



National Bushfire Recovery Agency

Bushfire Recovery News – Edition 18

From the National Bushfire Recovery Acting National Coordinator

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

Many of the communities we work with have now or are coming up to the 18-month mark of the 2019-20 bushfires in their area. Over this time, and while we continue to focus on the bushfire recovery effort, these communities have also experienced droughts, smoke and bushfires, the impact of COVID-19 and now floods.

I want to reassure everyone that we are committed to helping bushfire affected communities who have been impacted by other natural disasters, particularly as the fire recovery effort progresses and the needs of the community shift and need to be reprioritised due to the severe conditions they have recently faced.

Our Recovery Support Officers who work in these communities are also available for the flood recovery effort and many have been helping their local communities in the weeks following the floods across NSW. We are also collaborating closely with our Commonwealth and state colleagues in other government agencies dealing with drought, flood, and emergency services management.

Our commitment to the communities in which we work and who need our support remains as strong and resolute as it was on the first day we opened the doors at NBRA.

Part of this ongoing commitment is also a commitment to transparency on how we have and are spending the bushfire recovery fund. If you are keen to know about the impact of the 2019-20 bushfires in your location, and the money flowing to assist in the recovery visit our [interactive map](#).

The map allows you to zoom in on bushfire-affected local government areas and see things like the extent of the fires, the grants and payments to local people, as well as environment, telecommunications and Local Economic Recovery projects funded so far.

Kind regards,

Rina Bruinsma
Acting National Coordinator
National Bushfire Recovery Agency

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Community chats



NBRA Deputy Coordinator Rina Bruinsma presenting at a community forum in Bega. (Source: NBRA)

NBRA Deputy Coordinator, Rina Bruinsma, visited Bega in southern NSW last month to meet community members to help shape the new National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing framework. The National Mental Health Commission also presented findings from local research and the event provided everyone in attendance the chance to listen to, and learn from, one another to inform the framework.

Recently, Major General Andrew Hocking spent a week visiting various communities in the East Gippsland region with partners from Bushfire Recovery Victoria and the East Gippsland Shire Council. It was great to see a number of communities on their recovery journeys continuing to band together and support each other towards community enabled resilience. Major General Hocking and NBRA Recovery Support Officer, Ricky Ross, met with a number of Community Recovery Committees who shared their visions of recovery and resilience through stories of rebuild and their projects underway.

One of the highlights of the trip was being able to visit a local school whose buildings were lost in the Black Summer bushfires. The team spent an inspiring and insightful day meeting with teachers and students at Clifton Creek Primary. The school is now being rebuilt with the new building set to open in spring 2021. Young people are an essential part of disaster resilience in communities, and are key to building a better future.

Liaison Network spotlight – Miyun Shoemark, Recovery Support Officer, Queensland



NBRA Recovery Support Officer, Miyun Shoemark

Helping community members with their rebuild efforts, making connections with service providers and researching new funding pathways is all part of a days' work for Miyun Shoemark, NBRA Recovery Support Officer.

Based on the Gold Coast, Miyun supports 13 activated bushfire affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) from Rockhampton, down to Noosa and the Sunshine Coast, down to the Granite Belt in the Southern Downs region, to the south-west and south-east including the Gold Coast.

"I commenced in my role at the beginning of September last year when the recovery effort was well and truly underway, but what I noticed was that we were still seeing people almost 12 months on from the fires just starting to come forward for help.

"My work links in heavily with the Community Development Officers (CDOs), who are the boots on the ground in the more heavily impacted communities. I work with that network, local council members, recovery and community hub managers as well as community leaders, to understand the key issues in these communities and capture necessary intel to see how the federal government can assist," said Miyun.

Assistance for primary producers with financial support information, removal of green

waste from properties and rebuild of fencing are some of the key issues that Miyun is working on with her CDO counterparts. Re-fencing is a priority due mostly to biosecurity issues.

“Mental health is becoming a significant issue in our regions as people who initially thought they were okay, now realise they aren’t managing as well as they first thought. Sometimes it’s about finances, other times it’s about the length of time in their recovery journey. The toll of trying to return to a new normal, facing constant challenges in their recovery, and sometimes, triggers from past traumas. We are working with service providers to find alternate delivery models to ensure the support is being received in the way the communities need it,” said Miyun.

Working in disaster recovery is very familiar to Miyun who has also worked on the recovery efforts for Tropical Cyclone Debbie and the Central Queensland bushfires in 2018.

“When you have the opportunity to support someone to begin their recovery journey, assist them to build resilience and provide them referral pathways to overcome hurdles in their recovery, it gets into your blood and I realise that my calling in life is to work in this space. To assist impacted people either in a small or big way is one of the most rewarding aspects of my role. I have supported my family and friends all my life and to get paid for doing this in my day job is just amazing and a great fit for me.

“Being in this space for so long you definitely do get an immediate sense of what people need or if they are not coping too well but unable to verbalise to their support network. After disasters, people are trying to get through their own personal emotional recovery as well as the physical recovery of their properties. At times, it becomes overwhelming. As part of my work I want to make sure people who do feel overwhelmed know they haven’t been forgotten, there are people who care and can support them through their recovery journey at their own pace,” said Miyun.

That’s a load of Abalone



(Source: NBRA)

Local Mallacoota Abalone processor, Australian Wild Abalone, received \$3 million in the first tranche of the Victorian Local Economic Recovery (LER) program to rebuild its processing plant after it was destroyed by the 2019-20 bushfire.

The 50 year industry is reliant on the processing facility which employs over 100 locals during the winter months' abalone season, when few tourists visit the region. In summer this number can almost double and in a small community like Mallacoota with a population of approximately 1,000 people, this is significant.

During the devastating Black Summer fires the production facility in Mallacoota was destroyed leaving only the administrative building and a maintenance shed to support the plant's recovery.



Major General Andrew Hocking touring the Australian Wild Abalone processing plant in Mallacoota with production manager Charlie Nelson (Source: NBRA)

Charlie Nelson, the company's production manager, said the impact across the community was significant. "The normal winter time employment is always very limited but the facility normally keeps the summer work force employed over the slower tourism months of winter.

"We process the catches of the local abalone divers so it was vital to get a temporary facility back up before the winter season and keep employment in the community. Lucky for everyone, we were back up and running in a temporary facility by the end of April 2020.

"The final production facility will cost over \$6 million and will now include a public access capability to display what they do to tourists as well as look at other processing opportunities such as live export and possibly even cooking classes, a café and education centre," said Mr Nelson.

During a recent visit to the area, Deputy Coordinator, Major General Hocking explained that with the successful application for the first round of the VIC LER program coordinated by Bushfire Recovery Victoria, they would build back better and provide increased opportunities for local employment and recovery.

“In a community where the predominant number of residents are retirees, the workforce is approximately only 400, so a project such as this is significant to all as part of their bushfire recovery,” said Major General Hocking.

\$2 million for Indigenous fire management

Thirteen Indigenous organisations are receiving funding to run workshops that harness and share Indigenous land and fire management knowledge. The funding for these organisations was announced by the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, the Hon David Littleproud MP, the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Sussan Ley MP and the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt MP.

The program will help people understand how cultural burning practices can assist with local land management and bushfire preparedness strategies.

Increasing understanding of local landscapes, flora and fauna and how these interact with cultural burning is an important part of the fire and land management conversation. The program will combine cultural mentoring with technical training to help preserve our land for future generations of Australians.

Traditional Owners will hold workshops across the country sharing their knowledge with local land managers, fire services and councils to identify different types of burns and the ideal weather conditions for protecting native flora and fauna during burns.

To view the full list of funded projects, visit the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment’s website.

Baryulgil and Malabugilmah Aboriginal Land Clean-Up program

The recovery effort is underway in Baryulgil and Malabugilmah, with both NSW communities receiving funding for bushfire waste management and recycling as part of the Aboriginal Land Clean-Up program.

The program, being delivered by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), will see \$200,000 of restoration works in Baryulgil to manage hazardous trees, maintenance and alignment of fencing, and road grading and improvement works to the Clarence River Cattle Dip. Malabugilmah will receive \$90,000 for the removal of bushfire waste, managing their green waste and repair work of burnt fencing.

The clean-up effort will see local people employed to complete clean-up and environmental rehabilitation works on Local Aboriginal Land Council owned lands.

“This clean-up work under the NSW Government’s Bushfire Recovery Programs is really important to our communities. We have worked closely with the EPA and Public Works Advisory to get the works started, and we’re looking forward to repaired fences, removal of hazardous trees, and improved access for the community,” said Ross James, Chief Executive Officer, Baryulgil and Jana Ngalee Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Liesbet Spanjaard, Executive Director, EPA Engagement, Education and Programs

said the works were part of the EPA's new \$20 million Aboriginal Land Clean-Up program.

"These grants will aid in the next step of the bushfire recovery process, by protecting the environment from illegal dumping, removing waste, and supporting our communities to rebuild faster and stronger than ever," Ms Spanjaard said.

Mallacoota becomes the homeport for HMAS Choules



HMAS Choules Commanding Officer during Operation Bushfire Assist, Captain Scott Houlihan, CSM, addresses local residents and guests during a ceremonial homeport announcement for HMAS Choules at Mallacoota in Victoria.

(Source: Royal Australian Navy)

One of the most striking images of the 2019-20 bushfires was residents of Mallacoota being evacuated to safety, amidst total darkness, on board *HMAS Choules*. The navy ship evacuated more than 1,300 people as part of Australia's largest-ever maritime evacuation.

The ship also played a vital role in delivering the supplies the area needed during the fires including food, fuel and medical supplies.

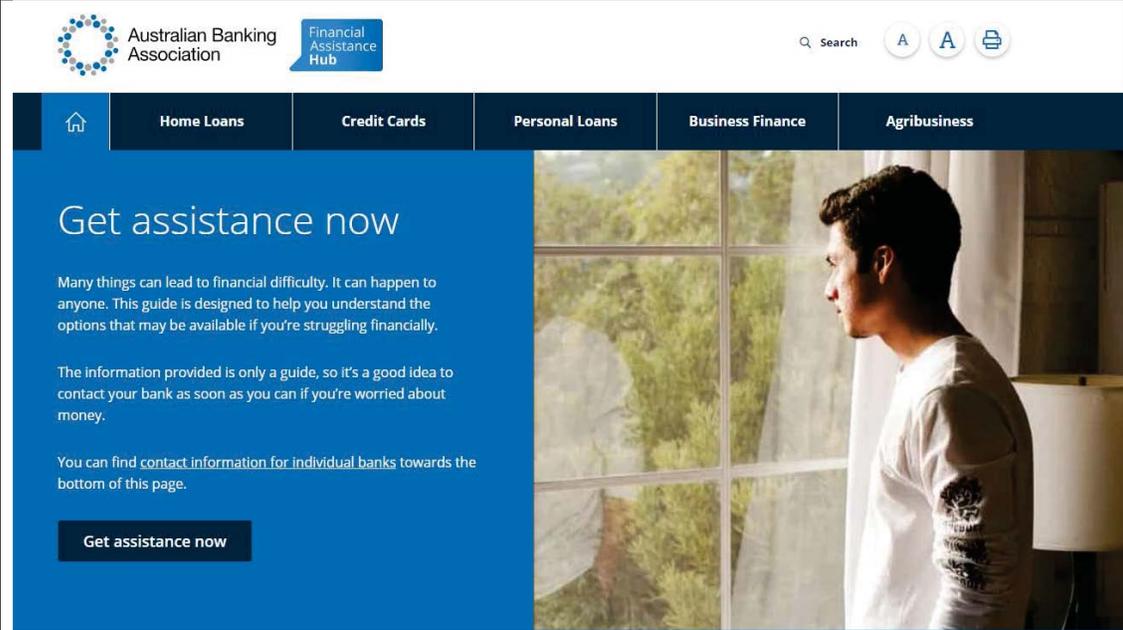
Given the close relationship and shared history between the two, Mallacoota was recently named as the homeport for *Choules*. A homeport is the ceremonial port of a ship.

After the fires, the Mallacoota community dedicated a plaque to the Australian Defence Force and Emergency Services. The town and the ship's crew have worked together to establish the ceremonial homeport relationship.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, the Hon Darren Chester MP attended the homeporting event and said, "This announcement today, held on the shores where the evacuation took place, is significant for the people of Mallacoota and for the crew of the *Choules*, and represents an important symbol of the bushfires.

"The ceremonial homeport is a significant connection for any Navy ship, bonding the ship and crew to a community for the life of service, and ensure the friendships developed during a time of devastation continue."

Mortgage assistance available from the Australian Banking Association



The screenshot shows the Australian Banking Association's Financial Assistance Hub. The page has a dark blue header with the Australian Banking Association logo and a 'Financial Assistance Hub' badge. A search bar and accessibility icons are in the top right. Below the header is a navigation menu with tabs for Home Loans, Credit Cards, Personal Loans, Business Finance, and Agribusiness. The main content area is blue and features the heading 'Get assistance now'. The text below the heading explains that the guide is designed to help people understand financial options. A 'Get assistance now' button is located at the bottom left of the main content area. On the right side of the main content area, there is a photograph of a man in a white shirt looking out a window.

(Source: Australian Banking Association)

The 2019-20 bushfires and COVID-19 had a huge impact on people's finances which led the Australian Banking Association and its members to offer Australians loan deferrals. For many people, these deferrals are about to end.

To help people through this transition the Australian Banking Association has updated its [financial assistance hub](#), which sets out options and advice for people who might be worried they can't make their next repayment or are falling behind on repayments.

The hub also links to other financial help services including the [National Debt Helpline](#) (1800 007 007), the [Small Business Bushfire Financial Counselling Support Line](#) (1800 413 828) and [MoneySmart](#).

Webinar to help bushfire affected children



(Source: Beyondblue)

Be You hosted a one-hour webinar exploring practical ways to support children and young people affected by the Black Summer bushfires. The discussion aimed to help educators and parents understand trauma responses and develop strategies to support their community.

Panellists included Clinical Psychologist Rob Gordon, April Harrison, who was affected by the Black Saturday bushfires, and educator Jess Moroney who was impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires.

Jess's family and school were impacted in the 2019 Cudlee Creek bushfire. Jess reflected on the personal side of responding to the events, as well as offering insights into supporting an entire school community.

As well as the webinar, there's a transcript of the session and a summary pack of key ideas. All provide reflections and insights, as well as strategies to help yourself and your community. [The webinar can be heard in full here.](#)

This is the second webinar in a series presented by the Be You Bushfire Response Program and hosted by Emerging Minds. A third webinar will be hosted on 20 May 2021 'Roadmap to Recovery'. [You can register here closer to the date.](#)

Preparing Australia's telecommunications network for future natural disasters

Ensuring mobile networks remain operational during a bushfire or other natural disaster is a priority for the NBN Co.

"In any disaster, telecommunications is not infallible. The mobile network was affected during the Black Summer bushfires mostly due to power going out in the area as well as physical damage to the base stations from the fires. When power

goes out it causes issues for connectivity, it's really the biggest issues we face trying to re-establish the network during a natural disaster," said Ms Kylie Lindsey, Head of NBN Co local Queensland.

To overcome these issues, NBN Co is being funded through the Australian Government's \$27.1 million Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters program, to help ensure the network remains online. This includes:

- five new Muster Trucks which allow people to connect their device and make WiFi calls during an emergency,
- fly away kits which are portable units on wheels that enable network connections when base stations are down, and
- 100 new satellite dishes on local fire service buildings which will allow fire services to keep operating and connected even if the power goes out

"I think a lot of people might not realise that it's not just members of the public who lose connectivity to the network during a natural disaster. Emergency service personnel do too. We want to make sure this becomes a thing of the past and that emergency services can rely on our network to remain in contact with each other and their colleagues in the field," said Ms Lindsey.

The NBN Co team has already started rolling out this new technology in bushfire-affected communities.

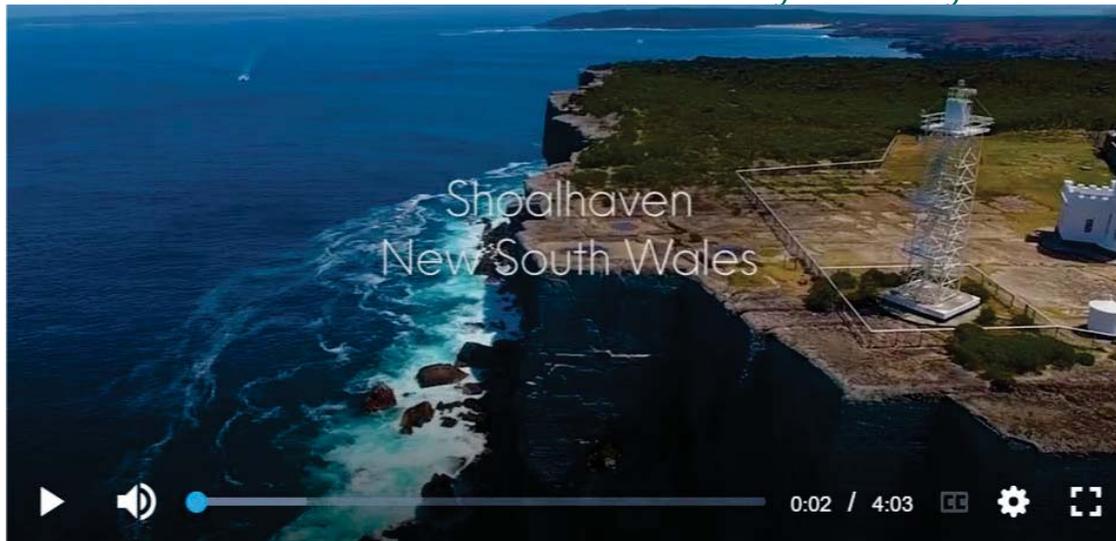
"The emergency services and councils are really excited to see us come into town and install these connections in their evacuation centres and other buildings, because they know this is providing them with a resiliency they have not had before. And it's of a quality where they can stream videos if they want to. Ultimately these new measures are going to keep people safer and that's the most important thing," said Ms Lindsey.



Residents at a community evacuation centre using the Muster truck during the 2019-20 bushfires (Source: nbn co)

A Muster truck in action during the 2019-20 bushfires (Source: nbn co)

Video series shows Shoalhaven's community recovery



(Source: NBRA)

One of the latest videos to be released as part of the '*Open for Business*' series puts the spotlight on Shoalhaven, NSW. We take a look at how the community has come together after the Black Summer bushfires.

Featured in the video are Shoalhaven City Council Mayor, Amanda Findley, Salt Ministries CEO, Peter Dover, and local business owner, Rosie Cupitt. The trio discuss the impact of the fires and the strength shown in the past 12 months to rebuild.

"It really has been wonderful to see those bonds and those connections be made, and our community feels stronger in many ways after the disaster that was," Cr Findley said.

Mr Dover says community spirit is strong and people are not alone on their recovery journey.

"If you'd asked me what the best thing about this region is a year ago, I would have said: we've got the best beaches in the world," he said. "But I suppose if you ask me today, I think it's the people."

While some landscapes are still recovering and regenerating, the community is welcoming visitors to experience the natural beauty and hospitality of the Shoalhaven region. By holidaying and spending tourism dollars in the area, travellers are supporting local economic recovery.

'*Open for Business*' is a 15-part video series filmed across bushfire-affected communities. Stay tuned each week for more recovery stories. Learn more at www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/open-for-business-videos.

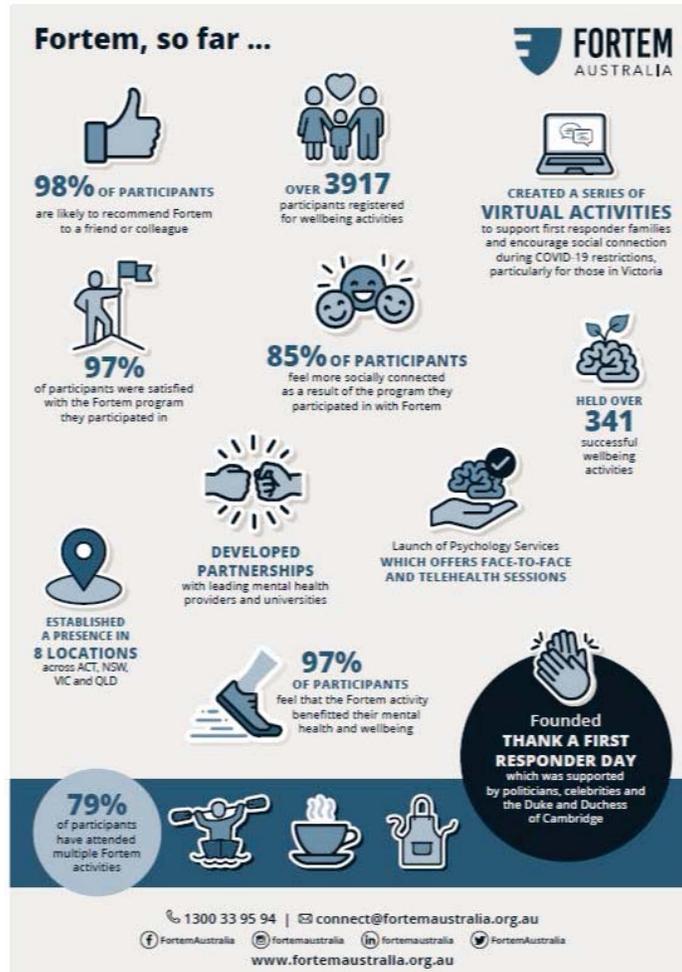
Increase in first responders reaching out

Fortem Australia supports first responders and their families to take care of their health and wellbeing. In February, this included supporting over 900 first responders and their families and providing 147 hours of psychology services.

First responders and their families were hit particularly hard by the 2019-20 bushfires and it's fantastic to see them reaching out to get information, assistance and a helping hand.

Connection is at the heart of Fortem Australia's values. Fortem runs events in eight locations across ACT, NSW, VIC and QLD, to strengthen family and community bonds and maintain wellbeing. They have also created a series of virtual activities to keep first responder families in contact during COVID-19 restrictions.

Fortem has been funded by the Department of Home Affairs to deliver services to communities affected by the 2019-2020 bushfires. This infographic provides a snapshot of how Fortem is continuing to help first responders and their families.



Towers of recovery



The Edithburgh water tower by artist Mike Makatron took 15 days to complete

(Source: Adobe photography)

Outback water towers in regional South Australia are at the centre of a new tourism campaign to welcome tourists back to bushfire affected parts of the state. The Southern Yorke Peninsula Water Tower Mural Trail project sees SA Water owned water towers in Edithburgh, Stansbury, Yorketown and Coobowie being painted in designs that reflect the local landscape.

In November 2019 fires ravaged these parts of South Australia. However, just as the community led recovery effort was underway, with a big public event planned to welcome back tourists, COVID-19 lockdowns were imposed.

“When COVID-19 hit, we had to change our plans immediately. One of our Councillors had the idea to create a water tower art project which would meet the funding requirements of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency. From there we pitched the idea to each community’s progress association who were all on board,” said Yorke Peninsula Council Communications and Engagement Officer, Taylor Gray.

The idea was to offer an experience for tourists who could visit each water tower and enjoy the artwork along the mural trail. While the water towers are on SA Water land, they neighbour farmers’ properties, all of whom are supportive of the project.

“We undertook multiple stages of community consultation to draw out what the community wanted on each tower. Coobowie was a bird theme as the area is well known for its bird life and attracts bird watchers. The Edithburgh Tower is reflective of the local jetty imagery as it is quite well known in the area and the sea life that live near it.

“Yorketown is very agricultural and is the only inland tower. The area is known for its

pink salt lakes. The Rural Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) also completes approximately 200 flights a year to the area so the RFDS plane is part of that tank's artwork. Stansbury is the last tower to be painted and will feature a Pelican and reference to Oysters, as Stansbury is well known for. The final design is currently being finalised by the artist," said Taylor.

Since the mural trail started there has been a steady and noticeable increase in people visiting each of the water towers.



The Yorketown water tower by artist Jasmine Crisp (Source: Adobe photography)

"We have been really encouraged by the amount of intrastate tourists doing the mural trail and now that there is a bit more certainty with interstate borders, we are really looking forward to welcoming people from across Australia onto the trail," said Taylor.

The mural trail project was made possible through the Australian Government's Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Grant, in partnership with Yorke Peninsula Council, Yorke Peninsula Tourism and the Coobowie, Edithburgh, Stansbury and Yorketown Progress Associations. For more information on the Southern Yorke Peninsula Water Tank Mural Trail visit the [Yorke Peninsula Council website](#).

Bushfire recovery in the news

New Aboriginal art identified in Yengo and Wollemi national parks in bushfire surveys
[The Cessnock Advertiser](#)

Post-fire Australia will provide travellers with more opportunities for 'restorative tourism'
[The Washington Post](#)

Mid North Coast beekeeper part of research project into the productivity and sustainability of the industry
[Port Macquarie News](#)

Bushfire recovery cricket match attracts hundreds of people one year on from fires
[ABC Online](#)

Hope for future rises from ashes of bushfire devastation
[Griffith University](#)

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