

Otway Complex Fires Recovery Newsletter

Issue 9 – 22 July 2026

We're still here to help with your recovery

We're delighted to let you know that the Emergency Recovery Support Program (ERSP), delivered by Colac Area Health and funded by DFFH has been extended until September 30th.

Thank you, farewell and welcome

We would like to acknowledge and thank our valued practitioners Barabara Croysdale and Tracy Pirie for their dedicated work in establishing the ERSP program and wish them well in their new roles as they leave our team.

Some of you will have already met our new fulltime practitioner Ellen Greengrass who has hit the ground running meeting clients and picking up some of Barb and Tracy's work. Welcome Ellen.

Phil Knight and Brad Sadler are staying on in the team with Phil in a fulltime practitioner role and Brad working Tues, Wed and Thurs as the program lead.

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 regularly at the Gellibrand Community House and at Carlisle River School

Wednesday afternoons so please drop in and have a chat with us.

Or just give Colac Area Health reception a call on 5232 5100 and leave a message for the ERSP team.

We will get back to you as quickly as we can and we can meet you at your home, or wherever best suits you.

Community Recovery 2026-28 Grants NOW OPEN

The January 2026 Victorian Bushfire Recovery Grants Program supports priority, locally led recovery projects in communities affected by the bushfires.

Administered by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), the program is open to community recovery organisations, not-for-profit organisations, neighbourhood houses and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations leading recovery efforts within their local government area.

Applicants must be incorporated, registered for GST and hold a current ABN. Organisations that do not meet these requirements may still be eligible through an auspice arrangement. Funding requests should reflect the actual cost and scope of the proposed project and can be less than the maximum available.

Organisations in Colac Otway Shire and Corangamite Shire can apply for grants of up to \$50,000.

Visit www.vic.gov.au/community-recovery-grants-2026-bushfires for guidelines and applications.



News from the Recovery Team

We're pleased to share that the Recovery Team has been successful in securing funding for a broad range of community initiatives.

Funding has been approved by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Department of Government Services (DGS), and the Department of Families, Fairness and Health (DFFH).

Funding is provided to support fire affected communities to conduct social events that reconnect communities through free family activities, with a focus on fun, food, and entertainment.

There are also funding opportunities to support communities that want to review, improve, and develop their local community emergency resilience plans.

This includes funding for training and community events to capture insights and share bushfire knowledge and lived experiences.

This involves a significant community driven commitment to make rural community living safer.

While funding is provided under specific and non-negotiable eligibility criteria, the Recovery Team will continue to adapt and seek other opportunities to support emerging community needs.

Talk to Bridie or George about funds to support your community events or community resilience initiatives.

Recovery Committee call out

An Otways Bushfire Recovery Committee chaired by George O'Dwyer has been established with representatives from Colac, Kewarren, Carlisle River, Gellibrand, Beech Forest, Forrest, Lavers Hill, Apollo Bay and Wye River / Separation Creek.

The committee ensures community voices help shape decisions related to fire recovery and identify emerging needs in community.

All events and initiatives are led and run by community members.

We're seeking an Irrewillipe resident to represent their community on the committee.

The committee meets fortnightly on Wednesday morning at 10am for an hour online via Teams or in person at Colac Otway Shire.

Contact Bridie on 0477 642 079 or email: bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au or George on 0400 978 356 or email: george.odwyer@colacotway.vic.gov.au.





Check in on your neighbours

Do you know someone who hasn't started their clean-up after January's bushfires?

They may be eligible for free-cleanup support.

Victorians affected by the January 2026 bushfires can still register for the State Government's Clean-up Program.

Free demolition and debris removal is available for eligible properties damaged by the bushfires. This includes properties that are insured, but where there is not enough to cover clean-up and a level of rebuild.

Property owners can call 1800 560 760 (select option 3) or register online at: vic.gov.au/register-for-cleanup

Plumbers return

Reece Group Foundation are donating water tanks and plumbing services to fire-impacted residents who experienced loss or damage.

Warren Eames from Reece Group Foundation and volunteer plumber Chris Mihicinac from Plumb Geelong met with residents in June to assess their needs.

The foundation returns this week to start replacing tanks and undertake plumbing works.

Contact the Community Recovery Officer Bridie Walsh on 0477 642 079 if you want to learn more about the program.

Steps to rebuilding



Call your insurer

Understand what is covered by your insurer and how much money you will have to rebuild your home.



Consider using an advisor

Consider using a planning consultant to guide you through the process.



Contact Council

Speak to a Council Duty Planner about your planning requirements. Council has gained funding to engage a Rebuild Concierge.



Plan your house

Plan your new home and gather the required reports and documents.



Seek a planning permit

Submit your planning permit application to Council.



Apply for a building permit

Apply for a building permit. This is usually done through your builder.



Rebuild

Rebuild once all permits and approvals are in place.

Supporting your rebuild

The Colac Otway Shire Recovery Team has been successful in gaining funding from the Department of Government Services to engage a Rebuild Concierge.

The Rebuild Concierge is designed to support property owners to work through the planning and building process, and facilitate a smooth process to rebuild homes

The Rebuild Concierge and our Community Recovery Officer Bridie Walsh will work closely together to connect with bushfire affected residences to help work through rebuilding issues where possible and to assist with applications and scheduling regulatory requirements that will help people make informed decisions.

The Rebuild Concierge will then liaise with COS internal planning, building and environmental teams and external authorities to determine what options people have for rebuilding their homes, their properties, and ultimately rebuild their lives after bushfire.

**Creative winter afternoons
@ The Gelli Hall with Bridget**

Sundays 2-4pm
8-100yrs ... All Welcome
Starting 26th July
\$15 per person, per session

Upcoming Regular Activities
at the Gellibrand Hall

Sewing
Up-Cycling
Eco-printing
Weaving
Bead Making
Beach Dying

Contact Bridget for info or Gellibrand Com House
0402 142 030 0482 570 142



YOU'RE INVITED!

THE SIMPSON FNC
invite
EVERYONE
ALONG TO OUR SPECIAL

**Remembering
Goose**
...10 YEARS ON

MENTAL HEALTH
AWARENESS DAY

SATURDAY 22ND AUGUST

SIMPSON VS SOUTH COLAC

FREE LUNCH

FREE KIDS ACTIVITIES

**SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER
WARREN DAVIES**
THE UNBREAKABLE FARMER

LIVE MUSIC IN THE EVENING

LET'S TALK
Start the conversation

LOOK OUT
Check in on your mates

SUPPORT
You are never alone

IT'S OK
To ask for help

IT'S OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY
THE STIGMA STOPS WITH ME

CORANGAMITE SHIRE

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH

All Welcome!



GIVIT continues to give

GIVIT is managing donations of money, goods and services for those impacted by bushfires in Victoria.

To request donations through GIVIT, you must first connect with a community organisation that's registered with GIVIT to place requests for donations of goods and services on your behalf.

Requests can be for grocery/fuel vouchers, clothing, tools, household furniture, kitchen appliances and more.

To connect with a support organisation to access material aid support, call the Emergency Recovery Hotline (1800 560 760).

Pictured is a six-month recovery snapshot of the support that GIVIT has been able to provide to the Colac Otway community.

Support provided

19

local residents supported.

\$24,180

spent purchasing what's needed.

Most requested goods



Groceries



Fuel



Bed linen



Clothes



Hardware items



Kitchen items & dining tables



Appliances & whitegoods



Household items & towels