



# National Bushfire Recovery Agency

## Bushfire Recovery News – Edition 11

### From the National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

I like to think that our newsletter reflects the recovery journey of bushfire affected communities. We are sharing stories about economic, social and environmental progress. Some stories are positive and heart-warming, others highlight the ongoing trauma and stress associated with the Black Summer bushfires. Most are a combination of both. Reflective of progress, our stories also reflect the shift from relief and response to longer-term recovery.

In sharing these stories we hope that people across all impacted communities feel that they are not alone and that they will reach out for help and assistance when needed.

In this edition you'll find stories about the progress of Flinders Chase National Park on Kangaroo Island and the remarkable recovery of Mallacoota koalas Leafy and Vicky.

Our story on Beyond Blue's 'Be You' Bushfire Response Program demonstrates the importance of supporting the mental health of bushfire-affected communities. The Program employs 25 Contact Liaison Officers who are doing an amazing job with bushfire-affected schools and early childhood services.

Congratulations to Victoria on finishing its [clean-up](#) of 736 destroyed and damaged buildings across East Gippsland and North East Victoria. They've finished on schedule, helping these communities on their recovery journey.

Congratulations also to BlazeAid founders Rhonda and Kevin Butler, who have received the prestigious Commonwealth Points of Light award for all their incredible work.

Until next time, take care.

**Andrew Colvin**

National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator

## In this edition

- Key facts and figures
- A primary producer's recovery from bushfires
- Local Economic Recovery
- The bushfire and recovery story of Flinders Chase National Park
- *Be You* Bushfire Response Program
- Koala Care: Leafy and Vicky on the mend
- BlazeAid founders awarded prestigious award
- HoneyBee Hives - recovery after the bushfires
- Foodbank distributes tea donation
- NSW Recovery Support Officer recruitment

## Key facts and figures

Our work to deliver financial relief to communities and businesses is continuing. Below is an update using the latest data.



## A primary producer's recovery from bushfires



*Sheep on Rebecca and Rodney's property, outside Lexton, Victoria*

Rebecca and Rodney McErvale are Merino wool growers and the owners of Leroy Mac Designs. Rodney has also been a volunteer fire fighter with the Country Fire Authority for 30 years.

According to Rebecca and Rodney they are the only producers they know of in Australia who are using the wool off their very own sheep to make quality machine knitted and machine washable pure Australian merino blankets and garments.

On 20 December 2019, the wind changed direction, sparing the town of Lexton, Victoria, but causing devastation to Rebecca and Rodney's property. They lost 95% of their main farm, along with 300 sheep and 27 kms of fencing due to the bushfire.

The fire was so intense that, even eight months later, nothing will grow on 10% of their property.

The road to recovery has been gradual.

Rodney cannot speak highly enough of the help he received from BlazeAid. BlazeAid volunteers arrived five weeks after the bushfires to help with the fencing. Given two thirds of Rebecca and Rodney's farm is adjoined by road, the volunteers were in Rodney's words "a Godsend".

Rural financial counsellors were also very helpful and informed Rodney about his eligibility for the \$75,000 Bushfire Recovery Grant. He used the \$75,000 towards equipment hire, erosion control measures, fencing, and buying a front end loader to clean up his property. He earmarked the remainder of this money for pasture work later in the year.

Leroy Mac Designs also received support. As part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) *Bushfire Support and Products Purchasing Program*, DFAT purchased woollen blankets to present as special gifts overseas.

Rebecca said she is grateful to DFAT for supporting their small business and providing them with an amazing opportunity to present their products to dignitaries around the world.

Rodney's advice to others recovering from the bushfires is, "Don't stress about the amount of work ahead of you. Everything will get done."

If you are a primary producer or small business owner, did you know that applications for primary producer and small business recovery grants have been extended? Find out more [here](#).

## Local Economic Recovery

### How we're supporting local projects

On 11 May 2020, the Australian Government announced \$448.5 million in Local Economic Recovery (LER) and Complementary Project funding. This money, supported by additional co-funding contributions from states, will help bushfire-affected communities restore local economies and build back better.

States are running the process of identifying the right projects to meet community needs, in line with national criteria agreed among states and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA). These criteria are set out in [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our website.

The process is a bit different in each state – some are doing an open call for project ideas, while others are working directly with local recovery committees and councils on local priorities.

Great things take time, but momentum is gathering and the first projects are beginning to be approved. However, there is still time to have your say, as projects are being assessed and announced progressively. State-specific information is below about who you can talk to in your area, to make sure the priorities for you and your community are factored in.

### *South Australia*

The South Australian Government is consulting directly with local councils, recovery committees, communities, and other stakeholders in bushfire-affected areas. Projects already announced include [Kangaroo Island's desalination project](#). More projects are expected to be considered in the coming weeks.

### *Queensland*

An expression of interest (EOI) process has opened in Queensland, where local governments and Queensland Government departments and agencies can apply for project funding in the following local government areas:

- Scenic Rim
- Lockyer Valley
- Somerset
- Southern Downs
- Livingstone
- Gladstone
- Bundaberg
- Gympie
- Ipswich City
- Mareeba Shire
- Noosa Shire
- Sunshine Coast
- Toowoomba

These local councils and state agencies can submit an expression of interest before 7 September 2020 for their projects to be considered. For more information visit the [Queensland Reconstruction Authority website](#).

### *NSW*

The NBRA is working closely with the New South Wales Government as it confirms its approach and process.

### *Victoria*

The Victorian Government is working with local councils, recovery committees, communities and other stakeholders in bushfire-affected areas to identify projects to meet priority recovery needs. Planning is well-advanced. Initial projects are being considered now and Bushfire Recovery Victoria will provide further information in the coming months about how to contribute project ideas for LER funding.

### *How can I find out more?*

The latest national information is available on the [NBRA website](#), including a set of [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

## The bushfire and recovery story of Flinders Chase National Park



*Flinders Chase National Park, South Australia*

The 2019-20 summer bushfires on Kangaroo Island were the largest in the island's recorded history. More than 200,000 hectares of the 440,500-hectare island was burnt and tragically two people died. Hundreds of firefighters were involved, supported by other agencies, private industry and the local community.

The west end of the island, home to the internationally renowned Flinders Chase National Park, was heavily affected by the bushfires – with 96 per cent of the National Park (including the adjoining Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area) burnt.

### **Bushfire damage to Flinders Chase**

Much of the Park's infrastructure was burnt in the bushfires, with the visitor centre, walking trails including the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail, boardwalks and visitor facilities destroyed, and heritage-listed buildings damaged.

Luckily, the tourism drawcard of Remarkable Rocks is still intact and the iconic sites of Admirals Arch, Cape du Couedic Lighthouse and cottages, Weirs Cove and Cape Borda Lighthouse and cottages were untouched by the bushfires.

### **Recovery journey of Flinders Chase**

National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia is working hard to support the bushfire recovery of Kangaroo Island's parks including supporting wildlife recovery, rebuilding essential infrastructure and reimagining visitor experiences in parks.

Plant life is already bouncing back at Flinders Chase. Many native plant species have adapted to survive, regenerate and thrive after fire. Native sedges, ghanias, yaccas, hakeas and mallees are re-sprouting and turning the landscape green again. Following winter rains, some plants are growing a few centimetres a day! It won't be long until the bush is back.

## Visitors welcome!

Flinders Chase National Park is now open for self-drive South Australian visitors to share in the bushfire recovery journey from 9am until 5pm daily, with last entry at 3pm. Find out more at [Flinders-Chase-National-Park](#).

When planning their trip, visitors from other states/territories should check travel restrictions that may apply and prevent them from entering South Australia or re-entering other jurisdictions.

## Be You Bushfire Response Program



To support the mental health of bushfire-affected learning communities, the Australian Government provided an additional \$8 million to Beyond Blue through its existing national mental health in education initiative, *Be You*, to develop the [Bushfire Response Program](#) (BRP).

The BRP has engaged 25 Contact Liaison Officers (CLOs) through Headspace and Early Childhood Australia to work closely with local schools and early childhood services in affected communities across South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. CLOs work with communities to identify their needs and connect them to local mental health and wellbeing services and supports, provide trauma informed information and learning, and support recovery planning.

As COVID-19 restrictions have begun to ease in some areas, the CLOs have re-commenced face-to-face engagement to provide crucial support in a COVID-safe way.

In July, the CLOs visited early childhood services and preschools in Cobargo, Mogo and Narooma on the NSW South Coast.

Seven months after the devastating fires that swept through their communities, many staff within these services have been left grappling with the situation, having taken on the role not only of educators but more often the 'life-line' to families within these communities.

The CLOs have provided wellbeing and self-care sessions to educators, giving them an opportunity to tell their stories and share their concerns about their own mental health. The focus of the Bushfire Response Program is on equipping educators and teachers with strategies to support their own wellbeing, so they can provide support for others.

Janet from Mogo Aboriginal Preschool asked the CLOs to "please come back soon." CLO Keri Baker says she looks forward to returning to the region.

"The communities need our support, although the strength and collaboration of the communities we visited is incredible," Keri said.

Early learning services and schools are able to sign up to *Be You* at any time, free of charge, at [www.beyou.edu.au](http://www.beyou.edu.au). Learning communities are also encouraged to contact *Be You* if they believe

their school or early learning service may benefit from support provided by the Bushfire Response Program.

## Koala Care: Leafy and Vicky on the mend



*Photo: Zoos Victoria*

At the height of last summer's bushfires, a great number of injured animals were urgently rescued and relocated to zoos and wildlife centres across Australia for care and rehabilitation.

With help from the Australian Government's \$200 million investment in bushfire recovery for wildlife and habitats, zoos have led efforts to establish insurance populations of at-risk species and treat animals injured in the fires.

Leafy and Vicky the koalas were rescued from Mallacoota and brought via Spartan military transport aircraft to the [Australian Wildlife Health Centre](#) (AWHC) at Healesville Sanctuary for treatment.

After receiving around-the-clock care for burns, Leafy is recovering well and Vicky, after treatment for severe burns to her ears, face and feet, is gaining climbing strength and vitality at the larger rehabilitation enclosure at Phillip Island Nature Park.

Plans are now underway for a monitored release of both Leafy and Vicky back to the wild in Mallacoota, once their forest habitat has regenerated. (article supplied by Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment)

## BlazeAid founders awarded prestigious award



*Kevin and Rhonda Butler, founders of BlazeAid (photo: UK Points of Light)*

The British High Commissioner to Australia, Her Excellency Vicki Treadell, virtually presented the founders of BlazeAid, Kevin and Rhonda Butler, with a Commonwealth Points of Light award. The award was presented to Kevin and Rhonda for their dedication and commitment to Australian communities impacted by natural disasters including the Black Summer bushfires.

"They both demonstrate incredible commitment to BlazeAid, the volunteers they have recruited and the communities they support. They are making a significant impact on the lives of those that benefit from BlazeAid's work," said Ms Treadell.

The Commonwealth Points of Light awards recognise outstanding individual volunteers who are making a change in their community.

Kevin and Rhonda started BlazeAid in Australia after the fatal Black Saturday fires in 2009. With local volunteers, they rebuilt the fencing of a few dozen of their immediate neighbours over 14 days.

"The idea caught on and in the ensuing 10 years, volunteers have poured in from all over Australia and the world to physically help others impacted by our country's yearly recurrence of fires, floods and cyclones," they said.

Today, BlazeAid has over 1,000 volunteers in 26 bases across three states. The volunteers work with rural families to rebuild fences and other structures that have been damaged or destroyed. They not only help individuals and families, they help rebuild communities.

Congratulations to Kevin and Rhonda on their well-deserved award!

## HoneyBee Hives – recovery after the bushfires



*Di McQueen-Richardson and Scott Richardson, owners of HoneyBee Hives*

Di McQueen-Richardson and Scott Richardson, owners of HoneyBee Hives, live on a 100 acre property at Kremnos in northern NSW.

Their bees were already suffering due to drought conditions when Di and Scott were asked to evacuate their property in mid August 2019 and again in November 2019 due to bushfires. On both occasions, they returned home to find their house and beehives still standing.

Unfortunately, beehives close to bushfire affected areas often suffer from smoke and heat stress. Heat-stressed bee colonies can take months to recover and return to full honey production. Some colonies may even die.

After the fires, Di and Scott found that the extreme heat had made their queen bees sterile, so all the queen bees had to be replaced. Not knowing whether their bees would make much honey after the fires, Di and Scott had the idea of making home-made Christmas gifts using the beeswax they had stockpiled for over 10 years. With Di's background as a natural therapist, she used her skills to create beeswax balm products with natural ingredients.

The beeswax products proved so popular with family and friends that a range of 15 beeswax balm products was born.

Di said the biggest order so far has been from the DFAT who bought 150 beeswax balm products and 150 jars of honey as part of their [Australia now](#) program.

The *Australia now* program promotes Australian made products from bushfire impacted areas through its overseas posts and overseas events.

Di believes HoneyBee Hives is better positioned after the bushfires than before the bushfires because of diversifying into beeswax products.

Her advice to other small businesses is to consider what resources you have, to think outside the box and not to cling to any particular role held before the bushfires.

Di has been amazed at the amount of support available. Her business has accessed Australian Government benefits such as the JobKeeper allowance, and the \$10,000 small business grant jointly funded by the Commonwealth and NSW Government to help diversify the business into beeswax balm products.

Di also strongly suggests businesses reach out to a business mentor and access all the support available. She found rural financial counsellors very helpful as well as the free business advice available through Business Connect, a program run by the NSW Government.

If you are a small business and/or primary producer that has been impacted by bushfires, you may be eligible for more assistance than you think! For more information visit our [website](#).

## Foodbank distributes tea donation

When bushfires tore through New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria last summer, thousands of people were displaced from their homes and communities, many without food or water. Foodbank provided essential food and groceries to help many families and individuals get through this difficult period.

It was in this challenging time that the Sri Lankan Government stepped up to support Australians with a generous donation of world-class tea. Thanks to this kindness, Foodbank has received over 1.3 million tea bags to distribute to struggling Australians.

A cup of tea can provide warm comfort when times are tough.

The NBRA was instrumental in liaising with Foodbank and DFAT in getting the donated tea to those in need. We're proud to support this initiative.



## NSW Recovery Support Officer recruitment

### We're looking for Recovery Support Officers (RSOs) in NSW

The NBRA is currently recruiting RSOs in Armidale, Walcha, Tenterfield, Clarence Valley, Mid Coast and Kempsey.

If you live in these areas and want to become part of the NBRA Liaison Network that supports locally led recovery efforts, then this is your chance to apply.

The job of an RSO is to build and maintain open and productive relationships to problem solve and coordinate support and information between the NBRA, state and local government agencies, local communities and individuals affected by the 2019-20 bushfires.

We already have RSOs embedded in various locations around Australia, and we are expanding this network to more bushfire affected local areas.

A day in the life of an RSO might look like this:

- working with people affected by bushfires to help them apply for government bushfire recovery assistance
- answering questions about government bushfire recovery measures
- representing the NBRA at community forums and events
- supporting local councils in bushfire recovery efforts, including working in close consultation with local council Community Recovery Officers, and
- supporting the NBRA's Liaison Network to contribute to the partnership between Australian, state and local governments.

You need to be proactive, resilient and flexible, with excellent communication and engagement skills. If this sounds like you, and you have a good understanding of local issues facing bushfire affected communities this could be the opportunity for you!

More information about the roles and how to apply is available on the [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Careers page](#). Applications need to be submitted by 11.30pm AEDT on 18 September 2020.

To get in touch with the local RSO in your area visit [bushfirerecovery.gov.au/find-recovery-support-officer](http://bushfirerecovery.gov.au/find-recovery-support-officer) or email [liaison@bushfirerecovery.gov.au](mailto:liaison@bushfirerecovery.gov.au).

## Contact Us

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### Key contacts

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Email us [contact@bushfirerecovery.gov.au](mailto:contact@bushfirerecovery.gov.au)

#### Message us

Click the 'Message' button on our [Facebook page](#) to send us a private message if you have a question or concern. Our Recovery Support Officers are online to help.

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Update from the National Bushfire Recovery Agency | Edition Number 11, 3 September 2020

