush be expanded to include repairs to bushfire damaged bridges, as well as replacement to a more resilient structure, and that this funding is fast tracked to provide economic stimulus to the region.</p>	<p>2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.</p> <p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p>
<p>29. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that in future disasters the NSW State Government reviews subsequent Clean-up and Recovery Plans in a timely manner with the understanding that this action is key in getting the community up and running as soon as possible.</p>	<p>8. Emergency responses to bushfires, including overall human and capital resourcing.</p>
<p>30. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the NSW State Government for funding for our communities made available through the Bushfire Recovery Clean-Up package but recommends that clear and consistent messaging is developed in tandem with the development of funding packages.</p>	<p>2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.</p> <p>5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks.</p>
<p>31. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government request information from all carriers as to how they prioritise remedial actions and if they understand their social responsibilities and legal obligations of providing telecommunications to vulnerable communities.</p>	<p>3. Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings ○ resourcing, coordination and deployment ○ equipment and communication systems.

Shoalhaven City Council recommendation	Inquiry Terms of Reference
32. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government investigates the applicability of micro grids and other stand alone electricity systems to future proof vulnerable communities.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks 7. Appropriate action to adapt to future bushfire risks to communities and ecosystems.
33. Shoalhaven City Council recommends that the State Government investigate the feasibility and need for a fuel storage facility located on the South Coast of NSW.	5. Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks 7. Appropriate action to adapt to future bushfire risks to communities and ecosystems.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *2016 Census QuickStats Lake Conjola*, viewed 24 March 2020.
https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC12244?opendocument

CSIRO 2020a, *The 2019-2020 bushfires: a CSIRO explainer*, CSIRO, viewed 23 March 2020,
<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Extreme-Events/Bushfire/preparing-for-climate-change/2019-20-bushfires-explainer>

CSIRO 2020b, *Our bushfire research*, CSIRO, viewed 6 April 2020,
<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Extreme-Events/Bushfire>

Ellis, S., Kanowski, P. & Whelan, R. 2004. *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

GIVIT 2020, *More About Disaster Recovery*, viewed 4 April 2020
<http://www.givit.org.au/disasters>

Hiatt, J.W. (Coroner) 1996. *Inquiry into the cause and origin of the bushfire occurring in New South Wales between 31st December, 1993 and 14th January, 1994 and Inquests into the manner and cause of death of Norman John Anthes, Robert Eglinton Page, William John Roach and Pauline Mary O'Neil*. New South Wales.

House of Representatives Select Committee into the recent Australian bushfires, Parliament of Australia, 2003, *A Nation Charred: Report on the inquiry into bushfire*, Commonwealth of Australia

Joint Select Committee on Bushfires, Parliament NSW, 2002. *Report on the Inquiry into the 2001/2002 Bushfires*, Parliament NSW Legislative Assembly

Langford, B. 2020 'South Coast: Power likely down for days, possibly a week', Illawarra Mercury. Viewed 23 March 2020
<https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/6562677/south-coast-power-likely-down-for-days-possibly-a-week/>

McIlwain, K. 2020 'Shoalhaven and South Coast now 'off limits' to tourists ahead of Saturday fire threat', Illawarra Mercury. Viewed 19 March 2020
<https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/6563536/shoalhaven-and-south-coast-now-off-limits-to-tourists-ahead-of-saturday-fire-threat/>

Nguyen, K. & Elsworthy, E. 2020 'NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian declares state of emergency, as thousands flee South Coast ahead of horror fire weekend', ABC News viewed 19 March 2020
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-02/nsw-rural-fire-service-declares-tourist-leave-zone-south-coast/11836730>

NSW Government, 2019. 'Disaster recovery relief for bushfire cleanup', viewed 20 March 2020,
<https://www.nsw.gov.au/news-and-events/news/disaster-recovery-relief-for-bush-fire-cleanup/>

Optus 2019, 'Optus coverage just got better in Shoalhaven', viewed 6 April 2020
<https://www.optus.com.au/about/media-centre/media-releases/2019/10/optus-coverage-just-got-better-in-shoalhaven>

Prior, T. 2019 'NPWS Tony Prior talks fire management in changing times' in I Love Bello Shire, viewed 24 March 2020, <https://ilovebelloshire.com/npws-tony-prior-talks-fire-management-in-changing-times/>

Profile id. 2020, 'Sussex Inlet – Cudmirrah and Surrounds', viewed 8 April 2020, <https://profile.id.com.au/shoalhaven/about?WebID=280>

Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries, Parliament of Australia, 2010, *The incidence and severity of bushfire across Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia.

Sutton, C. 2020 'Bumper traffic, dwindling fuel and food, no phones: Highway from hell for bushfire evacuees' News.com.au, viewed 24 March 2020, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/motoring/on-the-road/bumper-traffic-dwindling-fuel-and-food-no-phones-highway-from-hell-for-bushfire-evacuees/news-story/bd615d52a44e48a890e8bb7e0b4bccf3n>

Victoria. Parliament. 1939. *Transcript of evidence and Report of the Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of and measures taken to prevent the bush fires of January, 1939, and to protect life and property and the measures to be taken to prevent bush fires in Victoria and to protect life and property in the event of future bush fires*. Melbourne: Govt. Printer.

Attachment 1

CL20.31 Bushfire Recovery Update Report from Local Recovery Coordinator –
Mr Vince Di Pietro

HPERM Ref: D20/56856

Approver: Stephen Dunshea, Chief Executive Officer

Reason for Report

To update Council on the Bushfire Recovery

Recommendation

1. That Council note the Bushfire Recovery Activity and acknowledge the progress for the Shoalhaven LGA to date.
2. Council agree to receive a proposed schedule to expand Federal Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements under Category C.

Background

Emergency and Bushfire Status. Currowan and Crompton Grange Fire State of Emergency revoked on Friday, 7 February 2020 and the fires declared extinguished by RFS Superintendent Mark Williams on Saturday 8 February 2020. Record rainfalls occurred from Saturday 8 February 2020.

Recovery Committee Authority. Recovery Committee post disaster required by State Legislation. Shoalhaven City Council responded to this requirement in mid-December.

Council information briefing held on Thursday 16 January to update Councillors on Recovery Committee Progress, appointment of Recovery Coordinator, and intentions for Shoalhaven LGA.

Governance – Shoalhaven LGA The Recovery Action Plan, Recovery Committee structure and operating guidelines were unanimously approved by Council at its Extraordinary Meeting of 20 January 2020. The Recovery Action Plan dated February 2020 has been published, is accessible through the SCC Website Bushfire Recovery Page and has been distributed/made available in hard copy at the Recovery Centre, Community Recovery Meetings and on any opportunity basis with members of the community.

Governance – Regional and State. The Regional Recovery Coordinator, Mr Dick Adams, was engaged in the drafting process of the Shoalhaven Recovery Action Plan through its Recovery Committee State Govt Representative, Mr Anthony Body. Mr Adams requested and received approval to distribute the Shoalhaven Recovery plan to all other Southern Region GMs as a suggested template for other Council/Shire/LGAs to consider and adapt to their respective LGAs.

This brief updates Council on progress of recovery.

Community Engagement

Council engagement. Two Councillors Consultative Group meetings have been held since Council's adoption of the Recovery Plan on Thursday 13 February and Thursday 20 February 2020. At the time of preparing this report a third meeting was scheduled for Thursday 28 February 2020.

Community Meetings. Community Recovery meetings held since 20 January 2020 have been at Kangaroo Valley, Bomaderry, St George's Basin, Ulladulla, Lake Conjola, Manyana/Bendalong, Bawley Point/Kioloa. These meetings have been conducted with numerous Council officers in attendance and responding to the Community's concerns. The Mayor and various Councillors have also attended each and all of these community meetings and made themselves available for the community.

Recovery Centres. Recovery Centres were opened initially at the Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre and at the Ulladulla Civic Centre.

- The Ulladulla Recovery Centre opened officially on 17 January 2020 and has transitioned from OEM to Shoalhaven (Social Recovery Action Team) management. Hours of operation have been modified to accommodate demand.
- The Nowra Recovery Centre initially based in the SEC was moved to a dedicated desk at the Council Administrative Centre enquiries area as the volume of enquiries could be managed at the front desk of the Council Offices.
- Kangaroo Valley's Community Drop In operates and continues to offer support to the community with Council and State Agency support. SCC (Social Recovery Action Team) has managed transition from community drop-in centre at Kangaroo Valley to a Recovery Assistance Point including mobile outreach, Council staff advisory capabilities to the community, and enabling that Centre to remain open for five days per week.
- Coordination of mobile recovery centre is under development for mobile outreach to fire affected communities in response to OEM provided data. (Kangaroo Valley, Budgong, Conjola, Milton/Yatheyattah). Initially a four week programme, one day per week, with relevant service providers in accordance with the needs of the visited community.

Other Forms of Engagement

Daily engagement with the community – whether as consultation, enquiry or urgent recovery action needs - is a routine feature and ongoing commitment of SCC Communications team and the Recovery Action Teams as defined and described in the Recovery Action Plan.

Senior Bushfire Recovery Visits to the Shoalhaven LGA have included the Governor General and Mrs. Hurley, PM Morrison, State Premier Berejiklian, Federal and State Members of Parliament (Messrs Clare and Warren), Federal Senator Jim Molan (NSW), State and Joint Task Force Recovery leads (Commissioners Willing, Colvin, Brigadier Garroway), Regional Recovery Coordinator (Mr. Dick Adams) and numerous ongoing and continuous visit/recces and scoping visits by NSW and Federal Government agencies and latterly, representatives of the newly appointed Clean-up contractor, Laing O'Rourke. And, importantly, a continuous presence within our LGA of Federal and State representatives (Members, Fiona Phillips, Shelley Hancock and Gareth Ward).

Frequent updates of ALL bushfire related advisory notices and assistance alerts through the Shoalhaven City Council Website Bushfire Recovery page and hard copy distribution at Community Meetings and Recovery Centre.

Regular Recovery radio communications in addition to the communications weekly rhythm defined in the Recovery Action Plan. Most commonly used radio stations are ABC Radio Illawarra (97.3 and 603), 2ST and UUUFM Community radio.

Policy Implications

Initiatives undertaken by Council in support of affected Community members of the Shoalhaven LGA;

- Distribution of Mayoral relief fund for initial relief of bushfire affected persons.
- Extension of operating hours at Waste Transfer Facility at Lake Conjola.
- Extension of free green waste disposal at Council Waste transfer and management centres until end of March 2020.
- Waiver of all development and application fees for affected customers within the LGA (not including Federal Long Service Levy)
- Re-development and building update workshops and Seminars held by SCC Compliance (Mr Wood) at local community gatherings/CCBs (Ulladulla, Lake Conjola, Bawley Point/Kioloa).
- Comparison between Building Impact Assessment and Council Cadastre (rate notice recipient cross-referencing) data for early identification and outreach to destroyed dwelling owners in advance and support of Laing O'Rourke outreach for Deed of Agreement.
- Analysis of Registration process challenges and deficiencies for lessons learned.
- Indigenous land council outreach and consultation for recovery activities.
- Contacted multi-cultural communities through NSW Health to advise on relevant recovery issues. Standing by specific advice.
- Health and Well-being action group being established bringing together service providers from across the LGA to share specific recovery based, data and intelligence to identify gaps in community needs and necessary actions through collaborative council led partnerships.
- Established a SCC Wildlife Recovery Team
- Arrival, establishment and set to work of BlazeAid at Milton and Kangaroo Valley
- Arrival of 1000 litre (IBU) tanks at Kangaroo Valley and onward distribution to Mogo and Eurobodalla.
- Coordination of donations and voluntary assistance e.g. \$24K Gift Vouchers from Australian Radio Network, Cricket NSW staff volunteering over the next 12 months to fire affected communities, multiple offers of assistance from architects/trades/project managers.

- Coordination with community service providers and registration of interest and availability links through the SCC Bushfire Recovery Page to tradespeople, labourers and service providers.
- Installation of recycling plant at West Nowra in readiness for receipt of non-contaminated clean-up waste.
- Application submitted for \$1m grant funding for sediment and erosion control, water quality monitoring and foreshore rehabilitation across all fire impacted areas.
- Installed erosion control and management plan along Lake Conjola Area
- Augmentation to ongoing and water quality monitoring at Lake Conjola in particular.
- Waste management strategy prepared and submitted for Public Works Advisory and Environmental Protection Agency in advance of, and readiness for clean-up.
- Recovery Action Team School visit (by invitation of Sanctuary Point)
- Air Quality (conducted by State) and reported/amplified through regular updates of SCC website and SCC social media.
- In view of significant delays and inability to assist with temporary bridging or ADF DACC support, Council work moves apace on replacement of destroyed bridges (Wheelbarrow Road, School Creek, Brooman Road, Yerriyong Road). Council should note that there have been seven bridges damaged in our LGA
- ADF support of clean up and infrastructure remediation (e.g. Shoalhaven Water sites/access, Forest Road, Bugong Road, Yalwal Road, Burrier, Brundee, Ulladulla, Currarong, Bendalong, St. George's Basin, Conjola, Berry.)
- Rejuvenate Campaign launched 15th Jan - Social, video, publicity, local ambassadors
- Successful collaboration with Tourism Australia and Destination NSW - Shoalhaven in state and nation campaigns
- Small business bus in region quickly and roadshow dates confirmed for March
- Business Survey promotion to business and data collection and analysis to inform action plans
- Successfully advocated for event funding at a state and federal level
- Consistent two-way communication with business through business chamber meetings, community gatherings, newsletters and one-on-one discussions
- Event support through existing program and fast-tracked approvals for new events
- Extensive use of much needed and welcomed on the ground support and assistance provided by other Councils - including, Kiama, Shellharbour, Wollongong, Sutherland, Blacktown, Woollahra and Waverley Councils to date.

Looking through the Windscreen

Council has been advised of Federal funding under Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) Category C which will support significant and essential Council activity in favour of local stimulus through essential works.

The following five broad categories in need, and currently being investigated are:

1. Activities under maintenance budget which are unclaimable expenses.
2. Infrastructure improvements to community amenity (eg. Bomaderry Sports Fields in preparation for the Koori Knockout Cup).
3. Public building defects.
4. LGA cemeteries/burial grounds remediation.
5. Transition from NSW Government to SCC of recovery management arrangements (scheduled for end of March 2020).

It is recommended that Council agree to receive from the Recovery Coordinator a detailed schedule prior to the next meeting of Councillor Consultative Group on 5 March 2020 for its consideration and endorsement.

Risk Implications

Understanding and acknowledgement of the significant work and progress to date is essential for the ongoing well-being of Council Staff. It is through the Council Staff's enthusiasm that recovery will be effective.

Recovery Coordinator assessment is that the biggest risk to Shoalhaven LGA recovery is reputational. Any detraction from the collective effort of the Council, from Recovery Coordinator's perspective, is actively discouraged.

Council may provide further mitigation of potential reputational risk by acknowledging the effort and activity to date and taking every opportunity to amplify it with their relevant ward constituents and in the public domain.

Attachment 2

CL20.53 Bushfire Recovery Update Report from Local Recovery Coordinator –
Mr Vince Di Pietro

HPERM Ref: D20/96178

Approver: Stephen Dunshea, Chief Executive Officer

Reason for Report

To update Council on the Bushfire Recovery

Recommendation

That

1. That Council note the Bushfire Recovery Activity and acknowledge the progress for the Shoalhaven LGA since the last Ordinary Meeting.
2. Council agree to the enclosed proposed schedule to expand Federal Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements under Category C.

Evolving Global Emergency and Emergent Contingency Planning

COVID19. Since the last Ordinary Meeting of Council, COVID19 has been officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. This declaration has impacted most if not all personal, community, organisational and all levels of Government focus and activity. All Bushfire Recovery activity will be impacted by the personal protective measures and Federal Government led public gathering restrictions and travel advisories and precautions.

Importantly, some decisions or motions already approved may need to be re-adjusted to reflect the restrictions on public gatherings for the foreseeable future. This however does present an opportunity for Council to reallocate previously identified funds to address more urgent needs particularly in engineering and services. However, keeping close the identified activities focussed on social and economic recovery of the community will in due course be needed with more urgency and priority than they currently do under Bushfire Recovery alone.

This situation is far from clearly understood and its impact unfolds daily at pace. Nonetheless, this reports the Bushfire Recovery activity undertaken since the last Ordinary Meeting.

Background

Emergency and Bushfire Status. Currowan and Crompton Grange Fire State of Emergency revoked on Friday, 7 February 2020 and the fires declared extinguished by RFS Superintendent Mark Williams on Saturday 8 February 2020. Record rainfalls occurred from Saturday 8 February 2020.

Recovery Committee Authority. Recovery Committee post disaster required by State Legislation. Shoalhaven City Council responded to this requirement in mid-December. Council information briefing held on Thursday 16 January to update Councillors on

Recovery Committee Progress, appointment of Recovery Coordinator, and intentions for Shoalhaven LGA.

Governance – Shoalhaven LGA The Recovery Action Plan, Recovery Committee structure and operating guidelines were unanimously approved by Council at its Extraordinary Meeting of 20 January 2020. The current published Recovery Action Plan dated February 2020 needs updating to better reflect the shifting priorities of the current and emerging circumstance in the Shoalhaven. The first Recovery Update was presented to Council by the Recovery Coordinator on Tuesday 25 February 2020.

The Recovery Committee has agreed that while LEOCON and RFS representation remains important, as the clean-up proceeds and emerging emphasis on community mental health becomes more evident, the standing membership of the Recovery Committee should reflect both.

To this end, the Recovery Committee has sought participation and membership from NSW Health, the prime clean up contractor (Laing O'Rourke) and Council's indigenous liaison officer. NSW Health has attended the past two meetings, while the latter agencies' participation is being progressed. The SCC Website Bushfire Recovery Page and SCC Facebook page remain the primary sources of authoritative Council information and continue to be distributed/made available in hard copy at the Recovery Centre, Community Recovery Meetings and on any opportunity basis with members of the community.

Governance – Regional and State. State Government governance remains unchanged. Regional Recovery Coordinator, Mr Dick Adams, is in weekly contact through the LGA GM forums and continues to promote positively the Shoalhaven LGA actions and progress. The Recovery Committee State Govt Representative, Mr Anthony Body remains an active participant and continues to provide an excellent link to State Government agencies.

This brief updates Council on progress of recovery.

Evolving Global Emergency and Emergent Contingency Planning

COVID19. Since the last Ordinary Meeting of Council, COVID19 has been officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. This declaration has impacted most if not all personal, community, organisational and all levels of Government focus and activity. All Bushfire Recovery activity will be impacted by the personal protective measures and Federal Government led public gathering restrictions and travel advisories and precautions.

Importantly, some decisions or motions already approved may need to be re-adjusted to reflect the restrictions on public gatherings for the foreseeable future. This however does present an opportunity for Council to reallocate previously identified funds to address more urgent needs particularly in engineering and services. This situation is far from clearly understood and its impact unfolds daily at pace.

Community Engagement

Council engagement. Councillors Consultative Group meetings continue and have been held on 28 February and, at the time of writing, the next meeting is to be held 19 March 2020. Although not attended by all CCG members, the advice and discussion with those Group members who are CCG 'regulars' is helpful.

Community Meetings. Community Recovery meetings held since 25 February 2020 have been at Kangaroo Valley, Nerriga/Sassafras, and Fisherman's Paradise. These meetings have been conducted with numerous Council officers and other agencies' representatives in attendance. The Mayor and various Councillors have also attended these community meetings and made themselves available for the community.

Recovery Centres.

- The Ulladulla Recovery Centre continues to operate in the Ulladulla Civic Centre under SCC management (Social Recovery Action Team) with significant and ongoing OEM support. The COVID 19 related personal precautions and public gathering restrictions have led to the principle use of the Civic Centre being put in abeyance. This 'pause' means that the Civic Centre is usable potentially in its current role as a Recovery Centre until end of May. Modified (reduced) hours of operation have been implemented to accommodate demand. At the time of the last Recovery Committee Meeting on 17 March, Ulladulla had received 1,425 registrations in total. In the preceding five days to the Recovery Meeting, this included 37 new registrations, and 67 returning customers totalling 104 customer visits.
- Council Administrative Centre enquiries counter is proving to be sufficient to manage the Nowra enquiries.
- Kangaroo Valley's Community Drop In now operates as a Recovery Assistance Point including mobile outreach under the Social Recovery Action Team management and remains open for five days per week. Ms. Andi Csontos is to be congratulated for her and her team of volunteers' tireless and ongoing support for the Kangaroo Valley community.
- Since the last report, Mobile Recovery Hubs (an initiative of the Social Recovery Action Team) have commenced and are in full operations providing mobile outreach to fire affected communities. The month of March has been a four-week programme, involving one day per week in each community area, with relevant service providers in accordance with the needs of the visited community. The locations visited include Wandandian, Lake Conjola, Kioloa/Bawley Point, and Sussex Inlet. The program for the Mobile Recovery Hub visits has been published widely through the SCC website and Facebook page as well as on local radio and print.
- Since the last report, under the Economic/Tourism Recovery Action Team, Small Business Roadshows have visited the Shoalhaven. These have been held at Kangaroo Valley (17 March), Nowra (18 March) and Ulladulla (19 March).

Other Forms of Engagement

Daily engagement with the community continues (whether as consultation, enquiry or urgent recovery action needs) is a routine feature and ongoing commitment of SCC Communications team and the Recovery Action Teams as defined and described in the Recovery Action Plan.

Senior Bushfire Recovery Visits to the Shoalhaven LGA have included the NSW Deputy Opposition Leader, and the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. Regional Recovery Coordinator (Mr. Dick Adams) and numerous ongoing and continuous visit/recces and scoping visits by NSW and Federal Government agencies. Clean-up contractor, Laing O'Rourke has been present

throughout the LGA scoping and commencing clean-up operations in Conjola Park and Kangaroo Valley. And, importantly, a continuous presence within our LGA of Federal and State representatives (Members, Fiona Phillips, Shelley Hancock and Gareth Ward).

Frequent updates of ALL bushfire related advisory notices and assistance alerts through the Shoalhaven City Council Website Bushfire Recovery page, SCC Facebook page and hard copy distribution at Community Meetings and Recovery Centre.

Regular Recovery radio communications in addition to the communications weekly rhythm defined in the Recovery Action Plan. Most commonly used radio stations are ABC Radio Illawarra (97.3 and 603), 2ST and UUUFM Community radio.

Policy Implications

Initiatives undertaken by Council in support of affected Community members of the Shoalhaven LGA;

- Comparison between Building Impact Assessment and Council Cadastre completed. SCC Mailout to all registered landowners of destroyed dwellings occurred Thursday 5 March 2020. 261 letters were sent and at the time of writing 117 replies have been received in nine working days. This is very pleasing and an excellent result. Returns will be shared with owner's consent with Laing O'Rourke for comparison with ServiceNSW registrations assure maximum possible capture of destroyed dwelling owners to effect for Deed of Agreement.
- SCC Waste Management Plan endorsed by Public Works Advisory and accepted without amendment from the first submission in early January.
- Indigenous land council outreach and consultation for recovery activities. Met with Ulladulla Land Council and Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council – awaiting confirmation of meeting with Jerrinja.
- Contacted multi-cultural communities through NSW Health to advise on relevant recovery issues. Have connected NSW Multicultural Health with Community Migrant Centre (Parramatta) Business Connect Multicultural to provide support for business owned by people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.
- Health and Well-being action group being established bringing together service providers from across the LGA to share specific recovery based, data and intelligence to identify gaps in community needs and necessary actions through collaborative council led partnerships - meeting scheduled for 1 April with federal/state agencies, NGO's, Not for Profits. Currently investigating options to move this to an on-line meeting.
- Coordination of donations and voluntary assistance e.g. \$24K Gift Vouchers from Australian Radio Network, Cricket NSW staff volunteering over the next 12 months to fire affected communities, multiple offers of assistance from architects/trades/project managers.

- Ongoing coordination with community service providers and registration of interest and availability links through the SCC Bushfire Recovery Page to tradespeople, labourers and service providers.
- Working with OEM to roll out a Case Management service (Recovery Support Service) for fire affected residents. Currently in discussion with local agencies with case management experience and capacity.
- Developing a series of community information sessions/forums. Currently considering partnering with Wingecarribee Council for a series of on-line seminars.
- Attended Regional Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee for Southern NSW to advise and workshop ideas around 'One Stop Shop' mental health hotline and Recovery Support Service.
- Planning for ongoing operation of Recovery Centres in current climate of Social Distancing.
- Providing information on the proposed waiver of Long Service Levy for construction certificates proposed with new regulations to active expected very soon.
- Providing up to date advice on Council's recovery webpage of changes and FAQ on rebuilding issues including legislation changes.
- Engaging with Bushfire Housing Assistance Recovery Team in relation to temporary housing, especially the use of moveable dwellings.
- Facilitating rapid assessment of heritage properties affected by the bushfire to assist with conservation and clean-up activities.
- Representation on Southern Planning, Development and Environment sub-committee of the Regional Bushfire Recovery Committee to seek consistency across councils and push issues up to regional level.
- Re-development and building updates being provided face to face at recovery centres and at local community gatherings (Kangaroo Valley, Sassafras, Fishermans Paradise).
- Ongoing liaison with Laing O'Rourke in relation to the Clean-up, particularly in relation to asbestos waste.
- Coordination with community service providers and registration of interest and availability links through GIVIT to tradespeople, labourers and service providers.
- National Disaster Funding received for the replacement of three of the destroyed bridges (Wheelbarrow Road, School Creek, Brooman Road), Council should Yerrilyong Road). Note that there have been seven bridges damaged in our LGA.
- ADF supported air drops for fauna. 1.6 tonnes of food delivered by air.
- Two grant applications in for the Coast and Estuaries program for Sediment erosion control works and water quality monitoring totalling \$1.4million from NSW Dept Planning Industry and Environment.

- Air Quality monitoring of asbestos continues around Lake Conjola and Hoylake Park in Conjola Park.
- Rejuvenate Campaign has reached over 10.5 million people through social, video, publicity and local ambassadors, with over 45 positive media articles to national audiences.
- Small Business Bushfire Regional Roadshows in Kangaroo Valley, Nowra and Ulladulla complete.
- Business Survey data collection and analysis to inform action plans ongoing.
- BlazeAid fully operational in Milton and Kangaroo Valley with funding secured for up to 6 months of operation, each base has been supplied a vehicle by local dealerships.
- Successful two-way communication with business through business chamber meetings, community gatherings, newsletters and one-on-one discussions, including 3 precinct marketing partnerships for community-led recovery efforts.
- Event support through existing program and fast-tracked approvals for new events where possible in the current climate.
- Providing one on one support and advice to businesses, ensuring they have registered with ServiceNSW, they understand the grants available and have the information they need.
- Dedicated Business information provided at community meetings.
- Visitor Services out in region meeting one on one with tourism operators and provision of information on opportunities to be involved in local, state and national campaigns.
- Working closely with Google, Facebook and other large corporates to assist them in their desire to help small business.
- Support provided to local suppliers and sub-contractors that have the capability to work with Laing O'Rourke.
- EOIs for remaining allocation of the Bushfire Community Resilience and Economic Recovery Fund received and reported.
- Business Recovery mentoring program planning in progress – one on one support for small business.
- Correspondence with those who have offered assistance, arranging letters to all fire impacted properties with offers of assistance.
- Working with the Business Council of Australia to support tradies who have lost tools as well as supporting apprentices who lost tools through the Mayoral Support Fund.
- Matching all ABN's in fire effected areas with business type and providing information on opportunities, funding, registration requirements to assist business during the recovery process.
- Attended and presented at the Visitor Economy Recovery Summit at Willinga Park.

- Taking part in radio interviews and podcasts to help share information about opportunities to business in a variety of ways. Podcast available at <https://rensw.dsns.w.com.au/2020/03/bushfire-recovery-summit-podcasts/>
- Supporting event organisers with application to the Destination NSW Flagship event fund, applications close 25th March.
- Working with State Government to identify transformational projects for medium term economic stimulus and to drive demand as well as identify and address barriers to investment for longer term supply.
- Continue to attend the regional Small Business and Tourism Working Group, Chaired by Anthony Body, Director Illawarra - Shoalhaven, Regional NSW, DPIE.
- Met with State Government and consultants to provide information on the updates to the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS). Work is now complete; this will inform planning for future assistance.
- Working with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to identify opportunities for the development of a Tourism School of Excellence. Changing the way training is delivered in partnership with Shoalhaven operators.

Looking through the Windscreen

Transition from in person service to Call Centre Service. COVID 19 will inevitably drive provision of services – both Council and OEM including Mobile Recovery Hubs – to a call-centre based service provision. Council staff has met to begin scoping this, how it might operate and where it might be based. It is envisaged that by the time of the next Ordinary Meeting, this will be a requirement beyond Council's choice or control.

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. At the last Council Ordinary Meeting Council was advised of Federal funding under Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) Category C which will support significant and essential Council Bushfire Recovery activity and provide local stimulus through essential works.

The following five broad categories presented to Council agreed were:

1. Activities under maintenance budget which are unclaimable expenses.
2. Infrastructure improvements to community amenity (e.g. Bomaderry Sports Fields in preparation for the Koori Knockout Cup).
3. Public building defects.
4. LGA cemeteries/burial grounds remediation.
5. Transition from NSW Government to SCC of recovery management arrangements (scheduled for end of March 2020).

The Recovery Coordinator provided a detailed schedule to the Councillor Consultative Group on 19 March 2020 for its consideration and endorsement.

The proposed schedule appears below:

Natural Disaster bridge reconstruction program shortfall (grant excess premium on claim & Council funded works)	\$ 140,000
Southern District footpath renewals (5 sites)	\$ 40,000
Basin District footpath renewals (3 sites)	\$ 40,000
Central District footpath renewals (4 sites)	\$ 40,000
Northern District footpath renewals (5 sites)	\$ 40,000
Koori Cup Knockout as per MIN20.121	\$ 400,000
Museum-45 Princes Hwy-Lake Tabourie	\$ 3,000
Sussex Inlet Theatre-Jacobs Dr-Sussex Inlet	\$ 75,000
Public Hall-Burrill Lake	\$ 55,000
Public Hall-Osborne Park-177 Moss Vale Rd-Kangaroo Valley	\$ 25,000
Lake Conjola Cemetery fire damage not covered by insurance or Disaster Funding. Includes asbestos and tree removal and fencing repairs.	\$ 50,000
Customer Contact Centre includes modifications to the current counter arrangements and staffing costs.	\$ 100,000
Maintenance of 5 highest priority Council fire trails. 58km	\$ 55,000
Asset protection zone works	\$ 50,000
Business Workshops	\$ 30,000
Business Mentoring Program	\$ 30,000
Recovery Events Support	\$ 50,000
Mobile Community Hubs – resourcing	\$ 5,000
Health and Wellbeing Action Group – facilitation and resourcing	\$ 7,500
Community Information Session – Speaker fees and resources	\$ 2,500
Community Development Programs for recovery – i.e. Storytelling, filming, resource creations	\$ 20,000
Bushfire Recovery Operational Support	\$ 158,667
Total	\$ 1,416,667

Risk Implications

Understanding and acknowledgement of the significant work and ongoing progress is essential for the well-being of Council Staff. It is through the Council Staff's

enthusiasm that recovery, and now its resilience in its response to COVID19, will be effective.

Recovery Coordinator assessment is that the biggest risk to Shoalhaven LGA recovery is reputational. Any detraction from the collective effort of the Council, from Recovery Coordinator's perspective, is actively discouraged.

Council may provide further mitigation of potential reputational risk by acknowledging the effort and activity to date and taking every opportunity to amplify it with their relevant ward constituents and in the public domain.

COVID19 introduces a level of risk of higher consequence and almost certain likelihood to Council's reputation and Councillors' leadership of the Shoalhaven community.

Attachment 3

Shoalhaven City Council Resolution

Shoalhaven City Council resolved on 21 January 2020 (MIN20.29).

To assist in protect our Towns and Villages from future bushfire attack, Council resolve to mount a campaign to have the NSW or the Commonwealth Government carry out the following actions as they may apply to them and the same provisions also be applied to any Local Government Council where appropriate.

- 1. To exempt hazard reduction burns and the construction of asset protection zones, required as a result of a duly adopted standard, from the provisions of the EPCB Act and the NSW Environmental Legislation, internal Government Agency Policies, or any other limitations within other Acts or Regulations which restrict any authorised authority from constructing and maintaining APZs or undertaking hazard reduction burns.*
- 2. To have the NSW State Government adopt as a general policy that Urban settlements requiring the provision of an APZ at the interface with natural areas, such APZ be at least 200m and to have such APZs managed as Park Lands.*
- 3. To either repeal or create an easement over any section of a National Park where part of the Park falls within a 200m APZ and vest the management of that land in the local Council.*
- 4. To enact Legislation to require a private land holder (including Aboriginal Land) create and maintain a parkland like cleared area of generally 200m to act as an APZ between the subject land and the interface with any urban development requiring the provision of an APZ, where a property owner fails to comply with this requirement an authorised authority may carry out the work and charge the land holder for the works, with the exception of Aboriginal Land where the clearing will remain a cost on the authority.*
- 5. To require any Government Authority who manages forested areas to properly maintain and improve the construction of fire trails, this is to include the removal of any obstructions other than locked gates.*
- 6. To consider the construction of strategic fire breaks through forested areas including National Parks of a similar width to a major electricity easement.*

Attachment 4

Acknowledgements and thanks

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank and acknowledge the amazing work undertaken by the ABC in emergency broadcasting. The ABC continued to update the south coast community throughout the unfolding of the disastrous 2019-2020 Currowan fire. Broadcasts were informative and timely and perhaps more importantly, delivered by a trusted Australian organisation and this could not have been possible without the valued input of the Senior RFS Controllers for the Currowan fire.

Shoalhaven City Council wants to acknowledge the brave decision to create a “tourist leave zone”. Tourism is a significant contributor to the economies of the South Coast of NSW. This was a difficult decision due to the impact to the economy, but this action most likely saved many lives and assisted our emergency services with improved access to towns and villages under threat during the bushfire disaster

Shoalhaven City Council would like to acknowledge the work of government, emergency services, volunteers and the community in general in pulling together to address the fallout from the 2019-2020 Currowan fire.

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank the countless offers of support and donations for our community.

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank the vital support that we received from other Councils, being Kiama, Shellharbour, Wollongong, Sutherland, Blacktown, Woollahra and Waverley, who supplied staff and equipment to help with the massive clean-up and to get communities up and running again. Shoalhaven City Council thanks the Office of Local Government and the City of Sydney for their significant role in coordinating support efforts for regional councils.

Shoalhaven City Council would like to thank staff and volunteers who manned the Disaster Recovery Centres and supported the community in such a compassionate way.

Shoalhaven City Council has submitted applications to the NSW Natural Disaster Essential Public Asset Restoration Fund and has received funding to replace four bridges and works are underway. Shoalhaven City Council would like to acknowledge and thank the Office of Emergency Management for the extremely quick assessment time that has enabled Council to restore these essential public assets in such a responsive and timely manner.

Attachment 5

Shoalhaven Local Government Area Recovery Action Plan



Shoalhaven Local Government Area **Recovery Action Plan**

February 2020



The Shoalhaven Local Government Area **Vision**

The Mayor's and Council's vision is for the Shoalhaven to emerge from this bushfire and its impacts in a better, stronger and more resilient position than it was prior to the bushfire emergency.

How? The Council recognises that this outcome will rely heavily upon lessons learned from, and the incorporation of practicable and logical conclusions from those lessons into its planning and regulation.



Amanda Findley
Mayor



Stephen Dunshea
Chief Executive Officer

Important Shoalhaven **Messages**

Internal

1

We are all in this together. Our Council is working hard to serve our City and its people to get **back on our feet** as soon as possible.

2

The Shoalhaven has an established Recovery Committee which is **coordinated and responsive** to all of the needs of our City.

3

Safety is first and foremost in all we do during our recovery: second and third order consequences inform our assessment of the **best possible outcome** for our City and its people.

The Shoalhaven Council's **Aim**

The Shoalhaven City Council's aim is to restore the Shoalhaven Local Government Area (LGA) to normal operation and community activity as soon as possible.

Why? The impact and area of the bushfire will require significantly higher than 'business as usual' Council action, resources and involvement.

How? To meet this demand, the Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) has formed and will be supported by a Local Recovery Committee within which Recovery Action Teams have been shaped to best manage the information flow and required remediation necessary to achieve Council's aim.

Through the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee, and Councillors in their interaction with their affected constituents, Council will engage stakeholders and the communities affected in the development and

implementation of recovery objectives. Strategies adopted to effect the objectives are to complement and enhance the extraordinarily high levels of good work and goodwill that has occurred in many communities at the neighbourhood level. These strategies must also include those in the LGA away from communities or built up aggregations of inhabitants. It is essential that the understanding of the rich local Indigenous heritage is included in Council's planning considerations.

External

①

The Shoalhaven is ready to welcome you –
come, explore, stay.

②

Our air, our water and our sea is clean and safe –
come, explore, stay.

③

We want your business; we would love your business to be here –
come, research, move in!

Background

Event Summary – Currowan Fire 26th November 2019

- The Currowan Fire commenced 26th November 2019
- In the period leading up to the Christmas and New Year period, fires combined and spread across the neighbouring LGAs.
- The Currowan Fire, having initially been managed as a single entity, spread across neighbouring City and Shire LGAs and has seen the fire re-mapped into LGA areas for ongoing response and recovery management.
- This plan relates to the Recovery planning for the Shoalhaven LGA which involves over 80% of the Shoalhaven City land area impacted by fire totalling some 4567 square kilometres.

Council Response

- Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) response was immediate and the SCC has remained open and actively engaged throughout.
- The evolving demands placed upon local government services escalated rapidly.
- CEO and other Council resources positioned themselves in both the Council Administrative Centre and the Emergency Operations Centre.
- CEO and Mayor appointed a Shoalhaven Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC) to coordinate the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee response.
- The LRC will maintain links to Council, affected communities, NSW State Government recovery response, and available services and agencies engaged in bushfire recovery.



Vince Di Pietro

Recovery Co-ordinator



Recovery Action

Shoalhaven Recovery Committee

- The Recovery Committee will coordinate the implementation of this Recovery Action Plan and agree a timely and appropriate transition/exit strategy from bushfire recovery to routine Council business.
- Council is committed to be ready to assume all recovery tasks from the earliest time possible from the Emergency agencies (RFS, SES, NSW Police and NSW Government). To this end, at an Extraordinary Meeting of Shoalhaven City Council on 20 January 2020, Council approved the formation of the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee and its external linkages as attached to this plan.
- In readiness for the transition of bushfire impact management to the Shoalhaven City Council as the responsible and accountable LGA, the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee will actively engage and utilise, from the earliest time possible, local assessments and plans.

Shoalhaven Recovery Committee Task

The Committee's task is to organise and empower local agencies to respond, act, and when needed, seek assistance to effect an expeditious remediation of, and recovery from the effects of bushfire in the Shoalhaven LGA.

Committee Governance and Role

The Shoalhaven Recovery Committee shall:

- Report to CEO SCC;
- Be chaired by the Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC);
- Be informed by four specialist/focus activity leaders: Social, Built, Economic/Tourism, Environment;
- Inform prioritisation of effort, and facilitate resolution of competing demands;
- Facilitate/Inform/Conduct communication to the Community; between agencies (Council, Emergency Responders and Support agencies); and to State and Federal Government;
- Receive input from Councillors, Recovery Centres, City Administrative Centre front desk and third parties as and when raised for the attention of the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee; and,
- Meet weekly or as required as circumstances demand and, as soon as appropriate to move beyond the confines of the Emergency Operations Centre, to LGA locations where possible.

Shoalhaven Recovery Committee

Membership:

- Local Recovery Coordinator (Chair)
- Rural Fire Service
- Local Emergency Organisation Control (LEOCON)
- Regional Emergency Management Officer (REMO)
- Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO)
- NSW Government Regional Coordinator
- Recovery Action Team Leads (Economic/Tourism, Environment, Social, Built)

Recovery Action Team Leads

The Shoalhaven City Council will be responsible for Recovery Actions and activities within the LGA. This will include identification of shortfalls and additional resources needed to effect recovery objectives.

This will be achieved within Council, and be heavily dependent upon the information flow and activities of four Recovery Action Teams, led by a Recovery Action Team Lead.

The Recovery Action Team domains are:



Michael Paine

*Social Recovery
Action Team Leader*

Social

Social recovery is critical for future community sustainability. The Social Action Team will respond to, but not constrained to:

- Public Information/Community Engagement
- External liaison and advice (Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Media)
- Local Indigenous liaison
- Mental Health Services monitoring and liaison
- Informing Council



Warwick Papworth

*Built Recovery
Action Team Leader*

Built

The built environment is a mixture of public and private service providers which have evolved over a long period of time resulting in varying infrastructure codes and standards. Recovery within the built environment allows us to 'future proof' our infrastructure to meet the needs of our evolving community. This recovery action team will manage, but not constrained to, the recovery of the following:

- Damage Assessment
 - Homes
 - Outbuildings
- Trade monitoring and engagement
- Council Approvals
- Roads and Bridges
- Area reopening recommendation and advice based upon restoration/normality
- Water and Sewerage Infrastructure



Shannan Perry-Hall

*Tourism Recovery
Action Team Leader*

Economic/Tourism

The role of the Economic/Tourism Action Team is to lead and coordinate the planning and implementation of industry and business aspects of recovery, including tourism and agriculture. This group will manage, but not constrained to, the following:

- Tourism and Small Business
- Re-skilling/redistribution of available workforce
- Resilience Building
- Industry/Big Business

Tourism will be a major focus for this team as significant impacts on this industry have been reported as a result of this fire.



Shane Pickering

*Environment Recovery
Action Team Leader*

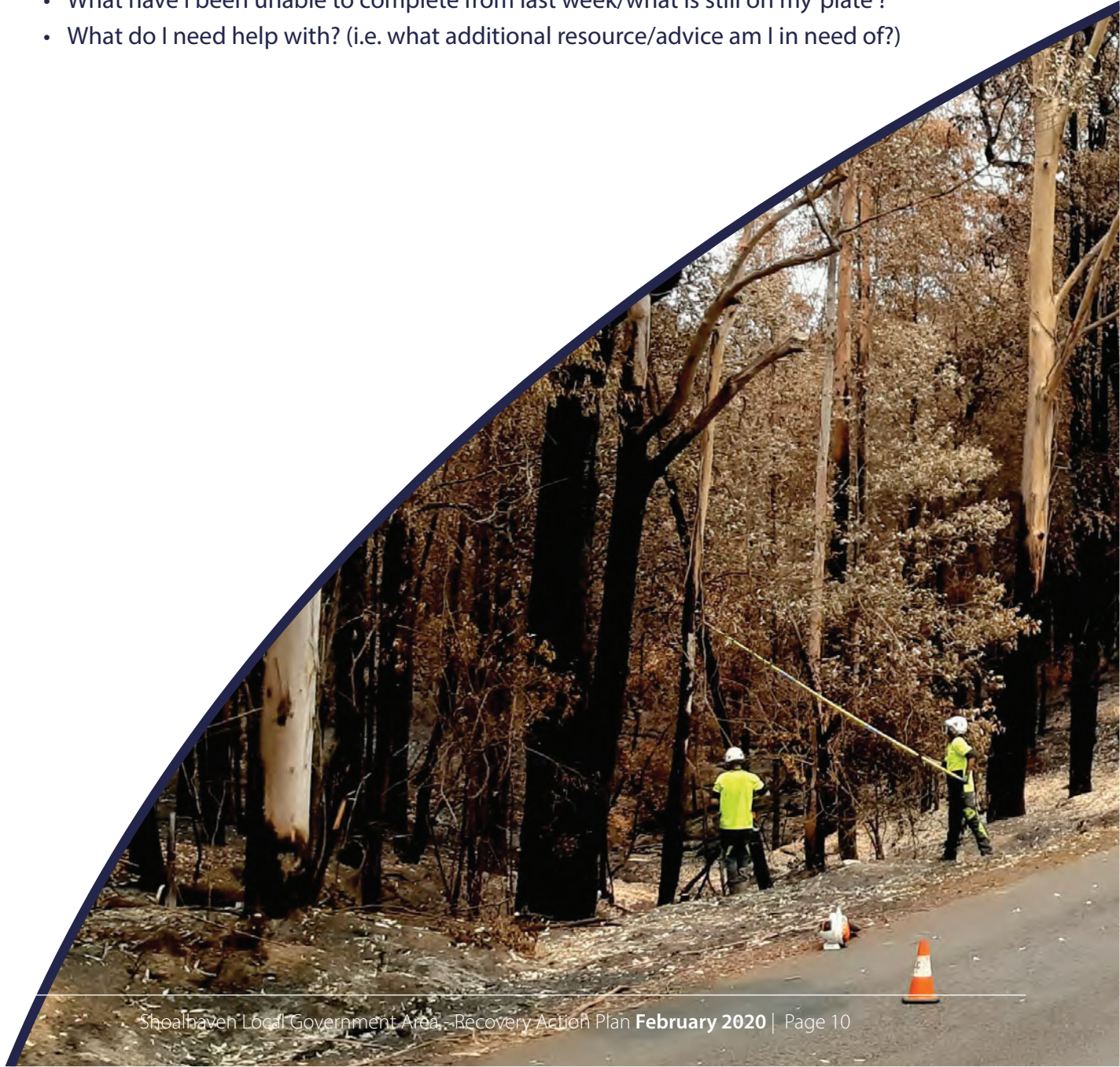
Environment

Recovery of the natural environment in our case will have flow on effects on our economic recovery. When recovering the environment, the focus and principles need to be on ecosystem resilience and maintenance of ecosystem processes. Waste will be a large part of the environmental recovery and this action team will manage the following:

- Waste management impact/alternatives
- Air quality advice/management
- Water quality and landscape restoration
- Fauna, fisheries and flora advice/management

Recovery Action Team **Guidance**

- Receive information, Assess, Liaise/consult, Decide, Act
- Beyond Action team capacity, delegation or capability?
 - Is it fire related?
 - **If yes** - refer to Shoalhaven Recovery Committee
 - **If not** - fire related refer to Council management as normal business
- Rules of Thumb: Recovery Action Team leaders should consider their reports to the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee responding to the following questions:
 - What are my current 'top three' matters?
 - What have I been unable to complete from last week/what is still on my 'plate'?
 - What do I need help with? (i.e. what additional resource/advice am I in need of?)



Recovery Action Team How/What/Who Work Lists

The approach to address the four Recovery Action Team domains is not proscriptive. The Recovery Action Team leads have the authority to get things done. Their respective 'to do' lists form attachments to the Plan but by their nature are not included in the printed form of this Recovery Action Plan.

The 'to do' lists belong to each lead and are the responsibility of each Lead to update and keep current. Founded upon community input, the 'to do' lists inform their respective teams and the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee. They are, by necessity, dynamic and will change frequently. For this reason each edition should be version controlled with a date, time and version number for ease of reference.



Communication and Engagement

Community input is the best way to inform Council and is the foundation of the Recovery Committee information flow. Accurate and authoritative information is essential to our recovery.

The best sources to rely upon are:

- Shoalhaven City Council website Bushfire Recovery page: **shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/bushfirerecovery**
- Service NSW and NSW Government agency information (accessible through the SCC website);
- Community meetings;
- Regular community contact with Councillors, Council, Community Consultative Bodies (CCB's) and the Recovery Centre;
- Media engagement through local radio, newspapers; and,
- Shoalhaven City Council Facebook page

Communication Weekly Rhythm

Tuesdays

- Weekly Recovery Committee meeting
- Councillor briefings

Wednesdays

- Mayor media engagements through local radio (2ST, ABC Illawarra 97.3, and others when invited)

Thursdays

- SCC Council e-newsletter
- List successes; prepare important advice and messages for publication; schedule community meetings for subsequent weeks

The SCC Bushfire Recovery page and Shoalhaven City Council Facebook page are updated as soon as information is released at any time during any week.



Shoalhaven Recovery Committee **Transition to Business and Service**

There is no intention to set a date for the closure of the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee. Our Council is determined to coordinate the best outcomes possible for our City, its people, businesses and environment. Council does not underestimate the task at hand nor the uncertainty of how long it will take.

However, at some time in the future, this plan and the Shoalhaven Recovery Committee will outgrow its purpose as our people, businesses and environment emerge from the significant personal, physical and financial effects of the bushfire across the whole area of our City.

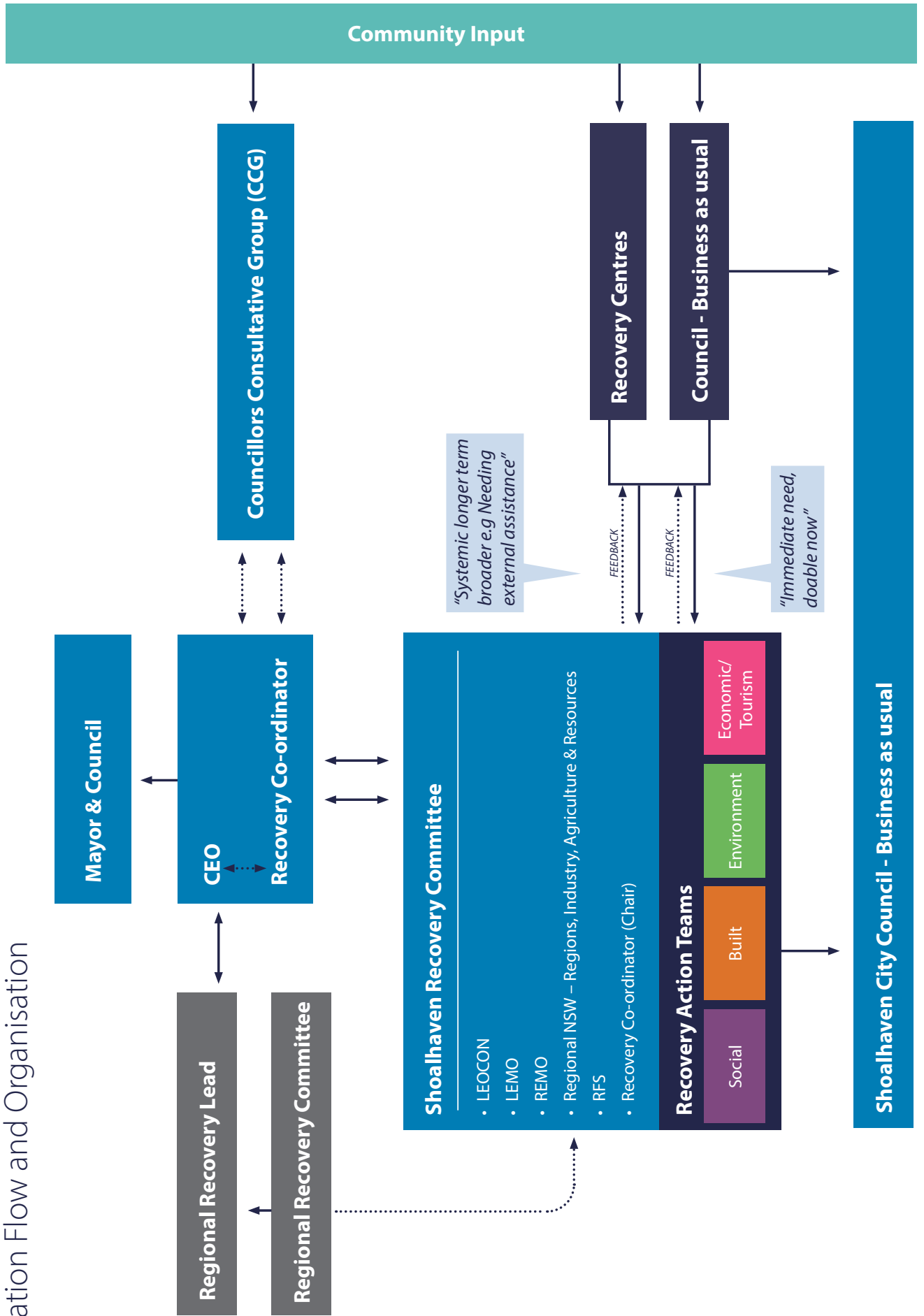
The most accurate indicator of the transition point from recovery to normal business and service will be when the demands for Recovery Action Teams are referred directly to Council without Recovery Committee involvement and referrals to external agencies are manageable as normal business for Council.

This Recovery Action Plan is how we are going to achieve the most timely, and best possible recovery. The Shoalhaven depends on our collective success.



Shoalhaven Recovery Committee

Information Flow and Organisation



Councillors Consultative Group

The Councillors Consultative Group (CCG) work together and within the community, providing assistance and support for bushfire recovery and with the commitment towards creating a stronger, better and more resilient Shoalhaven.

WARD 1



Annette Aldrick
Councillor



Nina Digiglio
Councillor



Andrew Guile
Councillor



John Wells
Councillor

WARD 2



Joanna Gash
Councillor



John Levett
Councillor



Mitchell Pakes
Assistant Deputy Mayor



Greg Watson
Councillor

WARD 3



Kaye Gartner
Councillor



Mark Kitchener
Councillor



Bob Proudfoot
Councillor



Patricia White
Deputy Mayor





Email: council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au

Bridge Road, Nowra (02) 4429 3111

Deering Street, Ulladulla (02) 4429 8999

All communication should be addressed to

The Chief Executive Officer:

PO Box 42, Nowra NSW 2541

DX 5323 Nowra NSW

Fax: (02) 4422 1816

shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au    

