



**National Bushfire
Recovery Agency**

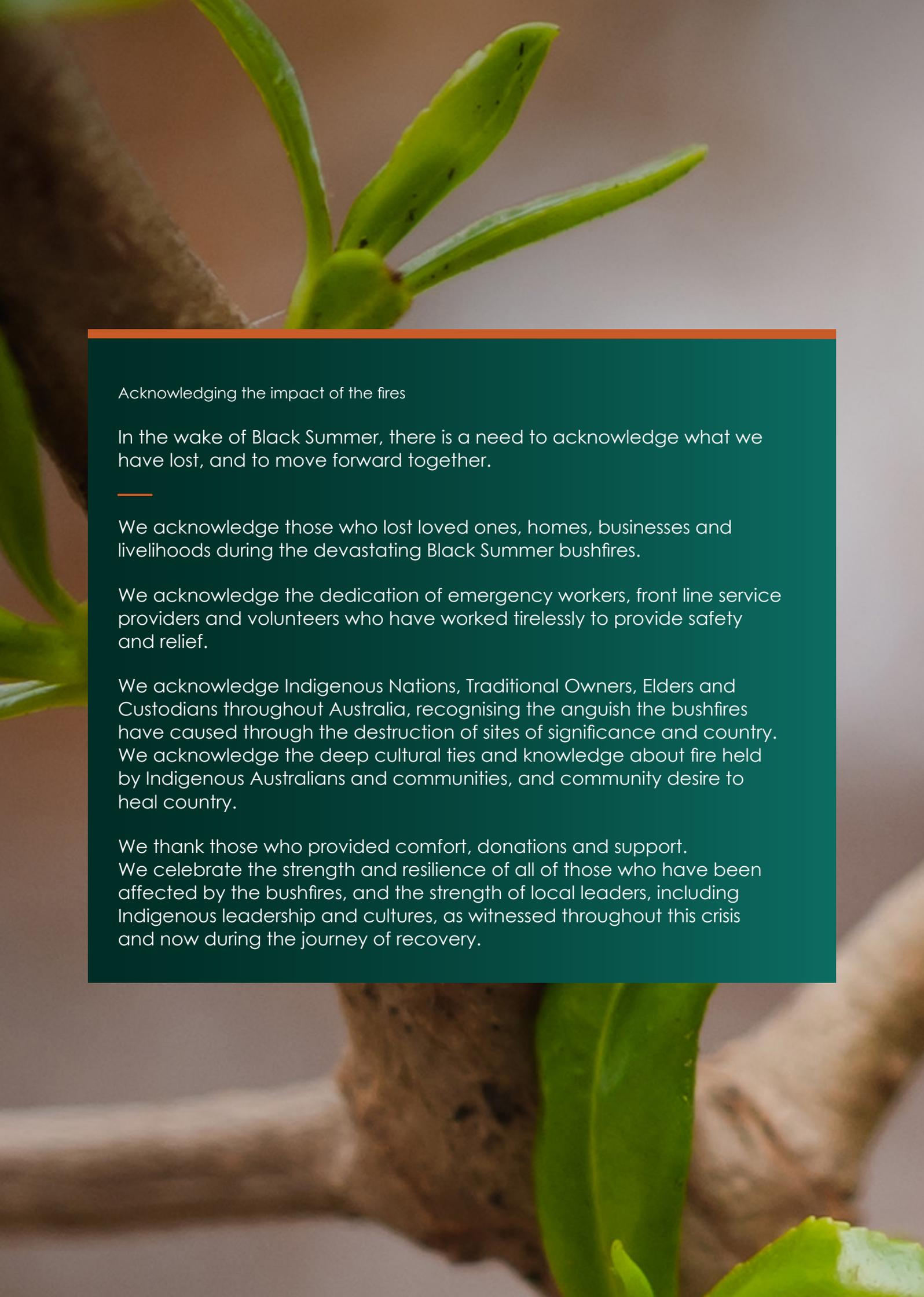
Journey to recovery



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Acknowledging the impact of the fires

In the wake of Black Summer, there is a need to acknowledge what we have lost, and to move forward together.

We acknowledge those who lost loved ones, homes, businesses and livelihoods during the devastating Black Summer bushfires.

We acknowledge the dedication of emergency workers, front line service providers and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to provide safety and relief.

We acknowledge Indigenous Nations, Traditional Owners, Elders and Custodians throughout Australia, recognising the anguish the bushfires have caused through the destruction of sites of significance and country. We acknowledge the deep cultural ties and knowledge about fire held by Indigenous Australians and communities, and community desire to heal country.

We thank those who provided comfort, donations and support. We celebrate the strength and resilience of all of those who have been affected by the bushfires, and the strength of local leaders, including Indigenous leadership and cultures, as witnessed throughout this crisis and now during the journey of recovery.

Introduction

Purpose

Journey to recovery describes the collaborative approach being taken across Australia to recover from the devastating 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires.

While recovery plans are developed at a state or territory level, the scale of the recent Black Summer bushfires was unprecedented, and recovery is beyond the resources of any one jurisdiction. Such an extraordinary event requires an extraordinary response.

For the first time, this document describes what the states and territories are doing in response to the bushfires, while also providing a national foundation for future cooperation.

It details the overarching framework that supports all levels of government, communities and individuals in their specific recovery actions.

It does not replace the recovery plans of each jurisdiction. Rather, it shows how these plans connect, along with additional Australian Government resources and support, to ensure a cooperative, national approach. It provides certainty to communities and to the states and territories regarding governance and support.

Journey to recovery is informed by consultation with communities and discussions with local, state and territory governments, industry bodies and charities.

It outlines what happened leading up to, during and immediately after the Black Summer bushfires.

It sets out a clear and structured approach for coordinated action by communities, local governments, state and territory governments and the Australian Government.

By working together in this way — alongside the private and not-for-profit sectors — we can ensure those directly affected by the bushfires receive the services and programs they need while empowering communities to rebuild and create a more resilient future.

National Bushfire Recovery Agency

In January 2020, the Australian Government established the National Bushfire Recovery Agency to work with state and territory governments to help coordinate and support the vital work of communities and their corporate and non-government recovery partners.

We have prepared *Journey to recovery* on behalf of the Australian Government and at the request of the then Council of Australian Governments.

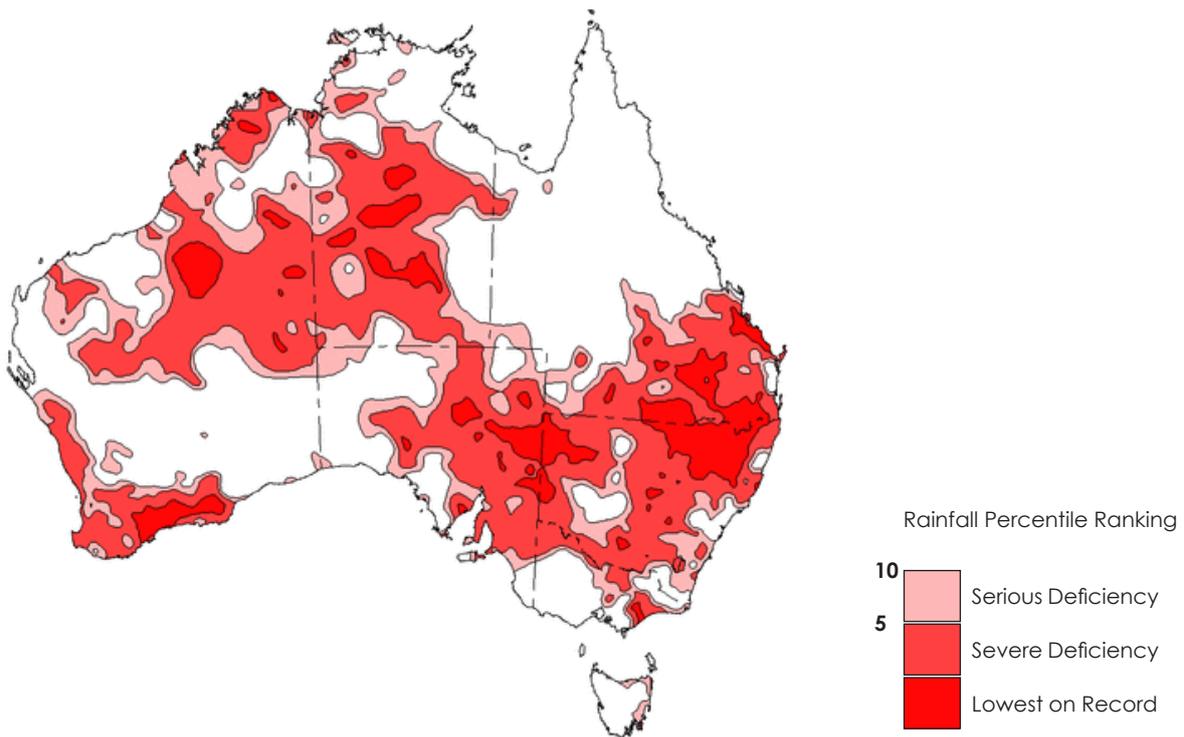
Black Summer

A dangerous season

'Black Summer' has come to describe the intense and widespread fires that burned across much of Australia during 2019–20. Never before has our nation experienced such fierce firefighting conditions across so many communities over such a sustained period.

Leading up to that bushfire season, conditions were unusually warm and dry over large parts of southern and eastern Australia. January to November 2019 was the second driest period on record. Rainfall over much of Australia was 'below' to 'very much below' average.

This map shows the extent of rainfall deficiency during the 18 months to September 2019. At the same time, temperatures were the second warmest on record. Drought ravaged vast areas of the country.



Rainfall Deficiencies: 18 months, 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2019, Australia Bureau of Meteorology.

The sustained, severely dry conditions, combined with high temperatures and record low humidity, contributed to the bushfire season's dangerous and early start. From mid-2019, there was a growing acknowledgement that a long and challenging season was ahead.

By December 2019, catastrophic fire conditions existed in parts of New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria.

THE FIRES

The fires began to impact communities before the end of winter, in August 2019. The terrain of bushfire-prone areas across eastern and southern Australia made it difficult to control the spread and manage the fires.

The figure below shows the varying start times and locations of major fires, and other social and environmental factors that contributed to the challenging firefighting conditions.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- **September 2019** – bushfires start
- **December 2019** – lightning sparks fire in Stirling Ranges and burns more than 40,000 hectares of parkland
- **December 2019 / January 2020** – fires near Norseman blocks access to the Eyre Hwy and Nullarbor, preventing people from entering and leaving Western Australia

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- **October 2019** – significant fires start burning in the Stuart Estate near Katherine and in Dundee, South of Darwin

QUEENSLAND

- **August 2019** – fire season starts, on top of intense drought from Rockhampton to the New South Wales border and extending inland to around St George
- **September 2019** – multiple blazes out of control across south-eastern and northern Queensland

NEW SOUTH WALES

- **September 2019** – bushfires start in the Blue Mountains
- **October 2019** – lightning bolt starts mega fire in Gospers Mountain, epicentre of the biggest forest fire to have started from a single ignition point in Australia
- **February 2020** – fire covers 7% of the state
- **March 2020** – the last fire was extinguished

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

- **5–6 January 2020** – Canberra records worst air quality in the world, 23 times the threshold considered hazardous
- **27 January 2020** – fire starts in Namadgi National Park
- **27 February 2020** – Orroral and Clear Range fires out

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

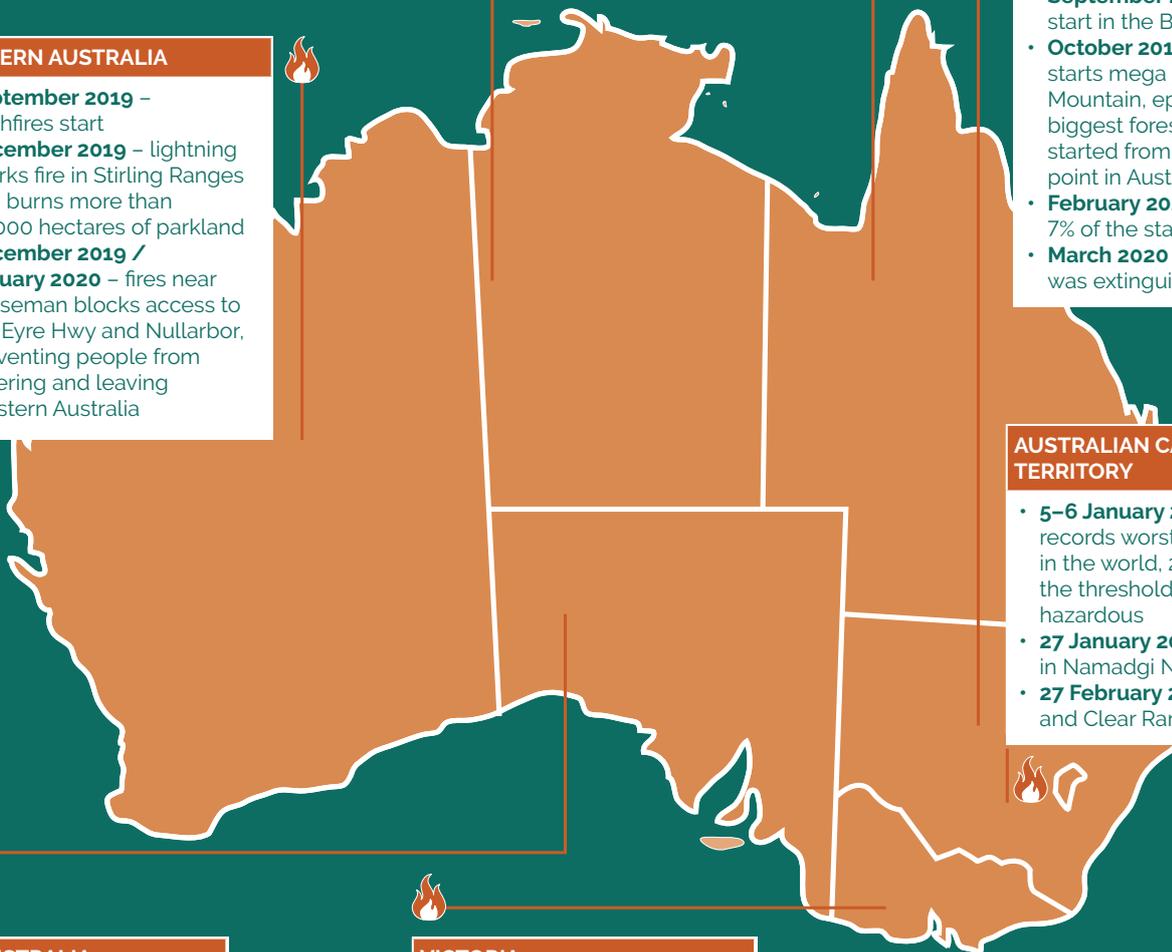
- **October 2019** – fires start
- **December 2019** – a tree falling on power lines starts the Cudlee Creek fire
- **December 2019 / January 2020** – one third of Kangaroo Island burns (170,000 hectare)

VICTORIA

- **November 2019** – 60 bushfires start
- **December 2019** – lightning strike starts the bushfire at Wingan River, north-west of Mallacoota
- **January 2020** – Australian Navy evacuates Mallacoota (see case study)
- **27 February 2020** – all significant fires declared contained

TASMANIA

- **October 2019** – fires start
- **January 2020** – fires continue burning with the Fingal fire covering more than 20,000 hectares



You can watch an animated national picture of the location and timing of the fires at:

 <https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/2019-20-bushfire-impact>

 Many months of drought had drawn every drop of moisture from our landscape – dams and paddocks were dry, random patches of bushland had started to turn brown. People feared what the long, hot days of summer would do to our scattered communities.

Leanne Barnes, Bega Valley Shire Local Council General Manager



Mogo Zoo, 31 December 2019.

The emergency response

In an emergency, state and territory governments have primary responsibility to protect life, property and the environment within their jurisdiction. But when bushfires burn across borders, affected jurisdictions are required to cooperate.

Some emergencies require even broader collaboration and coordination across all levels of government, and with the private and not-for-profit sectors.

This is what happened during the 2019–20 bushfires.

 We certainly haven't had any firefighting experience – there wasn't anyone on the site who had ever fought a fire before and I don't know how you would ever get that training. It's just the understanding that you need a heap of water and quickly.

Chad Staples, Managing Director, Mogo Zoo

 <https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-stories>

The 2019–20 bushfire season saw the largest coordinated interstate and international deployment of firefighting and emergency personnel Australia has ever experienced. In addition to regular firefighting crews, more than 7,000 extra workers supported the efforts, ranging from on-the-ground firefighters to incident managers and aviation personnel.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) also assisted firefighting crews in Queensland and New South Wales, early in their bushfire seasons. As the fires spread, this assistance extended to local emergency services in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, through Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–20. You can read more about the Operation here <https://news.defence.gov.au/national/operation-bushfire-assist-2019-2020>. In January 2020, thousands of ADF Reservists were mobilised to support the emergency response when the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management announced the compulsory call-out of ADF Reserve Brigades for the first time in the country's history. In all, about 8,000 ADF personnel and nearly 500 personnel from Australia's international defence force partners provided critical support, alongside a multitude of government departments at state, territory and national level.

Emergency evacuations

In early January 2020, more than 1,000 people and over 100 pets were evacuated from fire-hit Mallacoota on the Victorian coast. The Royal Australian Navy ships HMAS Choules and MV Sycamore, along with Army Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters from Sydney and Townsville, joined Victorian authorities to provide emergency aid and evacuation support. More details are at <https://news.navy.gov.au/en/Jan2020/Operations/5672/Choules-prepares-for-return-to-Mallacoota.htm>

This is just one example of ADF support provided to evacuate people from fire-affected areas.



HMAS Choules and MV Sycamore off the coast of Mallacoota.

International partners rallied. Nearly 100 personnel from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre responded to Australian requests for assistance from September 2019. Close to 300 personnel from the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service agency and the Department of the Interior were also deployed to support firefighting efforts from December 2019 to February 2020. Australia received additional help in various forms from other countries ranging from New Zealand to the Republic of Mauritius.

The disaster also highlighted the compassion, diversity and strength of the Australian people. Individuals offered material assistance and shelter, rescued animals, established and resourced recovery centres, and delivered food to firefighters and volunteers.



People who had lost everything were focused on the wellbeing of their neighbours, saying 'I will be okay, but I really need you to check in on the family down the street'.

Andrew Colvin, National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator

The impacts

While the fires did not burn in all states and territories – and did not all burn at the same time – the impact was felt deeply in communities across the nation, leaving physical and psychological scars.



During Black Summer, 35.8 million hectares¹ of land was burnt across Australia, an area 5 times the size of Tasmania.

Tragically, 33 lives were lost. Of these, 9 were firefighters, 3 of whom were aerial firefighters from the United States.

More than 3,000 homes and 7,000 facilities and out-buildings were destroyed.

More than 100,000 head of livestock perished.

No other event in our lifetimes has brought such sudden, drastic loss to Australia's biodiversity as the last bushfire season.

The scale of the fires

The impact on wildlife and the environment was devastating and will continue to be significant. An estimated 3 billion native mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs were killed or displaced. There was damage to National parks, World Heritage areas, wetlands of international significance, threatened species and ecological communities. The health of waterways, catchments and soils has also been affected.

Millions of people, often far away from the fires, were exposed to extremely high levels of particulate air pollution. Smoke blanketed towns and regions from Sydney to Melbourne, reached Auckland in New Zealand and was detected 10,000 kilometres away in South America.

¹ This figure represents the total area burnt across Australia, as at 31 May 2020. The burn area for Local Government Areas activated under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements was 13.3 million hectares.

In Australia it is estimated that up to 3,000 people were admitted to hospital with health issues related to the bushfire smoke and, sadly, there were further deaths.²

Importantly, the social impact on communities, and the emotional trauma experienced by individuals cannot be under-estimated. Many individuals, families and emergency service workers sought, and will continue to seek, emotional and mental health support – either informal or clinical support – in the days, weeks and months after the fires.

In January 2020, well before the fires were out, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Australia. The pandemic has added a layer of complexity to the impacts of the fires, and our ability as a nation to respond.

Some communities and groups of people have been disproportionately impacted, whether because of how badly the fires hit their area, or due to their unique needs and circumstances. Many of the communities affected by the bushfires were already facing pressure from drought or industry vulnerability.

Beyond the direct and indirect costs and impacts of the bushfires, there are impacts that are harder to measure. Only over time can we start to understand the full mental health and wellbeing costs to individuals and communities.

Further, the cost to the economy has been estimated in several ways, but is complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and social costs that are complex to measure.

The journey to recovery will be different for each community and will happen at a pace that reflects their needs, especially for communities that have faced the cumulative impacts of multiple disasters and stressors.

These unique needs of communities must be at the heart of recovery efforts.

All levels of government are working together to help address these impacts, and to help communities build resilience for the future.



I refuse to let it break me. I'm always positive, so the drought or the fire's not going to take that away from me.

Darren Sage, cattle farmer, Bellangry, New South Wales



<https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-stories>

Local bushfire impact and recovery assistance

The National Bushfire Recovery Agency has compiled information on each bushfire-affected Local Government Area. Profiles include general information, as well as specific details, including bushfire impact, relief and recovery support, and maps. These profiles are grouped together by state and territory. www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/progress-to-date/local-communities

² Arrigada NB, Palmer AJ, Bowman DMJS, Morgan GG, Jalaludin BB, Johnston FH. 'Unprecedented smoke related health burden associated with the 2019–20 bushfires in eastern Australia', *The Medical Journal of Australia* 12 March 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50545>

THE WIDESPREAD IMPACT

The impact was unprecedented



More than **35 million hectares** BURNT

LIVES LOST

Tragically, 33 people lost their lives

9 Firefighters

24 Community members

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

84,000

Indigenous people of New South Wales and Victoria live in the fire-affected area. Compared with **1/10** of the non-indigenous population.

22

discrete Indigenous communities located in fire-affected areas – **20** in New South Wales.

ADF

4,848 km roads cleared **240** km firebreak cleared

1,287 km of fencing **3.9** M litres water purified at Kangaroo Island

6.1 M litres

water purified at Bega



PROVIDED:

77,260 MEALS

served on Defence bases to emergency services personnel and evacuees

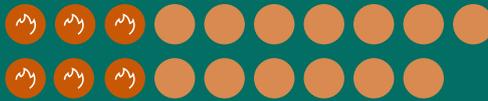
5.4 M litres

of water

73.3 K

litres of fuel

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT



Six of Australia's 19 World Heritage properties, including approximately **82%** of the Greater Blue Mountains Area (New South Wales) burnt.

709 PLANTS

identified as being at high risk, with **471** plant species identified as the highest priorities for urgent management intervention.

1/3

of Adelaide Hills entire region's vineyards was lost – approximately 1,000 hectares – in one night.

\$72 M

damage has been caused to three main apple growing regions.

129,000 hectares

of commercial plantations were impacted in the fires. This included **24%** of all plantations in **New South Wales**, **2.4%** in **Victoria** and **95%** on **Kangaroo Island**, **South Australia**.

WILDLIFE



750 ANIMAL SPECIES

identified as in need urgent attention, with 10% of the known habitat for **330** species affected and the entire geographic range of some species burnt.



9,800 BEEHIVES LOST

This raises a **significant risk** of sustained reduction of honey production.

HOUSES AND OTHER BUILDINGS (excluding Western Australia and the Northern Territory)

HOUSES DESTROYED

More than 3,000

HOUSES DAMAGED

1,080

BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES DESTROYED

5,941

BUILDING AND FACILITIES DAMAGED

2,738

Recovery



Recovery is 'the restoring or improving of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities, of a disaster-affected community or society, aligning with the principles of sustainable development and 'build back better', to avoid or reduce future disaster risk.

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

Recovery is primarily the responsibility of states and territories, to assess impacts, engage with the affected communities and plan to meet their needs. It is critical that recovery is community-led because recovery has different meanings to different people. There is no single experience of the Black Summer bushfires and no single way for individuals or communities to recover.

Just as the impacts of the fires are varied, so are the recovery efforts.

Recovery depends on the scale and intensity of the bushfire, the preparedness of the affected communities, the degree of community engagement during recovery planning, and the coordination of recovery actions.

Core to the understanding of recovery is the concept of resilience – including actions that aim to make individuals, businesses and communities more able to withstand future disasters, building stronger communities, economies, and natural and built environments.

Why we need a national approach

The Black Summer bushfires were of a scale never before experienced.

In addition to the work of local councils, state and territory governments and the Australian Government, the response has also involved – and will continue to involve – volunteers, community groups and not-for-profit organisations, businesses and industry groups.

Journey to recovery describes how all of us will work together to rebuild, recover and create a resilient future, while ensuring the needs of those impacted and their communities are at the centre of this effort.

What we know about recovery

Recovery is a process of addressing the disruptions and changes caused by a disaster. There is more than one path to recovery – the journey is different for each person and for their community.

In Australia, we use the National Principles for Disaster Recovery to guide our efforts, approach, planning and decision-making: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery/>.

These principles, outlined below, act like a checklist to inform actions and ensure they meet community needs.

Principles of recovery

Outlining the principles of recovery	
Understand the context	Successful recovery is based on an understanding of community context, with each community having its own history, values and dynamics.
Recognise complexity	Successful recovery is responsive to the complex and dynamic nature of both emergencies and the community.
Use community-led approaches	Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.
Coordinate all activities	Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach, between community and partner agencies, based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.
Communicate effectively	Successful recovery is built on effective communication between the affected community and other partners.
Recognise and build capacity	Successful recovery recognises, supports, and builds on individual, community and organisational capacity and resilience.

Phases of recovery

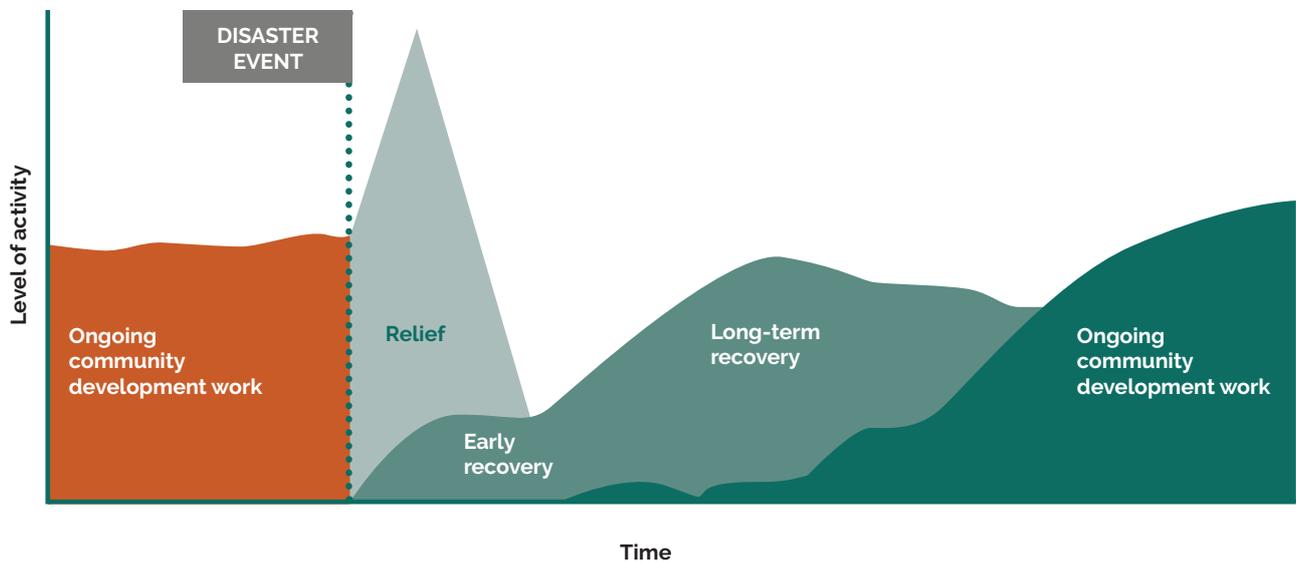
This document describes the journey to recovery in 3 phases:

- response
- relief
- recovery.

While the process always starts with response, the phases can overlap, reflecting the fact that individuals and communities need different things at different times.

These phases of recovery come after the emergency phase, which is the immediate action needed to save human lives or alleviate suffering, and to prevent widespread loss or damage to property, animals and the environment.

The figure below illustrates the phases of the journey to recovery.



Effect of disaster on ongoing community development and interface with relief and recovery – Adapted from Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience – Community Handbook 2

Phase	Description
Response	The help provided during or immediately after an emergency, providing immediate safety and security to those who have been impacted (including food, emergency shelter and medical care).
Relief	Short-term assistance, including material support, short- to medium-term accommodation, and access to mental health support that contributes to the recovery and resilience of communities.
Recovery	The coordinated process of restoring emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing, and rebuilding infrastructure into the medium- and longer-term, and building resilience.

This document describes response, relief and recovery actions undertaken in the short-, medium- and longer-term.



The number one thing about recovery is there must be an overt effort to stay in the game for the long run. And you must have a relationship with the local community, and it doesn't happen overnight.

Kevin Butler, President, BlazeAid



<https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-stories>

Domains of recovery

We describe the impacts of the bushfires and the actions taken to respond in the context of four domains of recovery:

- social
- built
- economic
- environmental.

This is consistent with the approach in the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework a national guide to help minimise the loss and suffering caused by disasters in Australia. You can read more about the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework at <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reduction-framework.pdf>

To ensure community-led recovery, national recovery spans all four domains.



Domains of Recovery

Note: COVID-19 has exacerbated the impact of the fires, testing people's resolve and resilience. The pandemic has impacted individuals, workplaces, retail trade and state border restrictions. While acknowledging the impact on bushfire-affected communities, we believe the complexities surrounding COVID-19 are best addressed in other recovery plans.

Social domain of recovery

 Develop and build local relationships and staff. The connections, knowledge and passions these people bring are critical when organisations and communities are stretched beyond capacity

Leanne Barnes, General Manager, Bega Valley Shire Local Council

Australians recognise social wellbeing as a vital component of community recovery.

The 'social domain' includes individuals and communities, and the bonds between them.

Black Summer tested these bonds – people were displaced, homes and schools were destroyed, families and communities were traumatised. For Indigenous Australians, sites of significance and country were lost.

These impacts occurred at the same time as the services designed to support people were under additional pressure.



The national response to Black Summer includes services and support to strengthen the resources, capacity and resilience already present within individuals and communities, as well as making sure these services are readily available and easy to use. This includes making sure services meet the needs of vulnerable groups, and that they have a voice in the recovery process. In particular, there has been a significant focus on ensuring communities have a range of mental health supports available in the days, weeks and months after the fires.

Built domain of recovery

 The desalination plant (on Kangaroo Island, South Australia) is the first of many priority projects that will receive local economic recovery funding available for bushfire-affected communities. This ensures a locally led approach to bushfire recovery.

The Hon David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management

Australians want to make the most of opportunities to build back better, to meet communities' future needs and improve their resilience.

The 'built domain' includes essential services and utilities, community infrastructure like schools and hospitals, transport services, property and changes to planning and building regulations as a result of bushfires.

In many areas hit by the 2019–20 bushfires, much of the built environment was destroyed. Homes and buildings, roads, public and private infrastructure, telecommunications and water infrastructure are just some examples.



The national response to Black Summer includes action to quickly restore services and facilities, sometimes through temporary solutions, while also investing in longer-term improvement. Simple, practical solutions, such as fee waivers for access to the bushfire construction standard, support the recovery and rebuilding of bushfire ravaged communities.

Economic domain of recovery

 Whether it is bushfires or global pandemic, we need businesses to pull through and keep communities alive. We're doing what business does best, acting quickly to cut through red tape and get things done.

Sir Peter Cosgrove, Chair, BizRebuild

Australians are entrepreneurial and hardworking, and they understand the role of economic recovery in the overall recovery of bushfire-affected communities.

The 'economic domain' supports local economies to operate so the material and service needs of communities are met through: business activity, including primary production; labour and employment; business development; land use; financial resources; and interaction with the broader economy.

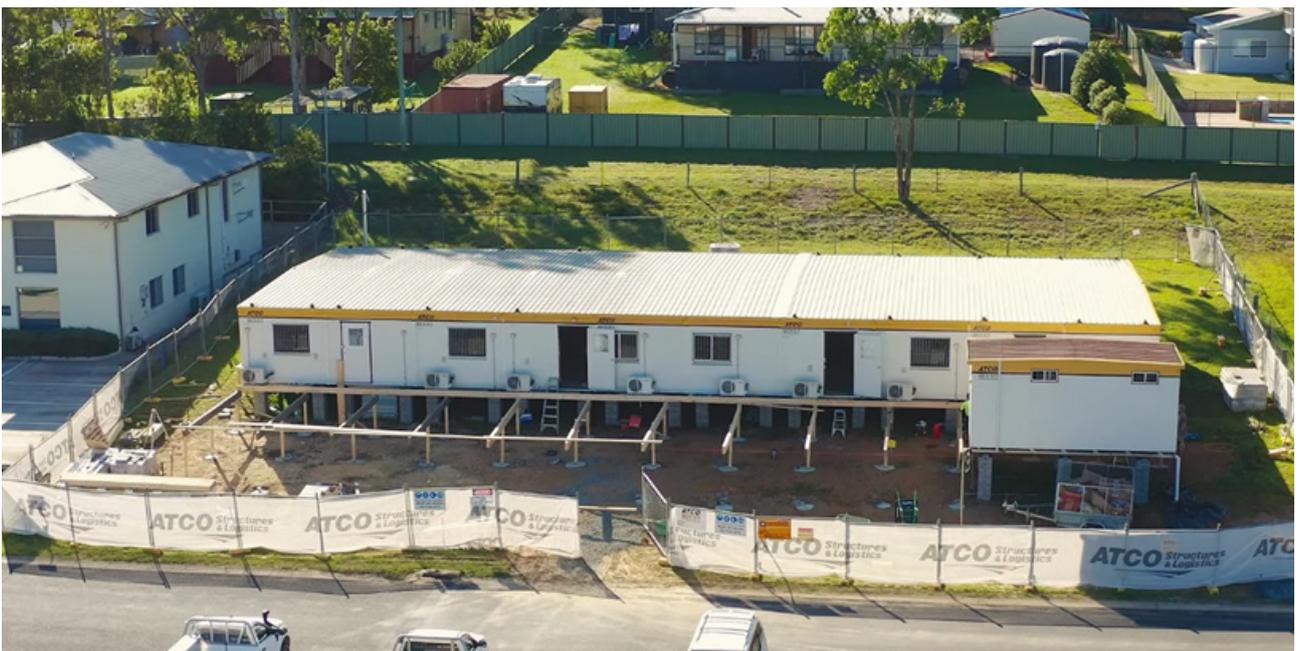
The Black Summer destruction of the built environment contributed to many people losing their jobs or businesses. Entire industries were affected either directly through the fires or indirectly through significantly reduced visitor numbers or smoke taint to crops.

Economic losses also complicate social impacts, as individuals and communities derive identity and belonging from what they produce and contribute.



The national response to Black Summer includes support from various levels of government for affected businesses and industries. A collaborative, well-coordinated and flexible approach is key to long-term economic recovery.

 <https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-stories>



Construction of the Mogo pop-up mall with donated demountables. Credit: Business Council of Australia.



Environmental domain of recovery



This is an historic environmental challenge ... [the] recovery effort requires collaboration between governments, environment organisations, scientists, farmers, communities, business, philanthropists and industry.

The Hon Sussan Ley MP, Minister for the Environment

Australians value the natural environment, as it is also a source of social and economic wellbeing.

Environmental recovery includes restoration of land and water resources, restoration of cultural and natural heritage sites, protection of wildlife and habitat protection, and management of pollution.

The Black Summer bushfires had a devastating impact on Australia's unique native animals and plants. More than 300 threatened species were in the path of the fires. Almost 3 billion animals died or were displaced. Ongoing risks for animals that survived include lack of food, water and shelter, competition and predation from feral animals, weed invasions, and sediment and ash clogging up waterways.

Environmental damage from the bushfires also has social, cultural and economic implications.

The loss of much-loved local bushland affects communities, tourism and recreation. Indigenous Australians have suffered deeply from the impacts on culturally significant sites and species. Recovery for our environment will require a decade or more of sustained effort. Importantly, we have taken the first steps on this journey.



The national response to Black Summer has supported environmental action across many sectors. A new expert panel on wildlife and threatened species has guided initial investments, through assessing impacts and prioritising actions. Across the nation, communities have come together to help rescue at-risk species, control pest animals and plants, protect critical habitat or create new homes for wildlife, and revegetate burnt landscapes. The CSIRO continues to work with rural fire agencies and other research bodies to apply knowledge of ecosystem and bushfire dynamics to real events, and draws on a wide range of expertise to understand, predict and manage fires and support recovery, rehabilitation and resilience.



*Rob Fitzclarence of Cann Valley Landcare Group at one of the gullies leading into the Genoa River at Wangarabell.
Credit: Landcare Australia.*

The human experience



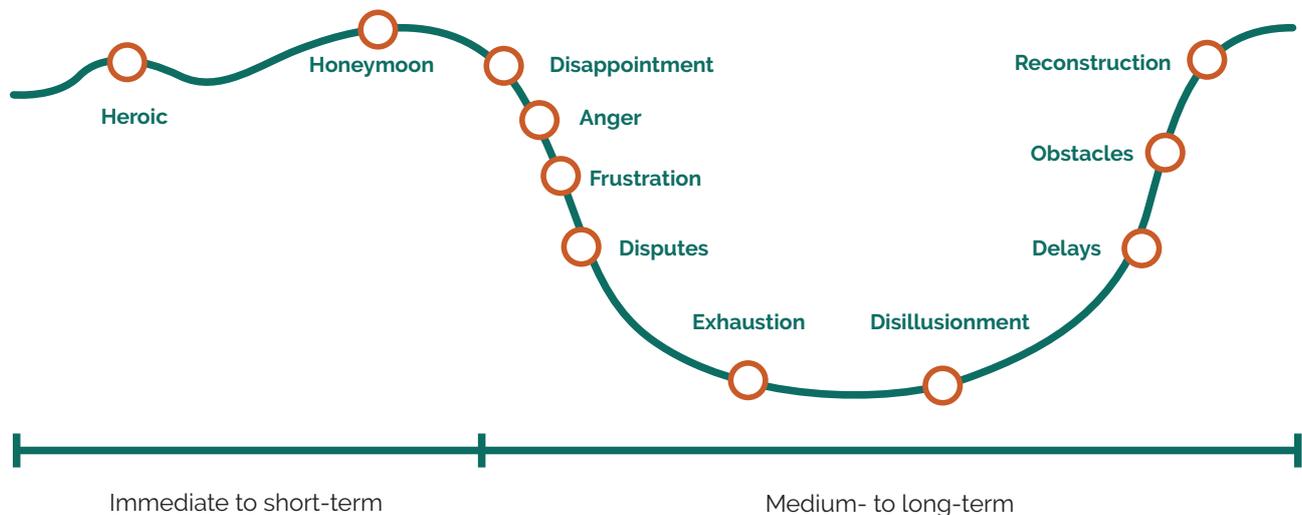
We need to ensure the trauma and mental health needs of our people are supported in a way like we never have before.

The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health

Journey to recovery considers that people respond to disaster in different ways and over different time frames.

The figure below illustrates the psychosocial experiences people may go through immediately after a disaster. Responses range from feeling heroic and a sense of community cohesion to feelings of disappointment, anger and frustration as clean-up and reconstruction commence, finally moving to reconstruction and a new normality.

It is important to realise that, just as actions in the recovery domains are not necessarily linear nor sequential, people and communities may move through these phases at different paces, meaning they are ready for new recovery actions at different times.



Human experience of recovery – adapted from Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience, Community Recovery Handbook 2

Planning the journey to recovery

Recovery planning happens in a 'system of systems'. The journey starts and ends with bushfire impacted communities and is supported by each layer of government and their relevant responsibilities, as illustrated in the figure below.



Australian Government	Enables and supports recovery through additional funding and resources
State and territory governments	Consolidate and support planning activity across the jurisdiction
Local governments	Develop local plans, based on community needs
Bushfire-affected communities	Identify needs, actions and priorities
National Bushfire Recovery Agency	Builds and maintains partnerships to support recovery efforts

The recovery planning system

Recovery plans summarise the principles and actions that will support communities, regions, states and territories, and the nation to move from the immediate impact of a disaster to a 'new normal'.

Communities and local governments

Depending on the scale of an event, recovery needs are best identified within states and territories, at the local level by local governments and their communities, using existing resources and expertise. Local governments may develop emergency management and recovery plans or reshape existing strategic plans and priorities following major events such as bushfires.

Recovery specialists and liaison officers work directly with local communities to support locally led recovery. In some cases, recovery officers have been employed by local, state or territory governments to support this process, which may be jointly funded by the Australian Government. Local governments may have hundreds of communities within their catchment. Depending on the scale of bushfires, these communities may be doing their own recovery planning.

Many local governments and recovery committees have arrangements in place to consult and engage widely, particularly with vulnerable groups in their communities. The Australian Local Government Association is the peak body representing local governments as part of this system. It provides the mechanism for local governments to feed into national decision-making bodies.

In the case of Black Summer, activity started in affected communities while the fires were still burning. Local businesses contributed to the effort, charities mobilised, and local governments activated their emergency management plans. This activity continues.

State and territory governments

State and territory governments are responsible for leading recovery efforts across their jurisdiction.

States and territories develop recovery plans that inform and guide the governance, planning and operational matters relating to recovery, consistent with the National Disaster Recovery Outcomes Framework and the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.

State and territory governments have primary responsibility for funding the activities in their plans. However, to increase the pool of funding available, and to ensure that help can be provided quickly to disaster-affected communities, the Australian Government also shares the costs.

Under the joint Australian Government-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018, assistance is provided to alleviate the financial burden on states and territories. These arrangements also support the provision of urgent financial assistance to disaster-affected communities.

Under the arrangements, the state or territory government determines which areas receive assistance and what assistance is available to people and communities. You can read more about these arrangements at: www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/related-links/disaster-recovery-funding-arrangements-2018.aspx.

The states most impacted by the 2019–20 bushfire season have developed specific recovery plans or frameworks to enable recovery in affected communities. Rather than replicating these, links to these plans and the relevant recovery, emergency and resilience agencies are provided in the following map.

This approach helps communities to realise their own visions for recovery, with well-coordinated support from all levels of government in addition to economic recovery actions taken by states and territories.

Coordinated funding approaches

Together, the state and territory governments and the Australian Government have made more than \$700 million available to support the delivery of local recovery plans – targeting the most severely affected areas in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland.

This funding will support recovery across the four recovery domains: social; built; economic; and environmental.

Importantly, to receive funding, communities must participate in the planning and development process, and support the proposed project.

LINKS TO STATE AND TERRITORY RECOVERY AGENCIES

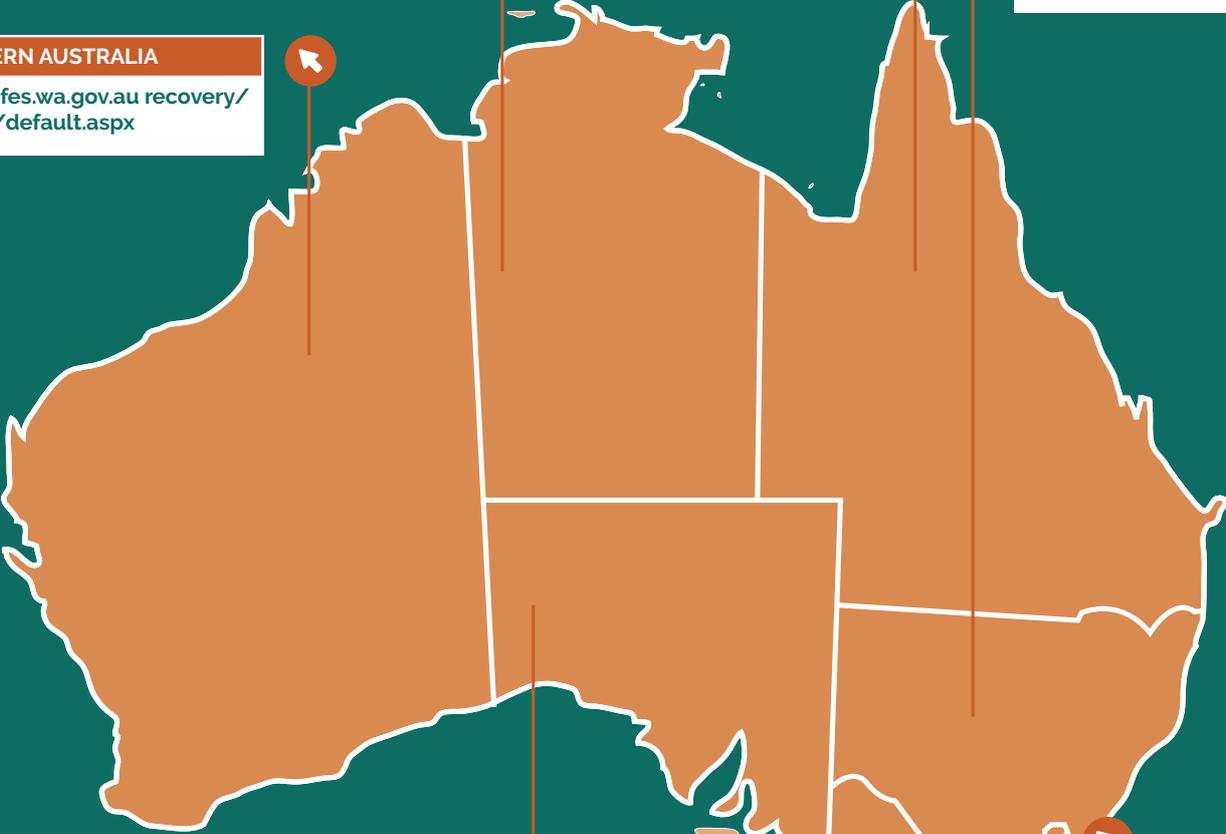
Click through the links to see each state and territory recovery plans.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
www.dfes.wa.gov.au/recovery/Pages/default.aspx

NORTHERN TERRITORY
www.securent.nt.gov.au/prepare-for-an-emergency/bushfires

QUEENSLAND
www.qra.qld.gov.au/our-work/state-recovery-plans#:~:text=The%20Queensland%20Bushfires%20State%20Recovery,September%20through%20to%20December%202019

NEW SOUTH WALES
www.resilience.nsw.gov.au



SOUTH AUSTRALIA
www.recovery.sa.gov.au

VICTORIA
www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire_management/recovering-from-the-2020-bushfires

TASMANIA
www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/osem/recovery_from_emergencies_in_tasmania

Australian Government

The Australian Government collaborates with the state and territory governments on disaster management and recovery.

Emergency Management Australia – Australia's national disaster management organisation – coordinates the provision of assistance through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements with the states and territories.

In addition, the Commonwealth provides financial assistance directly to people impacted by major disasters, through:

- Disaster Recovery Payments – a one-off payment to eligible Australian residents who are adversely affected by a major disaster.
- Disaster Recovery Allowance – a fortnightly payment for up to 13 weeks for eligible individuals whose income has been affected by a major disaster.

The difference with the Black Summer fires was the level of cooperation required across states and territories.

Recognising this, on 6 January 2020, the Australian Government appointed a National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator, Mr Andrew Colvin APM OAM, to lead a new National Bushfire Recovery Agency and oversee a new National Bushfire Recovery Fund.



Recovery operations require a whole-of-government response, and that is why we established the National Bushfire Recovery Agency...it is overseeing a national bushfire recovery fund, which will support all recovery efforts across Australia over the next 2 years and for as long as it takes.

Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, speech to Parliament

Our role as the National Bushfire Recovery Agency is to assist people to get the help they need across governments, and to coordinate and support the vital work of communities and their corporate and not-for-profit recovery partners. We have locally engaged staff working in many of the hardest hit communities. We consult directly with communities and communicate what we hear back to government, to improve recovery efforts.



The National Bushfire Recovery Agency brings stakeholders together through several forums to make sure we are sharing information and acting together in the best interests of bushfire-affected communities.

Credit: Daniel Unsworth, NBRA.

State–Federal Recovery Consultative Group

This group comprises heads of the Commonwealth, state and territory agencies responsible for bushfire relief and recovery, chaired by the National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator. The group supports collaboration and coordination across jurisdictions, with a view to monitoring recovery progress and identifying joined-up support to those affected by the 2019–20 bushfires.

National Charities
Bushfire Recovery
Coordinators Forum

National
Peak Bodies
Bushfire Recovery
Coordinators Forum

State–Federal
Bushfire Recovery
Coordinators Forum

Commonwealth
Senior Officials
Bushfire
Recovery Forum

Australian Government bushfire recovery consultation groups

Australian Government assistance

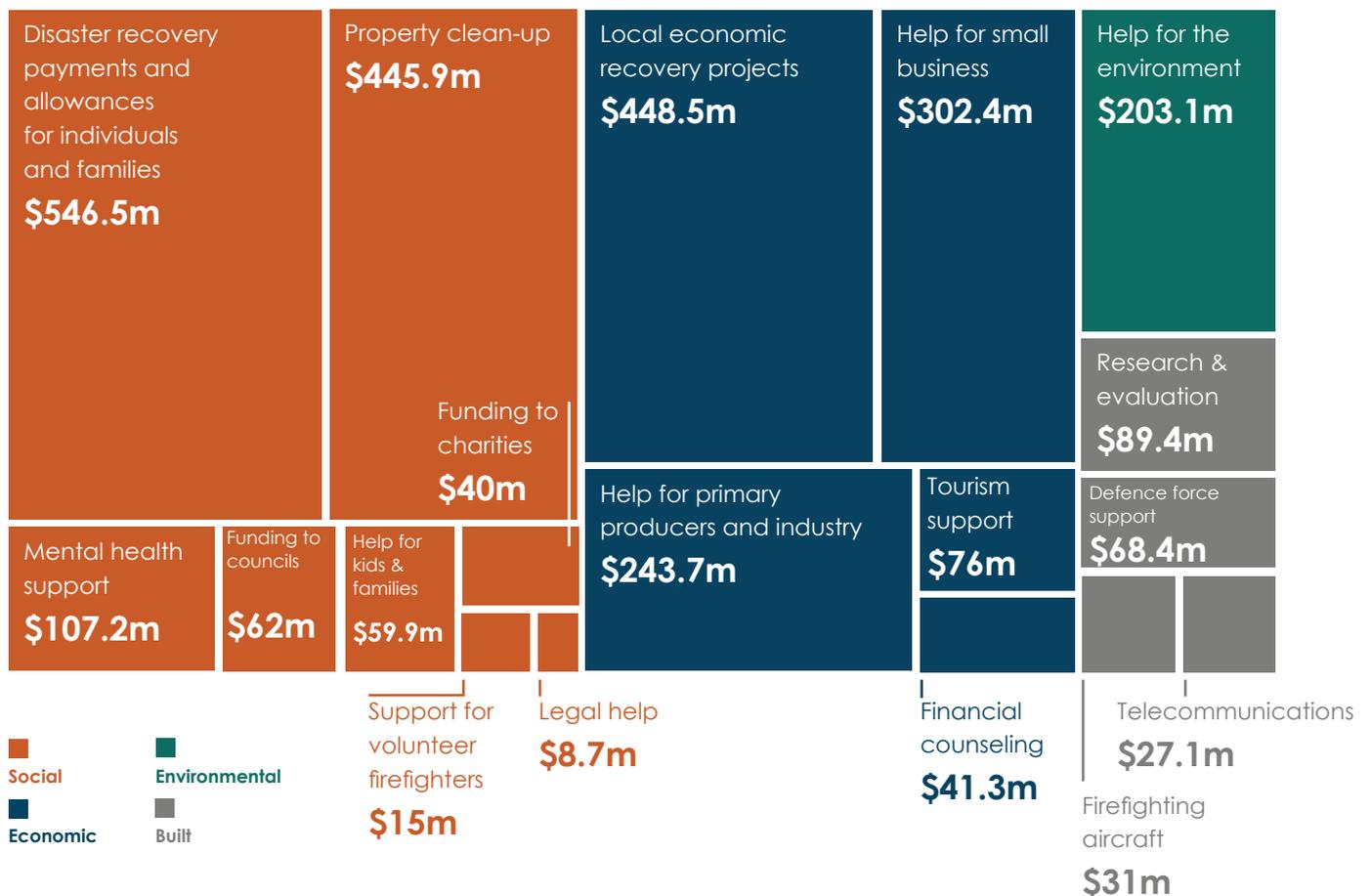
At the time of writing, the Australian Government has made available more than \$2.8 billion to support bushfire recovery efforts.

In many cases, the Australian Government has provided funding to local councils and charities to spend where it is needed, or to state and territory governments to deliver programs on the Commonwealth's behalf, using existing systems and structures.

The National Bushfire Recovery Fund is more than \$2 billion of new funding that is allocated to more than 30 initiatives. The largest part of this fund is to provide economic support, in recognition of the Australian Government's commitment to support the Australian economy.

In addition to the National Bushfire Recovery Fund, the Australian Government has committed funding through other existing programs and services.

Australian Government funding is summarised below. More detail, including who is delivering initiatives under the National Bushfire Recovery Fund and their take-up so far is available at: www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/progress-to-date/funding.



The role of the not-for-profit and private sectors

Local activities and plans are often supported by the generosity of charities, philanthropic and community-based organisations and private enterprises. These organisations contribute to community recovery for different objectives, in different locations, drawing on different funding sources. Charities and not-for-profit organisations play a critical role through their capacity to turn the enormous generosity of Australians, and overseas well-wishers, into organised and sustained support delivered to communities and individuals in need. In recognition, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission works with regulators across the country to reduce red tape for charities, making it easier for them to focus on coordinating donations and helping where it is needed.

Non-government organisations are funded to support immediate responses across all recovery domains (social, built, economic, environmental) – staffing recovery centres, attending to immediate needs, including food and shelter, rescuing wildlife and supporting people to connect with other services. Through contracts with local, state and territory governments, and the Australian Government, these organisations continue to aid recovery and provide critical services, including mental health support and advocacy, through the initial relief period and on to long-term recovery.



Brian and Karen Nixon of Rainbow Flats NSW.

How recovery plans connect

The following diagram shows how recovery plans at each level – local, state and territory – work together to create a strong national approach, supported by Commonwealth and the joint funding outlined above.



Interaction of recovery plans, NBRA website

Australia's collaborative journey to recovery

Communities

Who takes action	Immediate response	Relief (short-term)
<p>Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - volunteers - non-government and not-for-profit organisations - local businesses - charities 	<p>SOCIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food, water and sanitation supplies • evacuations • relief centres • domestic animal rehoming and care • emergency shelter, emergency medical care • primary and specialist health services • volunteering • communications and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food, water and sanitation supplies • coordinated counselling and mental health support • short to medium-term accommodation • primary and specialist health services
	<p>BUILT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • property and home defence • fencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • debris removal • fence and boundary building
	<p>ECONOMIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fundraising • financial support • Indigenous-specific payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing fundraising and financial support
	<p>ENVIRONMENTAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wildlife rescue and care • protection of threatened animal and plant species • documentation of event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cuttings and propagation of flora for regeneration • revegetation • nesting boxes • feeding programs • documentation of recovery

Australia's journey to recovery will be achieved by the combined efforts outlined in the national approach and state, territory, local, regional and community development bushfire recovery plans.

This journey is summarised in the following table and describes what has happened and will happen, and when. It is organised into the recovery domains to show how individuals and communities are supported holistically over time, according to their needs and circumstances.

Early recovery (short-term)	Recovery (medium-term)	Long-term recovery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • case management • counselling • primary and specialist health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • case management • counselling • primary and specialist health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • case management • counselling • primary and specialist health services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • debris removal • fence and boundary building 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing fundraising and financial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing fundraising and financial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing fundraising and financial support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cuttings and propagation of flora for regeneration • revegetation • nesting boxes • feeding programs • documentation of recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flora regeneration • revegetation • nesting boxes • feeding programs • documentation of recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flora regeneration • revegetation • nesting boxes • feeding programs • documentation of recovery

Local government

Who takes action		Immediate response	Relief (short-term)
Local governments - local councils - local assemblies		SOCIAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• activate emergency/disaster management plans• local coordination of support efforts and information• community engagement• domestic animal support• assistance for vulnerable members of community• facilities for goods and food distribution• temporary accommodation	
		BUILT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• permission and management of temporary housing and emergency evacuation shelters• debris removal, including asbestos• audit damage and urgent repairs• manage local traffic	
		ECONOMIC <ul style="list-style-type: none">• local government resources, staff, plant and equipment and coordination of local fundraising for bushfire affected councils• regional arrangements for approach to recovery• Internal Recovery Action Committees• 24/7 help lines and one-stop-shop arrangements• office space for Australian Defence Force and police• manage and distribute funds from local fundraising	
		ENVIRONMENTAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• audit nature reserves for damage• livestock management and disposal• debris clearing• tree clearing• waste removal	

Early recovery (short-term)

Recovery (medium-term)

Long-term recovery

- childcare and early childhood arrangements
- community consultation for recovery
- community mental health support
- grant management
- local coordination

- community mental health support
- community events and networking

- celebration of milestones
- remembrance and physical memorials

- debris removal, including asbestos
- advice to homeowners and businesses about rebuilding
- permission and management of temporary housing
- rubbish collection

- infrastructure rebuilding

- strategic plans for new buildings with higher bushfire ratings

- reduced council fees and rates
- grant management
- manage and distribute local fundraising funds

- ongoing support for business community
- rebuilding of council infrastructure

- marketing for tourism and business opportunities

- livestock management and disposal
- weed, pest and animal management
- water quality
- grant management

- revegetation
- rebuilding infrastructure in council owned reserves
- strategic fire management

- long-term rehabilitation

State/Territory governments

Who takes action

Immediate response

Relief (short-term)

State/territory governments



SOCIAL

- Social impact assessments
- multi-agency recovery centres
- recovery centres
- 24/7 assistance hotline
- disaster funding administration
- purchasing extraordinary non-government support and services
- community outreach
- mental health support services and psychological first aid
- medical and health care
- multi-media recovery information
- recovery governance groups
- awareness/advocacy at risk populations
- community outreach activities



BUILT

- impact assessment
- restore utilities and supply chains, clear access,
- respond to immediate health and emergency housing needs
- debris clean-up
- term-appropriate temporary housing



ECONOMIC

- economic impact assessments
- activate Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)
- economic support as appropriate



ENVIRONMENTAL

- environmental damage assessment
- impacts assessment for environmental and cultural significance
- threat assessment to threatened species and prioritisation of actions
- damage assessment of public infrastructure
- wildlife organisations support
- hazardous tree clearing
- recovery of native wildlife and environmental assets
- improvement of environmental resilience
- fire scar mapping

Early recovery (short-term)

- grant administration/distribution
- education and child care support
- short- to medium-term accommodation
- individual home repair/rebuild support
- case management
- purchasing of additional extraordinary disaster recovery supports
- targeted mental health programs
- recovery centres/hubs
- targeted outreach
- education support

Recovery (medium-term)

- grant administration/distribution
- event-specific State recovery plans
- State disaster recovery and reconstruction coordination
- support local government recovery planning
- support grants for recovery of local communities
- home repair/rebuild case management
- mental health and wellbeing and support
- complex case management to communities

Long-term recovery

- grant administration/distribution
- evaluate funds/grant programs
- long term mental health and wellbeing support

- emergency roadworks
- debris removal
- transport
- telecommunications
- power
- water
- sewage
- maintain supply chains for critical chemicals and fuels

- debris removal
- road restoration

- immediate DRFA support, including grants or loans for small businesses, not-for profit businesses and primary producers

- immediate DRFA support, including grants or loans for small businesses, not-for profit businesses and primary producers

- immediate DRFA support, including grants or loans for small businesses, not-for profit businesses and primary producers

- water quality
- revegetation
- rebuild state-owned infrastructure
- pest and weed control
- clearing debris and rebuilding tracks to reopen state parks
- implementation of priority species recovery actions
- grant management
- support to wildlife organisations
- assistance with waste management
- impact assessment for ecosystem, wildlife and cultural heritage

- long-term rehabilitation
- water quality
- monitoring and intervention to protect natural assets and significant species
- monitoring of ecosystem and species recovery
- pest and weed control
- support to wildlife organisations
- rebuilding infrastructure and amenity
- threatened species recovery action plans
- documentation of recovery

- long-term rehabilitation
- water quality
- review and adoption of improved bushfire management and hazard reduction
- continued monitoring of ecosystem and species
- pest and weed control
- support to wildlife organisations
- documentation of recovery

Australian Government

Who takes action

Immediate response

Relief (short-term)

Australian Government



SOCIAL

- Australian Defence Force assistance to evacuate and provide immediate life-support assistance
- establish National Bushfire Recovery Agency
- Ausmat deployment of personal protective equipment
- emergency assistance to local governments
- Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS)/Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) changes
- National Natural Disaster Mental Health Framework
- primary care and mental health support through Primary Health Networks
- telecommunications review and response
- receive and coordinate international contributions



BUILT

- Support maintenance of supply chains for critical chemicals and fuels
- Australian Defence Force (including Reservists) – debris and make-safe activities for communities and critical road infrastructure



ECONOMIC

- Disaster Recovery Allowance
- Disaster Recovery Payment
- Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
- Australian Taxation Office – PAYG and GST deferral arrangements
- Services Australia – immediate access to Family Tax Benefit Part A



ENVIRONMENTAL

Early recovery (short-term)

- continued consultation and forums
- Recovery Connect website
- Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements
- CSIRO report
- NBRA liaison network
- mental health support, counselling and community recovery activities

Recovery (medium-term)

- Royal Commission Interim Report
- CSIRO bushfire research
- NBRA liaison network
- mental health support, counselling and community recovery activities

Long-term recovery

- Royal Commission recommendations
- CSIRO bushfire research
- continuing mental health support

- infrastructure support
- burn scar mapping
- telecommunications infrastructure

- grants, industry support and financial counselling
- burn scar mapping
- industry and primary producer specific supports
- Australian Taxation Office – PAYG and GST deferral arrangements

- Local Economic Recovery Fund
- industry-specific supports

- Local Economic Recovery Fund
- industry-specific supports

- impact assessments for threatened plant and animal species, ecological communities and heritage places
- recovery priorities
- review of threatened species listings
- funding support to zoos, national environment organisations, natural resource management groups, states and territories
- protecting unburnt areas that provide refuge
- feral predator and herbivore control
- emergency salvage of plant and animal species
- rapid on-ground assessment for species and communities of concern
- Supplementary shelter, food, and water for animals

- grants and targeted investment to support wildlife and habitat recovery, and long-term resilience

- preparation to protect environmental assets in future bushfire events
- mechanisms to increase resilience of the natural environment to a changing climate

What happens next?

Recovery takes time. It will touch on many aspects of people's lives – from the way they live and work in their community, through to local landscapes, infrastructure and economies.

The way people have banded together, through the fires and beyond, is testament to the spirit, strength and resilience of the local communities.

The new version of normal will be different for everyone.

There is much we can achieve together. It is important that we continue to focus on recovery for the communities affected by the Black Summer, including through the impacts of COVID-19, and as we approach the 2020–21 bushfire season.



Credit: AAP images.

Listening and learning

The nation's journey to recovery, and the programs delivered through the National Bushfire Recovery Fund, will be reviewed and updated, in consultation with communities, to reflect changing needs and lessons learned.

We will continue to listen to and engage with our state, territory and local government partners as well as charities, non-government organisations and the local communities, to understand and anticipate need, and to adjust our approach. Data and expert analysis will complement the lived experiences communities share with us.

We will continue to examine the economic, social, infrastructure and environmental consequences of the 2019–20 bushfires and appropriate responses. These considerations will include existing and complementary support measures and any gaps in the recovery effort.

This will continue to inform future responses to national disasters and to build long-term resilience.

Safer into the future

All levels of government are considering future fire seasons and how to keep people safe.

For example:

- Briefings and workshops with state, territory and Australian Government agencies, along with industry partners, have started as part of the 2020 Australian Government Preparedness Program, to discuss:
 - national coordination
 - capabilities, preparedness, response, planning and recovery arrangements informed by observations from 2019–20
 - any nationally focused emerging risks or issues, prior to the high-risk weather season.
- State and territory governments and volunteer fire services are continuing their annual preparation activities ahead of the next fire season, including hazard reduction.
- The Australian Government is investing in telecommunications, to build resilience during emergencies by improving connectivity at fire service depots and evacuation centres.
- In addition to providing mental health support to emergency service workers, including volunteers and their families, the Australian Government is working to develop a National Action Plan to lower suicide rates and improve mental health outcomes among Australia's current and former emergency services workers.
- The Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements will make recommendations in its final report about the coordination, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from disasters, as well as improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions, and mitigating the impact of natural disasters.

How to stay involved

We will keep communicating about our activities so that Australians know what is ahead.

If you would like more information about how to get involved, whether through donations, volunteering or passing on information to others about the support that is available, you can visit the National Bushfire Recovery Agency website at: www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au.



Volunteers really are the oxygen of Australia, and volunteers need to be held up as the incredible people they are.

Kevin Butler, BlazeAid

If you need support

If you were affected by the bushfires, getting your life back together may not be easy. Many people are receiving help, whether it is from governments, through donations, or from local people coming together.

These hotlines and can tell you what help is available in your area:

	New South Wales	13 77 88
	Victoria	1800 560 760
	South Australia	1800 302 787
	Queensland	1800 173 349
	Tasmania	1300 135 513
	Australian Capital Territory	13 22 81

It is also normal to have strong emotional and physical reactions after a significant event. If you are not feeling like yourself after the bushfires, it can help to talk. You or people you know may be feeling this way after the bushfires, and now also with COVID-19. Everyone reacts to these feelings in a different way.

More information about support available is at:

www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-assistance/families-individuals/mental-health.



Kevin and Rhonda Butler with a local farmer who lost his home in the East Gippsland fires.
Credit: BlaizeAid.

Sharing stories and experiences

The scale of the fires means communities right across the country are experiencing similar journeys.

Acknowledging what we have lost, as individuals and communities, can be an important part of coping with what has happened. Sharing stories of support, compassion and good ideas can also help us move forward.

We share stories across communities to link people and their good ideas together.



Since joining GIVIT, I have seen the raw end of being impacted by the fires. When I think of the things some people, some children have seen and lived through, I want to do the best I can to make their recovery process as seamless and comfortable as possible.

Solange Ardiles, Victorian Manager for GIVIT



<https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/recovery-stories>

To ask questions, share stories, ideas or lessons learned, contact us:



Email

contact@bushfirerecovery.gov.au



**Facebook
(direct message)**

<https://www.facebook.com/FireRecoveryAU/>



**Talk to one of our Recovery Support
Officers in your local area:**

<https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/key-contacts>

