

Grants

The Victorian Government provides a range of assistance to support farming families, communities and small businesses to manage the impact of drought as well as technical information, tools and resources. A grant of up to \$25,000 is available to assist farmers impacted by drought and dry seasonal conditions to invest in on-farm water infrastructure that addresses animal welfare needs or for permanent horticultural plantings. For more information, call 1800 260 425 or visit ruralfinance.com.au The Rural Financial Counselling Service may be able to assist with applications for this grant; see Other Useful Links and Contacts for more information.

A 2020 Clean Up Program has been announced for funding to demolish, remove and safely dispose of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair by fire. The removal of fencing, trees and vehicles may also be included where necessary for the safe cleanup of buildings. For more information visit vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria or phone 1800 560 760.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria has announced Recovery Grants of up to a total of \$90,000 to help farmers in fire-affected areas. Pyrenees Shire Council area is included in the listed areas, with a grant of up to \$75,000 intended for immediate recovery works, which could include clean-up of infrastructure, fencing equipment, arborists for the removal of trees and more. A further grant for a maximum of \$15,000 has been announced to subsidise up to 50 per cent of transport activities for farm businesses, which may include transporting of emergency fodder or water for stock or transporting stock to (or returning from) agistment. For further information or to apply visit vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria

Communications

Optus has committed to the construction of a mobile phone tower to improve mobile communications in the Lexton region. Pyrenees Shire Council is eager to see work begin as soon as possible. The Optus website currently indicates that the Lexton Macrocell tower is scheduled for completion in Q2, 2020.

Rainbow Serpent Festival

Rainbow Serpent Festival announced plans to hold a Regen Edition event at Lexton over the Easter long weekend. These plans include assisting with the fire recovery with community-related events including tree planting and a community working bee. Further announcements and event specifics to be released as plans progress.

BlazeAid

The BlazeAid team has set up camp at the Lexton Recreation Reserve and volunteers have started to assist with the repair and rebuilding of fences damaged in the fire.

Please contact Bruce Hindson for further information, to volunteer or for assistance: 0484 582 755 or email blazeaid.lexton@gmail.com



Pyrenees Shire Councillors Ron Eason, David Clark, Mayor Tanya Kehoe and CEO Jim Nolan discuss the fire recovery plan with Dan Tehan MP, BlazeAid and local farmers.

Council Clean Up Works

Council assessments of hazards along roads and fence lines have now been completed, and clean up works have started. These works are being undertaken by Council contractors.

Domestic Water

Please be aware of any water contaminants following the fire. Your drinking water tank can become contaminated from debris, ash, dead animals or aerial fire retardants. If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink or give it to animals.

Health and Human Services recommends disconnecting the downpipes to your tanks to avoid contamination following the fire. Only reconnect the downpipes when the catchment area (i.e. roof) has been cleaned, either manually or after a good flush of rain.

Central Highlands Water has offered to replenish tank water for domestic use where contaminated or impacted by the fire. For further information, please contact Recovery Manager Martin Walmsley on 1300 PYRENEES (1300 797 363).



Farm Water Supplies

Agriculture Vic has helpful resources available for information on testing and protecting your farm water supplies. In addition to water testing, you may also wish to consider building a sediment fence before the next rain if your dam or waterway is at risk of contamination. A local environmental specialist has offered assistance with water supplies. For further information, please contact Recovery Manager Martin Walmsley on 1300 PYRENEES (1300 797 363).

Further information can be found at agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery

The Essential Water Replacement scheme helps to relieve hardship in the community by replenishing essential private water supplies used by fire services during bushfire emergencies. For more information, or to lodge a request for essential water replacement, visit ffm.vic.gov.au/recovery-after-an-emergency

Trees

Please beware of unsafe trees in the impacted areas. Works are being undertaken to ensure that any hazards are removed. Some impacted roads are speed-limited as a safety precaution.

Impacted landowners who have trees across their fence lines may be able to clear native vegetation to a minimum extent (up to 4m) without a permit to enable the maintenance of an existing fence or to construct a boundary fence. Please note that construction of boundary fences will require permissions from neighbouring landowners or agencies including DELWP and VicRoads. For further information, please contact Council's Environment and Sustainability Officer Terry McAliece: 0408 562 511. Members of the public have asked Council if they can remove trees from roadsides for firewood purposes. It is unsafe to remove the timber, as it is a hazardous area and the remnant vegetation could provide habitat for native wildlife.

Agistment

TB White have put a call out for available property for cattle agistment in Ballarat and surrounding districts to assist fire-affected farmers. For further information please contact Leo White 0427 501 772 or Xavier Bourke 0437 683 434.

Stock

Impacted landowners may find the most suitable option for their livestock is to agist away from the affected properties. Agriculture Vic has helpful resources available with advice to consider for the benefit of your stock's health and welfare in the long term.

Please note that National Livestock Identification System (NILS) regulations still apply when agisting stock following a fire, however animal welfare should take priority. NILS requirements can be addressed once the welfare of the livestock is assured.

Visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/recovery for more information, or contact District Veterinary Officer, Animal Health & Welfare Rachel Gibney:

T: (03) 5336 6619 | M: 0447 699 759

E: rachel.gibney@agriculture.vic.gov.au

There are a number of management practices which may improve the recovery of pasture after the fire. Helpful resources including a Pasture Recovery Guide are available via the Agriculture Vic website. You can also contact Land Management and Livestock Extension Officer Neil James:

T: 03 5336 6620 | M: 0417 353 929

E: neil.james@agriculture.vic.gov.au

Farmers wishing to revise their farm plans or the layout of pastures and paddocks can contact Senior Soil Conservation Officer Clem Sturmfels:

T: 5355 0535 | M: 0429 018 879

E: clem.sturmfels@agriculture.vic.gov.au

To arrange a visit from Agriculture Victoria, farmers should contact Vic Emergency on 1800 226 226.

Fodder

Feeding animals can be a huge challenge for those affected by the fires. Landholders needing emergency fodder for livestock should contact the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) on 1300 882 833 between 9am and 5pm, or email fodder@vff.org.au

If you are interested in donating fodder to those who need it, please also contact the VFF on the above details.

Fire affected wildlife

The Victorian Government is providing immediate support for wildlife shelters and foster carers to cover the costs of food, transport, medicine and enclosures as animals are rescued from bushfire affected areas. For more information, visit wildlife.vic.gov.au/bushfire-response-wildlife-shelters-and-carers



Air Quality

Vic Emergency are continuing to put out alerts for hazardous air quality across Victoria due to the fires in the North East of Victoria and NSW. Please ensure that you continue to monitor the effects on your own health and minimize outdoor activities where possible. Anyone experiencing wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing should call Triple Zero (000). If you have concerns about your health you should seek medical advice or contact Nurse on Call on 1300 606 024.

Personal Support Services

Where there are natural disasters, it's common that people go through stages of grief and/or trauma. It's important that you look after yourself, family, neighbours and friends, and are aware of the resources available.

People who are experiencing health or wellbeing difficulties should consult their GP.

Counselling Services are also available at Grampians Community Health, 60 High St Ararat, P: 03 5352 6200

For urgent concerns about your own, or the mental health of others, contact these services:

- Mental Health Services: 1800 808 284 (24hours)
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- MensLine: 1300 789 978
- Kid's Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- Nurse on Call: 1300 606 024

Donations

Monetary donations are a quick way to help. A Victorian Bushfire Appeal has been established to provide practical support to Victorians impacted by the state's devastating fires. Donations can be made at any Bendigo Bank branch or online via vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal

Other Useful Links and Contacts

The Rural Financial Counselling Service provides free financial counselling to farmers and small related businesses who are in, or at risk of, financial hardship. Call: 1800 686 175

Ballarat contact: Saul Moncrieff

M: 0455 333 577

E: saul.moncrieff@wswrcs.com.au

The Funding Centre has helpful information about grants that may be available to those affected by bushfires across Australia. Visit fundingcentre.com.au/bushfire-relief-grants

Insurance Council of Australia: 1300 444 557

Disaster Legal Help Victoria: 1800 113 432 or disasterlegalhelp.org.au

Pyrenees Shire Council: 1300 PYRENEES (1300 797 363)