

# Otway Complex Fires Recovery Newsletter

Issue 5 – 11 May 2026

## A word from the Community Recovery Officer

It was wonderful to see so many people attend last Sunday's Gellibrand Kawarren Celebration Day on 3 May.

A huge thank you to Kyla and Amanda from Neighbourhood House, Trish from the Beechy Rail Trail Committee and Cherry from the Gelli Shop (who provided the wonderful food).

They made sure the day was a fantastic event.

Not to mention many volunteers from the event crew to the Rotary volunteers on the BBQ and food and information agency vendors like Colac Area Health, Agriculture Victoria, and Barwon Legal.

Thank you.

The best part - seeing everyone connect again.

It's our social connections that help us get through a significant emergency event.

So, if you are feeling out of sorts, fatigued, overwhelmed or just need a listening ear reach out - either to a close friend, family, a neighbour, or any of the wonderful people or organisations I've already mentioned.

As a starting point, I can help direct you to the support and resources that are available.

Call Bridie on 0477 642 079 or email [bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au](mailto:bridie.walsh@colacotway.vic.gov.au)

Or visit the Gellibrand Recovery Hub on Monday (10am-4pm), Wednesday afternoon or Thursday (10am-4pm).

## Mental health wellbeing support

**It's natural for emotions to sneak up on us after a few days or weeks, and sometimes these experiences can impact how we feel and function.**

There are many local providers you can turn to if you need mental health support and would like someone to talk to:

Barwon Health Mental Health - Colac:

1300 736 254 (BH) or 1300 094 187 (AH)

Colac Area Health Counselling Services: 5232 5100

Medicare Mental Health: 1800 595 212

headspace Colac: 5232 5520

Great Ocean Road Health (Apollo Bay): 5237 8500

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative: 5277 0044



Join us for

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE WEEK  
11-17 MAY 2026

# THE LONGEST LUNCH

as a part of  
Neighbourhood House Week

12.30PM  
WEDNESDAY  
13<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY

AT THE  
GELLIBRAND HALL

*Katie Symes*  
OUR GUEST SPEAKER  
FOR THIS YEAR'S  
LONGEST LUNCH

Katie will join us for lunch at the Gellibrand Community House on Wednesday, 13 May 2026. She will share her lived experience of working and living in a disaster-impacted community during the early stages of recovery, and she looks forward to listening to and learning from Gellibrand community members.

GELLIBRAND COMMUNITY HOUSE

VICTORIA  
State Government  
Justice and Community Safety

## Join us at the Longest Lunch

**Emergency Management Victoria's Katie Symes will be the guest speaker at Gellibrand Community House' Longest Lunch on Wednesday 13 May 2026.**

She will share her lived experience of living and working in a disaster impacted community during early recovery, and will listen to and learn from Gellibrand community members.

Born and raised in Mallacoota, Katie has more than 20 years experience in community, non government and Victorian Public Sector roles, including six years in emergency management. After returning home just before the 2019 to 2020 bushfires, she supported local recovery efforts as Community Recovery Hub Coordinator.

Katie now works with Emergency Management Victoria and is acting as Senior Regional Relief and Recovery Officer for Barwon South West, with a strong focus on community centred and trauma informed recovery.



**The Governor General of Australia, Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, browsed stalls at the Kawarren Market, met community members at the Gellibrand Community House and tossed the coin to start the Otway v Alvie football match during her recent visit to the area.**



## Waste disposal program extended

The FREE waste disposal program has been extended to 30 June 2026.

Following an announcement from the Minister for Environment extending the Gate Free Rebate Program, residents in fire-affected areas can dispose of non-hazardous waste at Council transfer stations in Alvie, Apollo Bay and Birregurra for FREE until 30 June 2026.

Proof of address within the fire-impacted zones is required.

## Volunteer with BlazeAid

**Do you want to give back?**

BlazeAid needs volunteers to help rebuild fences.

Donations for meals, cakes, bikkies or slices are also welcome.

Help keep a busy and hungry crew fed and ready for hard work OR volunteer your time to join a fence rebuilding crew.

Register to volunteer or for assistance by calling area coordinator Sandy on 0439 890 538.

## Water tank cleaning

**Water tank cleaning rebates END SOON!**

Don't miss out on your water tank cleaning and gutter cleaning rebates.

Get your invoices and complete the online form.

Grant program finishes at the end of May.

Visit [water.vic.gov.au/grants/recovery-water-tank-rebates](http://water.vic.gov.au/grants/recovery-water-tank-rebates)

## Agriculture Victoria Upcoming Events and Webinars

- **12 May 2026**

Upskilling Agribusiness for the future: Bank applications and reviews

- **14 May 2026**

Seasonal update and outlook for Victoria

- **27 May 2026**

Refresh and Reset Farmer Dinner - Skipton

For a full list of events and webinars visit:

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/event-listing](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/event-listing)

## Celebrating community spirit

The community came together to celebrate the Gellibrand and Kawarren Spirit through a relaxed and welcoming family fun day.

A Welcome to Country was shared by brothers Peter and Richard Collopy, acknowledging Country and setting a healing tone for the day.

With live music and entertainment enjoyed by all ages, the event created space to reconnect, reflect and celebrate together.

It was a warm reminder of the strength and resilience of the community, and the value of coming together.

We look forward to other opportunities to come together in the future.

