

### Fire Facts

The Lexton-Ben Major Fire burned approximately 3,000 hectares of farmland and bush on December 20 and 21 2019. Losses included:

- 1 primary residence
- 4 sheds
- In excess of 1,000 sheep
- Many kilometres of internal and boundary fencing
- Significant loss of crop and pasture
- Significant tree damage

The ICC made the decision to evacuate the Lexton township as a precaution following weather warnings. Fortunately, thanks to the outstanding efforts of emergency services and volunteers, the fire was contained.

Relief centres were established in Avoca and Learmonth, and a recovery centre opened in Lexton following the fire.

### 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.

We thank Telstra for promptly providing a temporary mobile booster for the Lexton recovery centre and Golf Club at the Lexton recreation reserve.

The NBN has provided free wifi coverage at the Lexton recreation grounds to assist BlazeAid and the community in their recovery efforts.

This newsletter is intended to keep the community informed about fire recovery. We will be distributing further editions for regular updates.

### Rainbow Serpent Festival

A multi-agency review determined that 2020 Rainbow Serpent Festival could not be safely held at Lexton over Australia Day long weekend. Festival organisers announced new plans for an event at Lexton over Easter, and intend to assist with recovery with plans for a working bee and tree planting. Further updates will be provided as these plans progress.

### BlazeAid

The BlazeAid team has set up camp at the Lexton recreation reserve in order 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: 0417 052 493 or email [blazeaid.lexton@gmail.com](mailto:blazeaid.lexton@gmail.com)

### 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 have 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

Water contamination can occur during and following the fire. Agriculture Vic have 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](http://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](http://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 McAlicee: 0408 562 511.

## 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. This includes assessing whether the stock are fit to travel, having them assessed by a veterinarian or DEDJTR animal health staff member if required, and protecting the stock from disease whilst on agistment, or whilst you are agisting someone else's stock.

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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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 Sturfels:

T: 5355 0535 | M: 0429 018 879

E: [clem.sturfels@agriculture.vic.gov.au](mailto:clem.sturfels@agriculture.vic.gov.au)

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

Farmers needing fodder should contact the Victorian Farmers Federation on 1300 882 833.

## 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

## Other Useful Links and Contacts

The Rural Financial Counselling Service provides agricultural industries and small rural businesses with free, confidential and independent planning and support services. Ballarat contact, Saul Moncrieff:

M: 0455 333 577

E: [saul.moncrieff@wswrcs.com.au](mailto: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](http://fundingcentre.com.au/bushfire-relief-grants)

Insurance Council of Australia: 1300 444 557

Disaster Legal Help Victoria: 1800 113 432  
or [disasterlegalhelp.org.au](http://disasterlegalhelp.org.au)

Pyrenees Shire Council: 1300 PYRENEES (1300 797 363)