

Otway Complex Fires Recovery Newsletter

Issue 3 – 13 April 2026



Backing locals by horseback

You may have passed this trio in recent days. Riders Veronica, Gerard and Annie on their horses Nelson, Thredbo, and Happy Jack are travelling from Moggs Creek to Princeton across the Otways.

The trek is about visiting local businesses along the way and promoting donations to CFA units in Gellibrand, Kawarren and Carlisle River. They're booking into country halls along the way, with a stopover at the Gellibrand Hotel too.

"You really sense the community spirit here in Gellibrand," says Veronica. "It's also great to stop for a coffee at the local store."

Each day involves about 20 to 30 kilometre horse ride and discovering the wonderful experiences and local produce in the region.

Fire Inquiry Open Mic Sessions - Register NOW

Victorians impacted by the 2026 summer fires can register to speak directly to members of parliament during a series of open mic sessions to be held across the state.

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee is travelling to regional Victoria for public hearings in late April.

The open mic sessions for community members to have their say will be:

- Tuesday 21 April: Colac, 1 pm – 2 pm

People interested in speaking at the open mics must register their interest on the inquiry website by **Thursday 16 April 2026** at www.parliament.vic.gov.au/summerfiresopenmic



The ERSP team will be at the Carlisle River Primary School and the Gellibrand Neighbourhood House every Wednesday afternoon.

Emergency Recovery Support Program

The Emergency Recovery Support Program (ERSP) is delivered by Colac Area Health and funded by DFFH.



We would love to have a chat to you to find out if we can support you, your neighbours, friends or family.

We offer practical, face-to-face support to help you:

- Understand what needs to be done and where to start
- Explore the supports available to you
- Access the services you need

We do this by:

- Meeting you where you feel most comfortable — at home, in the community, at a café, hall, or another suitable place
- Listening to your needs and concerns
- Working with you to develop a personalised Support Action Plan
- Assisting with phone calls, paperwork, follow-ups, and helping to ease the load

We can also support you to access:

- Financial advice and assistance
- Information and guidance around insurance and legal matters
- Government services and registrations
- Local services and community supports

We will be onsite at the Gellibrand Community House and at Carlisle River School Wednesday afternoons so please drop in and have a chat with us.

If you're unable to attend, you can call 1800 560 760 to access support.

Summary from the Gellibrand Community Recovery Group

• 7 April 2026

A group of 14 community members and those representing local community organisations and services, met in Gellibrand on 7 April 2026.

The meeting was chaired by Paul Hicks and documents were tabled by Max Moegerlein.

This meeting followed a community consultation on 26 March 2026 that gathered community feedback about the preparation and response to the January 2026 fires.

The Gellibrand Community Recovery Group (CRG) agreed to the composition and Terms of Reference for the group and discussed four potential areas of focus for improvement in service and/or infrastructure in the Gellibrand area.

These areas include:

- Fire preparation, planning, management and community safety
- Infrastructure for fire readiness and recovery
- Mental health, wellbeing and community connection, and
- Business and farming impacts and financial recovery assistance.

Appreciation was expressed towards the Gellibrand Community House and to small businesses who kept services running in support of the community and emergency services throughout the active fire, relief and recovery periods.

Colac Otway Shire Emergency Recovery Team and Colac Area Health services are now present at the Gellibrand Hall and will be available for 12 months.

Concerns were raised about access to funding for community organisations and compensation for local small businesses.

Action:

The Gellibrand CRG will organise a Community Day on 3rd May in Rex Norman Park, weather permitting. We will move to the Gelli Hall if it is raining.

This will be a day for an opportunity to relax, gather together and enjoy free food and activities for the kids.

Each focus area now has a small group of GCRG members to meet and follow up action recommendations to be brought back to the larger group.

Feedback from the community is welcome.

Fire Danger Period

The Fire Danger Period for Colac Otway Shire Council and Corangamite Shire Council will be lifted at of 1:00am on 20 April 2026.



Fire Recovery Hub

A Fire Recovery Hub has been established in Gellibrand to support people affected by recent fires.

Get practical advice, learn about available resources and connect with services to support your recovery.

Residents are encouraged to drop in to talk through what support is available, ask questions or be pointed in the right direction. No appointment is needed.

Colac Otway Shire Community Recovery Officer Bridie Walsh, pictured above, will also be visiting communities across the shire over coming weeks.

Bridie will be available from the van parked outside GelliHouse, with visit times displayed on the blackboard.

If you cannot attend in person, you can still get in touch.

Call Bridie Walsh on 0477 642 079 or email bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au

Please reach out and share this information with anyone who may need it.

Bushfire Recovery Committee

The first meeting of the Bushfire Recovery Committee meeting was held on Wednesday 15 April and for now is schedule for each fortnight between 10:00 and 11:00 am.

The aim is to share information across the ten impacted communities and several key recovery agencies and work through issues and concerns raised by impacted communities.

While this is a formal meeting, minutes will be shared, and any additional issues and concerns can be raised through the Community representatives.

The COS Bushfire Recovery Team is waiting on a few communities to confirm their representatives and once memberships has been finalised the Terms of Reference with a list of members will be provided, hopefully in the next edition of the Recovery Newsletter.

In the meantime, the COS Bushfire Recovery Team continue to work through the EMV funding criteria to match up all potential community recovery initiatives, with a draft submission tabled at the first meeting.

Yarning SafeNStrong

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Services (VHAS) have established a free and confidential counselling service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Yarning SafeNStrong (YSNS) is available to people and families who need to have a yarn with someone about their wellbeing.

COVID-19 saw many community members without access to their family and other support, including face to face access to workers from Aboriginal services, leaving many feeling vulnerable and isolated.

We have culturally suitable counsellors you can yarn safely with 'who get it', no matter how big or small the challenge.

Yarning SafeNStrong helpline is available 24/7.

So if you're feeling like you want someone to talk to maybe give us a call?

We offer support with:

- Social and Emotional wellbeing
- Financial wellbeing
- Medical support including COVID-19 testing
- Drug and alcohol counselling and rehab services

Call **1800 959 563**, email ysns@vahas.org.au or visit: www.vahas.org.au/yarning-safenstrong