

Otway Complex Fires Recovery Newsletter

Issue 11 – 21 September 2026



BUNNINGS BBQ IS A WELCOME DONATION: Members of the Gellibrand Recovery Committee, from left, Bruce, Mick, Rod, Daffy and Paul enjoy a well-earned BBQ meal cooked on their new barbecue following a working bee at the Gellibrand Community Hall. The barbecue was generously donated by Bunnings as part of its support for local communities recovering and rebuilding after the January bushfires. A second barbecue was also donated to the Carlisle River CFA community, helping bring people together and strengthen community connections across the district.

Mental health & wellbeing local service extends to Colac Otway

I am pleased to announce that Barwon Health has been funded by the Department of Health to expand the Greater Geelong Queenscliffe Local to Colac.

The funding has been provided in the context of bushfire recovery in the wake of the January 2026 Otway fires.

The program has been funded until the middle of 2027.

Mental Health and Wellbeing services have commenced and are being provided by Leo who is a Mental Health Occupational Therapist and Paul who is a Social Worker.

Both are experienced counsellors and are trained in responding to people who have experienced adverse events and trauma.

We are currently operating from Colac Area Health whilst we negotiate a lease on a premises.

We will also be running a recruitment drive for mental health and wellbeing clinicians as well as for a community worker.

We would expect the community worker to be in the community, attending events and joining community lunches.

For initial contact, please call 1800 573151 where you can have a quick chat and provide basic details.

An appointment will be made for you to meet one of our staff in Colac.



Working Bee Expressions of Interest

Whether you need support with property clean-up or would like to lend a hand, you can now register your expression of interest for a community working bee.

Residents in Carlisle River, Kwarren, Gellibrand and Irrewillipe are encouraged to get involved, either by seeking assistance or volunteering to help neighbours recover and rebuild.

Together, we can make a real difference in our communities. Sign up here: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/7cEjt8HJSS>

Recovery Representation

Otway Complex Bushfire Recovery Committee

The Otway Complex Bushfire Recovery Committee meets every third Wednesday.

To get in touch with the Committee or for more information please contact George O'Dwyer by email: george.odwyer@colacotway.vic.gov.au

Committee Members:

Paul Hicks	Gellibrand Recovery Group
Kyla Beale	Gellibrand Community House
Peter Collopy	Local First Nations
Gillian Brew	Forrest FLARE
Sarina Persall	Lavers Hill
Karen Keegan	Apollo Bay
Christine Shaw	Wye-Sep
Caleb Clarke/Dave Robers	DEECA
Mel Peverill	GIVIT
Kirsten Dudink	Carlisle River
Renee Taylor	Forrest Neighbourhood House
Bruce Beale	Kwarren
Rob Henry/Amanda Court	Beech Forrest
Vacant	Irrewillipe
Gemma Cuolahan	Colac P&A Society
Bradley Sadler/Phil Knight	Colac Area Health - Emergency Recovery Support Program
Anneri Humphris	VCC Emergency Ministries
Matt Roberts	VicPol
Liz Bishop	ICRF FRRR
Sue Pigdon	Emergency Management Victoria

Gellibrand Community Recovery Group

The Gellibrand Community Recovery Group has 21 community representatives ensuring local voices shape recovery decisions.

To get in touch with the Recovery Group or for more information please contact co-chairs Paul Hicks on 0409 210 894 or Max Moegerlein on 0484 360 022 or email: moegerlm@ozemail.com.au



Deputy Commissioner for Relief and Recovery, Mariela Diaz, Colac Otway Shire Council's George O'Dwyer and Gellibrand Recovery Committee co-chair Paul Hicks.

Deputy Commissioner Visits Gellibrand to Discuss Support

Community voices were heard loud and clear when the Gellibrand Recovery Committee recently met with the newly appointed Deputy Commissioner for Relief and Recovery to discuss ongoing recovery support for the area.

Earlier this year, the Committee wrote to Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to raise concerns identified by the Gellibrand community regarding the current Community Recovery Officer (CRO) and Recovery Hub funding criteria. The correspondence was originally directed to EMV Director Mariela Diaz, who has since been promoted to the role of Deputy Commissioner for Relief and Recovery.

Following the Committee's letter, the Deputy Commissioner offered to meet with representatives in person to better understand the community's concerns and hear directly about the challenges facing Gellibrand's recovery journey.

The meeting provided an opportunity for the Committee to outline the issues raised by community members and discuss the importance of ongoing support for local recovery initiatives. The Deputy Commissioner acknowledged the concerns presented and advised that feedback would be provided as further information becomes available.

Once updates are received, the Gellibrand Recovery Committee will share this information with the wider community at a future community meeting. Details of the meeting, including timing, will be communicated as soon as they are confirmed.

The Committee thanked the Deputy Commissioner for taking the time to meet with local representatives and for her willingness to listen to the experiences and perspectives of the Gellibrand community.

Waste Levy Waiver Extended

The Victorian Government continues to support communities impacted by the fires that commenced 7 January 2026 has been extended until 28 October 2026 following the Gate Fee Rebate Program ending on 30 June 2026.

You can find all the information about the waste levy waiver at www.vic.gov.au/disposal-bushfire-waste

Please note that this extension applies only to bushfire waste generated by the fires commencing 7 January 2026 within Colac Otway Shire Council and Corangamite Shire Council

Waste facilities are responsible for ensuring that only eligible waste is accepted under the program. Colac Otway's waste transfer stations (tips) are located at Alvie, Birregurra and Apollo Bay. Facility opening hours and addresses are available on Council's website.

Lighting upgrades at netball courts

Upgrade of the lighting for the Gellibrand Recreation Reserve netball courts is being undertaken by Council as part of Council's Capital Works Program.

Works are currently underway with expected completion in late September – early October 2026 (subject to favourable weather conditions).

The project has been part funded under the State Government's Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund (up to \$138,666 ex. GST), with local contribution of \$34,667 ex. GST from the Otway Districts Football Netball Club.

The netball courts lighting upgrade will provide safe and compliant lighting for the Club's training and night match activities

Attend a Get Fire Ready event

From 1 October to 3 November, CFA brigades across Victoria will host Get Fire Ready events, providing practical bushfire preparedness information and advice for local communities.

Get Fire Ready events are your opportunity to learn about bushfire risk in your local area, hear from CFA volunteers, and discover practical actions you can take to prepare your household, family and property.

Listed below are the Get Fire Ready events in the Colac Otway Shire. For more information about these events, and other Get Fire Ready events in Victoria visit www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/cfa-events/get-fire-ready

Otway (Lavers Hill)	17 October
Kennedy's Creek/Chapple Vale	18 October
Forrest	20 October
Apollo Bay	20 October
Gellibrand	24 October
Barongarook West	24 October
Kawarren	25 October
Barwon Downs	25 October
Kennedy's Creek/Chapple Vale	25 October
Wye River	2 November



YOUTH SUNDAY MUSIC SESSION

Gellibrand River General Store
16 Main Road, Gellibrand

Sunday 27 September

12:00PM - 3:00PM

FEATURING LOCAL YOUTH MUSICIANS

GENERAL GELLIBRAND RIVER STORE

Colac Otway Shire, ENGAGE!, VICTORIA State Government



Made with AI

Make your mark on Gelli

We are painting the Gelli community hub van at the hall.

All ages and abilities welcome (children will need to be supervised)

Come and help design the animals and get some tips on how to draw from a local artist.

Sunday 2-4pm, September 20 and 27

Ongoing painting during the school holidays (weather dependent):

Monday 23 September - Friday 2 October

Days confirmed closer to the time.

For further information or to RSVP your interest:
Loreen Missen - 044855281