

# Living in Eurobodalla

Caseys Beach, JOSH BURKINSHAW

Last summer's bushfires shook us to the core but also forged a new resilience and sense of community across our beautiful shire. People came together as never before.

This edition of *Living in Eurobodalla* tells just some of the extraordinary stories of those dark days, when the worst in Mother Nature brought out the best in us.

In the tightly-knit coastal community of Rosedale, long established relationships proved a godsend when the fires hit on New Year's Eve, with the Rosedale Association leading the charge up to the bushfire season. The association was sending information on bushfire risk and property preparation to 177 members, with regular updates as the fires grew.

In the aftermath, with 84 Rosedale homes destroyed, the association stepped up again. Secretary Vicki Smith says they had three things in their favour.

"Firstly, the Rosedale Association is well established in the community, with its origins in the 70s," says Vicki.

"Secondly, with fourth and fifth generation families here, people feel more like family than neighbours - we really do talk about the 'Rosedale family' - with strong generational bonds creating trust.

## Community trust burns bright



**a car horn system that could quickly alert people was set up**

"Thirdly, we have a really good network of external relationships, including with the Council. That helped us get information and support."

With five of the 10 committee members present as fire engulfed the village, the association was able to spring into action to make residents feel safe as soon as the fire-front passed. Two committee meetings

were followed up by wrangling with outside services, installing a community noticeboard and setting up a fire-fighting ute.

"We formalised night patrols, splitting Rosedale into two patrol areas," says Vicki.

"Starting with a core group of 12, we ended up with around 20, rotating through the night to monitor conditions, put out spot fires, and see off looters."

Vicki says local roads were often cut and highways mostly closed. With no internet or reliable phone service a car-horn system that could quickly alert people was set up.

"Then donated UHF radios arrived and they were a game changer," she says.

"We allocated them strategically around Rosedale."

The community of Rosedale worked together to prepare for further threats - checking hoses and fittings, watering, filling green bins, and securing vacant properties.

"We cleaned fridges and freezers, and taped bins closed to prevent contents spilling out in strong winds. We all checked on neighbours, and shared food and donated items. We used barbecues, camp stoves and lanterns until generators arrived. With no sewerage, we showered outside, washed up in buckets and monitored our flushing."

Vicki says the community welcomed the early arrival of fires, Council, police, Essential Energy, and other services; "thanking them all". They also relied on the network of 'outside' Rosedalians.

"We got messages out when we could and they organised support and donations of equipment, keeping the community on the ground committed, cohesive and contained," says Vicki.

"We didn't want to be anywhere else... Rosedale had given us all so much and it was our turn to give back."

"We still live among unbelievable destruction every day. But with such a strong community, we are confident Rosedale will recover and so will we all."

Rosedale beach, New Year's Day, JOSH BURKINSHAW

### Allan key in a crisis



Workshop coordinator Allan Crapp says he'd never seen as many generators in one place. "We were halfway through March before they were all disconnected and back to their bases."

In a crisis, it's the basics that count - access to safe drinking water, medical services, communications, and waste disposal.

It takes ingenuity and grit to keep these services going when power lines are down and fuel is in short supply in a shire effectively isolated from the rest of the state. Our workshop coordinator Allan Crapp is one of the shire's unsung heroes. His innovation, courage and commitment kept these services going through the dark days.

With a small team, Allan helped keep fire trucks on the road, water pumping from Deep Creek Dam, hospitals running, and emergency information being broadcast.

"Fuel was gold," says Allan, "and we ratted fuel from everywhere we could get it."

During the fires, petrol was critical to get holidaymakers and residents out of the danger zone, and diesel was crucial to fuel the fire trucks and keep generators cranking, but with no electricity, the shire's service stations were useless.

"None of the servos were set up to run on generator power," says Allan, "we had to get out there and set them up."

Other facilities did have their own generators but soon found themselves running out of fuel, so Allan cobbled together a mobile re-fueller using a sewer pod on the back of a truck to deliver fuel to essential services like the Moruya Hospital, Mount Wandera communications tower and Deep Creek water filtration plant.

"That was a lot of organisation and went on for weeks - I've never seen so many generators in my life," says Allan.

Through months of fire and with his own home coming under direct attack, Allan continued to beg or borrow fuel, unload and reload emergency supplies, and come up with nifty innovations and work-arounds.

Council's long-retired two-way radio system also came into its own during the crisis.

"When there was no phone reception, we could still talk to each other and organise work," says Allan, whose team repaired graders and fire trucks, retrieved broken down vehicles, and cleared access for remote fire-fighting teams. He says the commitment was remarkable.

"No matter the request, you only had to ask once and it got done - you could have complete trust."

Allan was also blown away by generosity of spirit in the wider community.

"Everyone seemed to have the same attitude and sense of urgency," he says. "We all understood our role and the difference we could make. We had local tradies coming in and asking if they could do anything... bus companies, removalists, businesses donating fuel.

"It was a privilege to be part of it all and it just goes to show what we can achieve together."

## Building a quicker DA process

We've already seen an influx of development applications from bushfire affected residents wanting to rebuild and we're doing all we can to make sure it goes smoothly.

While decisions around rebuilding are different for everyone, we recognise the process must be quick and easy.

Dedicated assessment officers will fast track applications to rebuild fire-affected buildings. Thanks to the generosity of Inner West and Canterbury Bankstown councils, five of their employees temporarily joined our team of seven development assessors during February and March to help process existing applications and make way for new ones. They processed 83 DAs in March alone.

Manager of development services Gary Bruce said the generosity of the Sydney councils made all the difference.

"I had staff directly affected by the fires too, so having this team arrive was like having the cavalry turn up. It not only helped the community by getting through the assessment work quickly, the generosity also provided a big morale boost for my team."

The NSW and Australian governments are covering the cost of bushfire cleanup for eligible property owners, and NSW Government fees associated with development applications have been waived for home owners rebuilding bushfire-affected buildings.

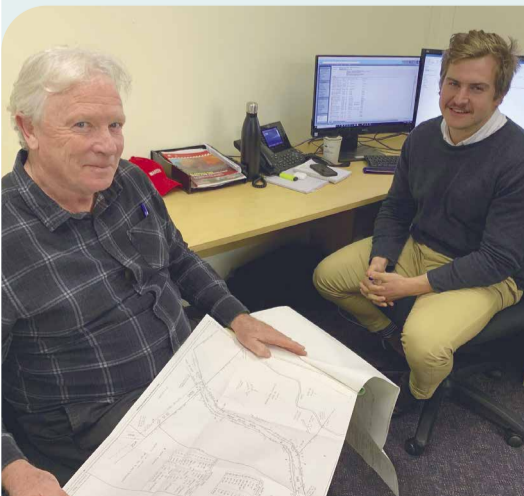
Council is offering to complete bushfire attack assessments for those rebuilding, and our staff were instrumental in changes to planning legislation that allow fire-impacted property owners to set up temporary storage or dwellings on their properties - no approval required, and no cost. The NSW Government has also covered the cost of council rates for six months for those who lost their homes.

Gary says a steady stream of development applications and enquiries are coming in now for bushfire re-builds.

"53 bushfire rebuild applications have been lodged to date, with 27 approved already in an average turnaround time of 15 days. In 23 cases, we've been able to simply issue a construction certificate."

For more information and assistance in the clean-up or rebuild phase, contact our Recovery Helpdesk:  
**4474 7434 | [recovery@esc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:recovery@esc.nsw.gov.au)**

Development assessment coordinator David Meagher with Cameron Gray, from Inner West Council.



## Youth recover their voice

In February we watched around 70 young people talk about their summer of bushfire, drought and flood - and they were not backward in coming forward.

Carroll College assistant principal Nathan Mansfield says his students returned from the event "absolutely buzzing". That event was a post-fires youth forum, hosted by Council's youth team at the Moruya Golf Club.

“Some said it was the first time they'd seen their dad cry,” says Angie. “They were upset about fires losing lives, they were upset about the loss of wildlife, and they were angry with government, who they call out of touch.”

Youth development officer Angie McMillan says it was one of the best experiences she's had working with the shire's young people.

"In no time at all they were in full voice... it really was quite powerful," says Angie.

Narooma and Moruya High Schools, Carroll College and St Peter's Anglican College were all represented, with other young people not currently at school also attending.

Angie says the kids came to the forum adamant "they did not want to talk specifically about the bushfires, so seeing

them find their voices, their courage in coming forward, seizing the opportunity as a real highlight".

Clear themes emerged, with some heartfelt talking going on.

"Some said it was the first time they'd seen their dad cry," says Angie. "They were upset about fires losing lives, they were upset about the loss of wildlife, and they were angry with government, who they call out of touch."

Angie said the kids were clear they weren't interested in a clinical approach to recovery, "they said they're not interested in talking to counsellors".

Instead there was a strong push for more events that build community; events they can attend with family and friends. Angie says the forum made space for young people to feel supported and free to talk.

"And that's where the magic happened," she says. "When they left, they were smiling, there were high fives...we felt good about it too."

Youth officer Angie McMillan with high school students at February's youth forum.

## ADF signs up to help

The men and women of the Australian Defence Force were a comforting presence during the fires, and a big help. They ran our donations centre at Mackay Park, transported emergency provisions to remote areas, and helped our crews clear trees to regain access to roads and properties.

After the New Year's Eve fire destroyed much of our beloved Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Garden, they were there too, rebuilding retaining walls and helping clear up.

Colonel Warwick Young visited to inspect the work and spoke with Mayor Liz, telling her: "When you sign up, this is why you do it. Our soldiers are yours."

Mayor Liz Innes with Colonel Warwick Young at the Botanic Garden in March.



## Opportunities abound for Mogo

At the beginning of 2020, Mogo became the focus of national and international attention - for the wrong reason. Bushfire swept through on New Year's Eve, destroying homes and several of the unique commercial properties lining the village's main thoroughfare and providing much of its charm.

The recovery and clean-up continues; efforts hampered by ongoing coronavirus pandemic restrictions. Yet as blackened rubble and burnt bush is shifted away, opportunities become apparent.

Both the private sector and government are showing confidence in the future of Mogo. There's potential for a once in a generation rebuild of the town and surrounds that enriches its distinct character.

The Business Council of Australia were quick to assist fire-hit Mogo - coordinating a pop-up mall that allowed businesses with lost shopfronts to continue trading - and maintains a strong interest as the town rebuilds.

We've hired adventure trail experts Dirt Art to work on the proposed mountain bike trails linking Mogo with Batehaven and the Botanic Garden. They say our trails could become a nationally significant adventure hub.

If successful, our grant applications could result in millions of dollars of trail building, and we're working on an investment prospectus to attract further spending that could see Mogo established as a premier adventure destination.

The owners of the Mogo Wildlife Park also have plans for the future, with accommodation and partnerships with other tourism operators in mind.

Council is injecting staff and resources into a rebuilding project that includes planning, urban design, and economic development. Two world-class consultancies - Complete Streets and Ethos Urban - have volunteered their expertise to Council for free. Buy-in from affected land owners wanting to collaborate is high.

The town's active business chamber continues to be a shining light, with president Richard Adams describing projects like these as providing the community with hope: "They will allow us to get back to some kind of normal".



# Through hell and high water

We lost electricity, we lost communications, but we did have water. It was no stroke of luck.

Our water team had prepared for the horror fire season. Back in September they placed large generators at key sites, started removing trees around assets, and changed operations to make sure water in the 26 storage reservoirs spread throughout the shire never dipped below 85 percent.

When power was lost on New Year's Eve morning, the first priority was connecting the massive 500kVA generator. It was already positioned on site to keep our only operational water treatment plant at Denhams Beach processing and distributing water.

However, the crew connecting the generator were forced to evacuate as fire

quickly surrounded the plant and nearby Deep Creek Dam.

It was an anxious wait. Without supply, the shire's towns and villages were relying on local reservoirs.

"It wasn't until midnight that we got the emergency generators going and the plant up and running," says Adam Bellis, the senior operator at Council's water treatment plant.

"It was hard to catch up on the deficit, because people were using so much water to protect their homes."

“...fire quickly surrounded the plant and nearby Deep Creek Dam

The continuing lack of power and communications over the following days and weeks meant our workers had to check and fill local water reservoirs manually.

Our water and sewer manager Brett Corven praises his team, who worked in trying circumstances away from their own families.

"Some of the guys worked 16-hour days for more than a week, and three of our operators had lost their own homes".

"We were lucky enough not to lose any major infrastructure, however repairing damage to our water and sewer networks will take time."

Fire-damaged flow meter at Deep Creek Dam pump station.

## Comfort and normality

Business-owners from one end of Eurobodalla to the other did remarkable things to help their local communities during our black summer.

Some threw open shop doors to let frightened evacuees sleep on their floors, others cooked meals by candlelight or handed out free coffees, still more donated their time, skills or goods to the fire-fighting effort.

With no power to operate ATMs, pump petrol, or refrigerate food, many residents found themselves in dire straits.

In Malua Bay, IGA supermarket owner Matt Burgess worked tirelessly while the big supermarkets were closed and took IOUs from people in need rather than turning them away.

Pharmacist Raj Gupta lost his own home, but kept his Malua Bay pharmacy open, supplying critical medication to people in need.

Motels, hotels and accommodation houses took in everyone - and everything - they could.

"We had dogs, cats, someone brought a chook, and one woman escaped on her horse, so we had that here too," Mark Ethell, from the Waterfront at Moruya, said.

Up and down the shire, restaurants offered free meals to people struggling to get by.

In Bodalla, Sharan Callender and the team at the bakery did their bit to keep people fed and connected. They stripped the shelves at both Bodalla Bakery and Gundry Store and took everything they could to the evacuation centre to feed the hungry. Then they went a step further, contacting their supplier and getting longlife milk to give away to people without refrigeration.

"Times like these make you get back to the basics," Sharan said. "With a bit of bread and some milk you can make something happen."

"We came home to Bodalla as soon as the power was back and on our first day of opening we made six times the amount of bread we would usually bake."

"People were looking for comfort and some normality."

Fleur Gunn at Dowry Store in Moruya couldn't feed the masses, so she focussed instead on helping wildlife. She bundled packs of beautiful handmade goods donated by local creatives, and using her social media reach, asked for donations to WIRES in return for a chance to win a prize pack.

"We wanted to do something and our customers really wanted to help as well," Fleur said.

"It was just awful hearing about the injured and dead animals, so we decided to help WIRES."

"Our makers and our customers were just so generous. We set out to raise \$3,000 and ended up raising \$10,000."

## Keeping Bodalla connected

Working from the community hall, Bodalla village residents quickly rolled up their sleeves to support neighbouring communities devastated by bushfire. Volunteers came together to establish a local hub, filling the void before larger organisations could mobilise, and providing immediate relief to more than 500 families, 15 community organisations and five fire stations.

The hub's members gathered and coordinated food, water, clothing, bedding, cooking and medical supplies from local and interstate donors, then ferried to those in need up and down the shire. The hub also provided emergency accommodation and access to information and services as they came online.

Out of those tough days grew a desire to stay connected. An enthusiastic small team found funding from the South East Primary Health Network, and will produce Moo News, a bi-monthly community newsletter for the Bodalla district.

The Moo News team expect it to start circulating by July or August this year and welcome interest and involvement from the community - contact [mooforthenews@gmail.com](mailto:mooforthenews@gmail.com)

Untouched gateway Bodalla, LACHLAN CALLENDER





## “Locked the gate and crossed our fingers”

Just five months after the New Year's Eve bushfire swept through, there's new life aplenty at the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Garden, ranked by TripAdvisor as the shire's top attraction.

While the Garden is loved and visited by locals and tourists alike, its mission is the protection and conservation of regional flora. Manager Michael Anlezark spent years developing the site, and was rightfully proud of the Garden's gleaming new facilities, carefully curated collection and pristine surrounds.

A realist, Michael says his heart was heavy when he locked the Garden's entrance gates in December 2019, knowing “it was highly likely the fire was going to go through”.

Michael and the staff had already done their utmost; removing all the furniture from the veranda, relocating combustibles away from buildings, clearing and re-clearing gutters.

“The last things we did were put the valuable stuff in the new herbarium building, load the cars, lock the gate and cross our fingers,” Michael says. It was 48 hours before he could return and the scene was heartbreaking - the front gates and welcome sign had melted, pipes had melted, water was gushing everywhere.

“More than 30 years of things accumulated to run the place - every bit of it gone.”

Amazingly - or maybe not - some buildings were still standing. Recently built to current fire ratings, protected by annual

fire maintenance programs and clear asset protection zones, the visitors centre, herbarium, café and education hub stood undamaged.

Still the task ahead is immense; more than 95 percent of the 32 hectare site was seriously burnt and many precious plant species lost. More than 250 dead or dangerous trees are being removed to make the site safe.

“We lost all the shrub cover,” says Michael, “but the natural vegetation is growing back, including the groundcovers”.

Only 20 percent of the ornamental plants will survive - they took 30 years to collect and must be replaced by painstaking collection of wild specimens or begged and borrowed from sister botanic gardens.

“Fortunately we are part of the only bio-regional partnership in Australia, which we formed a couple of years ago.

“We share expertise and knowledge, along with specimens of rare and significant flora,” says Michael, “and that's key, because this is not only a recreational facility - it's a scientific one”.

“More than 30 years of things accumulated to run the place - every bit of it gone

Michael, his staff and the Friends of the Garden are buoyed by the stream of calls, emails, offers of help, and letters of support. Michael says Eurobodalla's is one of the largest volunteer supported botanic gardens in the country.

“So many people have put so much into this garden over decades. We'll rebuild better than ever but it's going to take a lot of work.”

New fire-rated buildings at the Botanic Garden stand unburnt.

and birds lost, it was imperative to help the survivors in every way possible.

As flooding rains poured down on ground laid bare during the black summer, our team joined with local landholders, community groups and colleagues north and south to find the best ways to keep ash and sediment out of our creeks and rivers.

Soon after the fires had passed, with assistance from South East Local Land Services, they were training locals on the best methods to control run-off; landholders, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Landcare all joined the effort.

They aren't stopping there. Council has secured a \$1.1 million NSW Government grant for more work to protect and repair Eurobodalla's waterways after our summer trifecta of drought, fire and flood. Another \$427,281 will be shared with Shoalhaven and Bega Valley councils to develop the south east catchment and waterways bushfire recovery plan.

The money will see us working on public land and with private landholders to put in place effective erosion control, water quality testing, weed control and revegetation.

Ash and mud washed down from the hills after the fires and flood. Our sustainability team are working hard to keep sediment like this out of Eurobodalla's waterways.



## More than just a pretty place

Pretty Point is a tranquil spot in the middle of suburbia and perhaps that's why so many people hold it dear. For decades the 7.5 hectare headland just south of Malua Bay has been prized by those living nearby.

In the late 80s a neighbourhood of willing workers banded together, transforming Pretty Point from a barren dumping ground into an oasis for nature, and for people; offering walking tracks, bird and whale watching, and picnics with ocean views.

Long-time local Sheila Box is the coordinator for the McKenzies Beach Landcare group and says she would often walk out on the headland “to dream”.

“Our original vision was to create a haven for birds and animals, a place where the trees being planted would one day be full of life,” says Sheila.

“We had the reserve closed to vehicles and got started tackling the blackberry, with helpers coming from as far as Canberra to lend a hand. There was also early help from our neighbours at Lilli Pilli/Malua Bay Landcare.”

Unfortunately, the headland haven was hard hit by intense bushfire on New Year's Eve, with almost all vegetation lost. Just a few eucalypts still stand, bright green leaves bursting from blackened trunks - a last testament to the visionary community who planted them 30 years previously.

Now seedlings are emerging through the ash.

Sheila says the McKenzies Beach Landcare group will again pick up tools to restore the natural haven of Pretty Point, using funds recently provided by Landcare Australia's Bushfire Recovery Program. They will focus on replanting vegetation to provide food and habitat for endangered species in the area, install sheltering nest-boxes while the headland recovers, and assist specialists contracted to control opportunistic weeds erupting from barren earth.

Sheila knows the reserve will again be a pretty as a picture, and she still walks out to the point to dream.

“Even though it's burnt, there are still nooks and crannies where you can find beauty, and quiet, and enjoy the view.”

Sheila Box, McKenzies Beach Landcare coordinator.



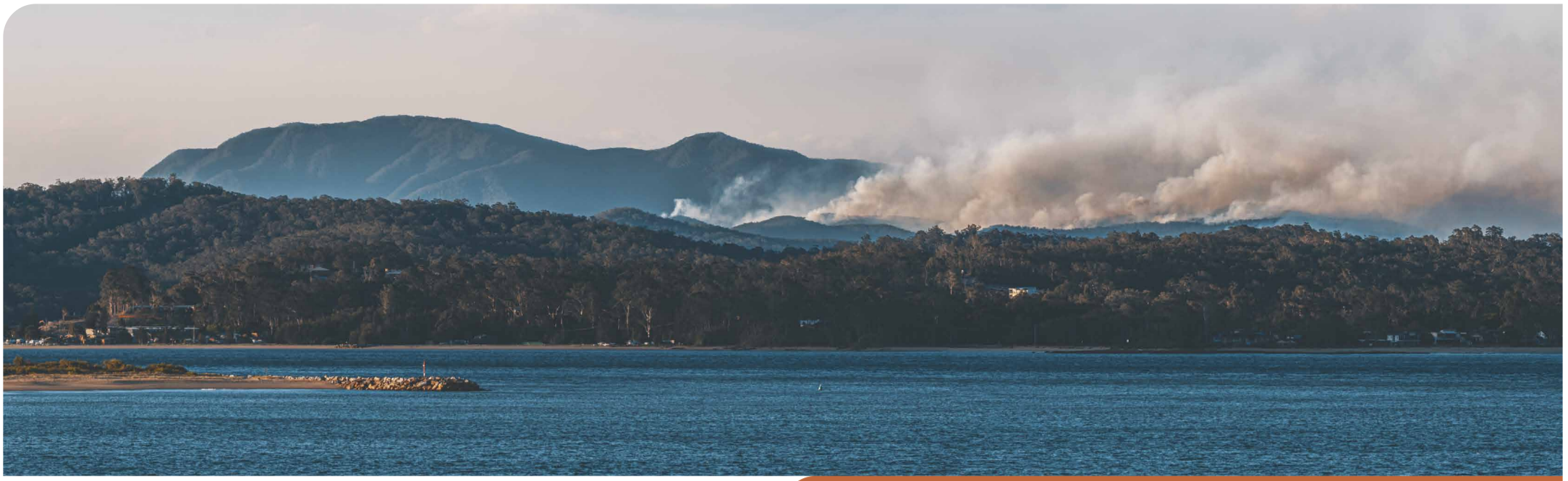
## Nurturing care endures

As soon as it was safe, our sustainability team went to work; installing feed and water stations for struggling wildlife, delivering newly crafted nest-boxes to provide shelter for the parrots and possums whose homes had gone up in smoke, and controlling erosion and sediment to help protect our precious drinking water supply.

The team went back to areas they'd be working for many years. In places,

a decade of nurturing care at a favourite fragile spot had burnt away in a single day of fire.

Working with wildlife and animal welfare groups and plenty of passionate individuals, our team helped distribute much needed feed for animals and birds stressed by the bushfires and unable to find enough to eat in the aftermath. Normally, feeding wildlife is discouraged but with so many animals



# Emergency management explained

The bushfires were handled by an incident management team, led by the Rural Fire Service and supported by NSW Forestry and the National Parks and Wildlife Service - also expert firefighters. This team coordinated the firefighting response from the Moruya RFS building. Down the road at the Moruya RSL hall, a multi-agency team formed Eurobodalla's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), supporting fires by managing all other aspects of the emergency.

The EOC comprised representatives from NSW Police, Eurobodalla Shire Council, Essential Energy, NSW SES, NSW Ambulance, NSW Disaster Welfare, NSW Local Health District, Transport for NSW, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Agriculture and Animal Services and NSW Local Lands Services.

Council supported the EOC by providing Local Emergency Management Officers, support staff, local infrastructure management, and preparation of official emergency updates for media - also published on Council's Facebook page and website.

Council made facilities available for evacuation centres, which are operated by the NSW Government. Around 60 evacuation centres were in operation simultaneously across NSW at the time, five times the typical maximum in any one emergency.

Eurobodalla's three evacuation centres registered more than 10,000 people. The NSW Government-contracted welfare agencies who would normally open up evacuation centres couldn't reach Eurobodalla because the roads were cut, so our staff and councillors stepped in at 4am on New Year's Eve and got things going until trained personnel arrived.

The support of our local licensed clubs was a godsend for many, providing shelter, food and company. Generous families and friends housed people and pets, while surf clubs and aged-care facilities also opened their doors and hearts.

The resilience and self-reliance of our community was remarkable, and we deserve to be proud of our collective strength and compassion during those dark days.

Clyde Mountain fires, JOSH BURKINSHAW

## What Council did during the fires...

- Played a crucial role as part of the multi-agency team managing the emergency (see Adapt, Innovate, Overcome story).
- Set up Moruya and Narooma evacuation centres in the absence of NSW Government-contracted welfare agencies, delayed by cut roads. Then continued to provide vital local knowledge and resources to the agencies responsible for running the centres, including at Batemans Bay.
- With RFS, NSW Police and Transport for NSW, successful mass evacuation of tens of thousands of visitors out of Eurobodalla, allowing the emergency response to better care for residents.
- Used more than 120,000 litres of diesel to refuel firefighting vehicles and generators at critical facilities (see Allan's story).
- Provided generators and re-wired evacuation centres, petrol stations, aged care facilities and other critical services during power outages, with the assistance of Essential Energy.
- Traffic control for multiple highway and local road closures and re-openings.
- Provided Moruya Airport as a base for firefighting aircraft.
- Vegetation removal and construction of containment lines ahead of fires - this mitigated impacts on highways and roads, and better protected emergency personnel, residents relocating, and critical infrastructure including Mt Wandera comms towers.
- Removal of dangerous burnt trees on the Kings Highway (working with Forestry NSW, local contractors and Transport for NSW) to reopen highway.
- Collaborated with fuel suppliers, Police and Transport for NSW to arrange emergency fuel deliveries into the Eurobodalla and Bega Valley shires through fire grounds to support firefighting efforts (vehicle and air), and to supply fuel to residents and visitors so they could evacuate.
- Cleared George Bass Drive immediately after New Year's Eve fire to maintain north-south transport route into and out of the shire, while Princes Highway was impassable.
- Restored access to hundreds of kilometres of local roads, removing dangerous vegetation with Forestry NSW, Transport for NSW and contractors.
- Established emergency sidetracks and temporarily repaired damaged or destroyed timber bridges. (One staff member chainsawed burning deck timbers from a bridge to save the bridge girders.)
- Maintained water and sewer system, without power and telecommunications, to secure critical water supply for firefighting and drinking water (see Hell or High Water story).
- Arranged delivery of generators, food, water and fodder to fire-affected farmers in the days after the fires, working with ADF personnel and Local Lands Service.
- Conducted more than 200 welfare checks on vulnerable community members.
- Provided escorts through firegrounds for agencies to work on damaged telecommunications towers, electricity stations, and to rural properties for assessment and euthanising of livestock.
- Prepared official emergency updates distributed to local media and published on Council's Facebook page and website. Delivered paper copies to neighbourhoods without power.
- Managed donated goods using our staff and depots, then arranged ADF personnel to set up facility at Mackay Park.
- Received and managed 400+ offers of assistance, including accommodation, trade skills, donations (food, clothing, financial support) grants and sponsorship opportunities - and distributed via appropriate charities.

Bumbo Road, LACHLAN CALLENDER

## Media Stars

Eurobodalla's media outlets were absolute stars during the fires.

They were right there with us 24/7, keeping us informed and connected with each other.

Sustaining professional and empathetic emergency coverage for such a long time requires commitment and genuine care for the community.

Thank you journos and broadcasters. Your familiar faces, voices and bylines were a lifeline and a comfort.





## And after...

- Opened, managed and staffed Recovery Centres in Batemans Bay and Narooma in collaboration of NSW Office of Emergency Management (more than 6,000 households registered), and provided free transport with Council's Community Transport.
- Coordinated 14 outreach sessions in fire impacted communities, with more than 500 residents attending.
- Established a Recovery Helpdesk at Council when COVID-19 restrictions forced the closure of recovery centres and outreach program.
- Letter from Council to 700+ fire-impacted residents to reassure that support continues during COVID-19 pandemic, reinforce key information for financial, rebuilding and mental health support, advise of recovery helpdesk.
- Implementing case management service funded by NSW Government.
- Worked with NSW Bushfire Housing Assistance Response Team, non-government agencies and charities to identify housing opportunities and solutions.
- More than 80 properties owned by non-resident ratepayers made available for emergency and longer term rental as a result of a letter from the Mayor.
- Participation in recovery committees at all levels of government to ensure immediate and future community needs are met. Numerous meetings with government ministers to advise community needs, including collaboration with state and federal members of parliament.
- Prepared submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry with 12 key recommendations. Same report submitted to Bushfire Royal Commission and responded to commission's follow up questions (see Lessons from the Fire story).
- Successfully advocated for NSW Government to waive all Council rates (water, sewer, waste), not just the land component, for fire-impacted households eligible for six months rate relief.
- Established the Eurobodalla Disaster Relief Fund to accept donations and distribute funds to impacted residents and businesses to spend in the community.
- Set up recovery webpages on Council's website to provide trusted information to the community.

- Work with media and using Council's communication platforms to make community aware of recovery support and activities.
- Prepared plans to upgrade Council-owned facilities used by the NSW Government as evacuation centres, including power supply, kitchen equipment, showers and toilets. Seeking NSW Government funding to implement.
- Supported set-up of Headspace in Batemans Bay.
- Connected local high schools and Headspace to support wellbeing in school settings.
- Hosted forums for youth and youth sector workers in February to establish their recovery needs.
- Worked with health providers to simplify access to mental health support and information.
- Preparing evidence-based program of community development, arts and cultural and recreational programs that provide social and economic benefits towards recovery.\*
- Environmental health officers and planners assisted RFS and Public Works Advisory with first and second round of building impact assessment inspections, plus provision of building age data.
- Free internet, scanning and photocopying at libraries for twelve months.\*
- Successfully advocated for changes to NSW Government regulation to allow temporary accommodation and storage on bushfire impacted properties, for pop-up shops, and to make demolition of bushfire destroyed or damaged properties exempt from development application process and cost.
- Advocating for Biodiversity Conservation Act to be switched off to allow rebuilding of homes and specifically to enable establishment of compliant asset protection zones.
- Established team of planners and support staff focussed on rebuilding enquiries and development applications - 53 rebuild DAs processed by early May.
- Arranged Housing Industry Australia forum attended by more than 150 builders and impacted residents to discuss bushfire clean up, planning controls and rebuilding.

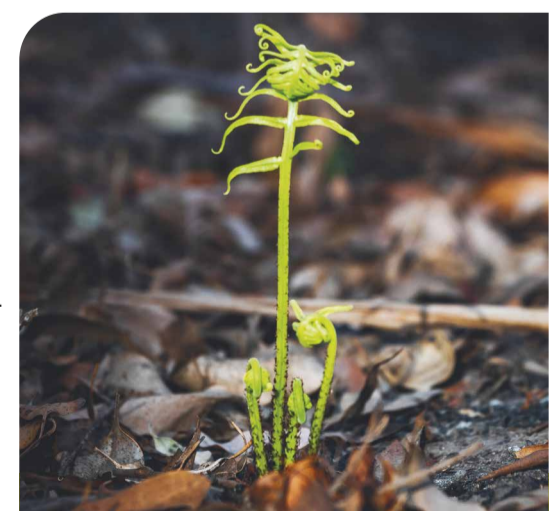
- Free onsite sewer management system inspection fees for fire-affected properties plus advice on most cost-effective way to reconnect if rebuilding.
- Providing bushfire attack level certificates for bushfire impacted properties free of charge.
- Investigating ways to allow rebuilding in areas where native vegetation and size and density of lots create bushfire management compliance challenges.
- Successfully advocated that the NSW Government waive the Long Service Levy component of development application fees for fire-impacted property owners.
- Provided catch-up and additional kerbside waste collection services as soon as safe to do so.
- Accepting free trailer/ute loads of bushfire impacted waste and green waste.
- Developed solution with NSW Government for disposal of bushfire waste that does not adversely impact ability to manage waste during and after bushfire clean-up (bushfire clean-up will see four times the usual annual volume of waste received at Surf Beach and Brou tips in three months).
- Repairing 490km of fire-damaged local roads, including installation of new guide posts, signs and guardrail.
- Repair or replacement of 18 fire-damaged or destroyed bridges, mostly west of the highway in rural areas.
- Work with NSW Government and Minderoo to provide temporary on-farm accommodation for landowners while they rebuild.
- Arranged temporary lockable containers for farm equipment and tools for landowners who have lost their farm sheds.
- Assisted rural farmers to re-establish fencing.
- Tasked ADF personnel to clean-up fencing on public boundaries, assist in clearing access to rural properties, and assist in rebuilding at Eurobodalla Botanic Garden.
- Secured grant to support Blaze Aid, plus assisted Moruya camp set-up.
- Ongoing assistance to impacted rural landowners with weed and pest management.
- Assisted oyster growers to access support.
- Emergency erosion and sediment control works in catchments with Local Lands Services.
- Supported WIRES with wildlife water and feed stations, and nesting boxes.

- Coordinated successful NSW Government grant for south east councils to identify high risk sites for environmental remediation works.
- Successful in obtaining \$1.1M grant from NSW Government for sediment and erosion control and revegetating waterways on public and private land.
- Assisted Mogo businesses and BizRebuild to establish Mogo's pop-up mall.
- Preparing plan for restoration of Mogo commercial area, retaining unique character and assisting ease of redevelopment - pro bono work with consulting firm.\*
- Developed free three-month business development training program focused on moving businesses online and resilience.
- Met in late January with business chambers and industry representatives to understand the impacts on business and their needs. Provided this feedback to government towards support package development.
- Tourism and business industry newsletters increased frequency and focussed on financial assistance and support available.
- Advocacy to bring forward government funding for planned projects including Mogo mountain bike trails, southern water storage (dam), Narooma recreation precinct, Bay foreshore.
- Rent relief for tenants at Council-owned premises.
- Event hosting fees waived for six months.\*
- Outdoor dining license fees waived for six months.\*
- Commercial pool inspection fees waived for six months.\*
- Food premise inspection fees waived and free advice on moving to takeaway service under COVID-19 restrictions.\*
- Adapted tourism marketing campaigns post-fires and in readiness for lifting of pandemic travel restrictions.
- Promotion of buy local campaigns.

\* Full or part funded by NSW and Australian government bushfire grant.

Replacing fire-damaged signs near Tomakin

And there's more to come.  
Read our recovery action plan at  
[www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery)



## Recovery Helpdesk

Support for fire-impacted residents. Let us help with information about rebuilding, DAs, clean-up, financial and housing assistance, mental health support.

P 4474 7434

E [recovery@esc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:recovery@esc.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery)

Regrowth, JOSH BURKINSHAW

# Adapt, innovate, overcome



## Lessons from the fires

Council submitted a comprehensive report to the NSW Government Bushfire Inquiry and the national Royal Commission.

We were part of this emergency; we heard our staff, we heard our community. Here's a summary of our key recommendations to government:

- Manage fuel loads in the landscape and examine potential for low intensity burns used by Indigenous Australians.
  - Make power supply and telecommunications more resilient to disasters, along with highways and major roads, water and sewerage systems, hospitals, schools, emergency operations centres and evacuation centres.
  - Implement regulations that require business continuity, especially power supply, for critical businesses like petrol stations, major food retailers and aged care providers.
  - Review evacuation centres (run by NSW Government), including catering arrangements, train more locally-based NSW Government personnel to work in emergency operations and evacuation centres, and fund upgrades to council-owned buildings used as evacuation centres.
  - Remove the need for expensive environmental studies or biodiversity offsets for property owners wishing to establish asset protection zones around dwellings.
  - Ensure well-resourced and capable emergency response in each local government area, well supported by emergency management structures, including new integrated emergency services operations centre in Moruya.
- The full submissions can be found at [www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery) Community members are welcome to provide feedback at [council@esc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@esc.nsw.gov.au)

#Sharp4PM was the Emergency Operations Centre in-joke during this summer's bushfire crisis but the sentiments behind the hashtag (courtesy of a grateful Facebooker) were anything but in jest.

Our director of infrastructure's unwavering commitment and cool head in a crisis drew praise from all quarters: "In terms of civic leadership, Warren Sharpe was a great example," says Local Emergency Operations Controller chief inspector Greg Flood.

"He was always calm and considered, and his investment in the community was obvious. He was just everywhere. There were long hours but that didn't seem to dull his focus on keeping the community safe, keeping them informed, and making sure we came out the other end.

"He knew the areas to go to, he knew the people, and he was out there speaking to people on the ground. His knowledge of the community, his genuine compassion for people in remote areas, it was amazing."

Warren marked 35 years at Eurobodalla Council during the emergency but there was no time for celebrations. In fact he'd begun preparing for a horror bushfire season last autumn, noting this was our third dry summer and we'd dodged the bullet so far.

"That wasn't going to keep happening," he says. "At the end of August I issued instructions to make our infrastructure as resilient as possible."


That move got Council on the front foot and Warren's catchcry of 'adapt, innovate, and overcome' kept it there. It was as if 35 years of local government experience was distilled into dealing with this one crisis - he didn't take a backward step.

The EOC at the Moruya RSL Hall brought together leadership teams from all support services involved in the massive firefighting effort. With a dozen committed and switched on leaders in the room, decisive action was

being taken. Inspector Flood says there were no power trips or big egos.

"Decisions were made and implemented very quickly," he says.

And they had to be. The fire that tore through the shire on New Year's Eve was twice as long, twice as wide, and twice as fast as predicted - taking just 12 hours to

 We need to make sure destruction on this scale is never repeated

get from the range to the coast.

Warren says the right people were available so decisions could be made.

"I had 24-hour access to Mayor Liz Innes and MP Andrew Constance, and they were fantastic. Fiona Phillips was in regular contact. Greg and his police team did a terrific job. My fellow LEMO Rob Burke was outstanding, as was Council's communications manager Kellee Pisanos, who prepared the emergency updates and managed hundreds of media calls.

"It's the most challenging thing I have ever done by far and the best team environment I have ever worked in. Everyone did such an amazing job, especially our Council teams."

Much has been learnt from the 2019-2020 bushfires. Council put together a 24-page report for the NSW Government Bushfire Inquiry and the national Royal Commission.

Warren says Council wants state and federal governments to act on the report's key recommendations, which include making sure that telecommunications, power, roads, and water supply are more resilient.

"We need to make sure destruction on this scale is never repeated."

Emergency managers Warren Sharpe, Chief Inspector Greg Flood, Rob Burke

## Inscribing our memories

When people across the globe think of last summer's bushfires in the Eurobodalla, many see them through Josh Burkinshaw's eyes.

The young locksmith's images of the raw and savage beauty of the beast that stalked our shire for months were reproduced across the world.

When Josh first started photographing the fires in November 2019, he had no idea he was recording history.

He bought his first camera just four years before and says it was more good luck than good management that enabled him to capture the evocative images that later told our story to an international audience.

"I took my first photo of the fires on the 26th of November," Josh said. "I didn't realise how big it was going to be."

Like many in the Eurobodalla, Josh sporadically fought fires throughout December and into January.

His iconic shot of Point Upright ablaze was taken only after a mate told him to get his camera - a Sony A7iii - out.

"It was more luck than anything that I even had my camera with me," he said.

"I'd left my car in town and I didn't want to leave my camera there, so I'd chucked it in the back of my mate's car."

But even after he captured his stunning images, Josh was reluctant to use them.

"When I took the photos, I was aware some people had already been through a firestorm and were living with the aftermath," he said.

"I didn't want to bring back bad memories or create negative feedback but I wanted to capture photos that would let the world know what was happening here.

"I took photographs but I made sure I never got in anyone's way. We all had more important priorities, we had each other to protect."

Some of Josh's images went on to attract 750,000 views on Facebook and draw the attention of Sydney media, the New York Post and Al Jazeera.

But he refused to take photographs of anyone's burnt home, unless they specifically asked him to.

"After the New Year's Eve fires, I just put the camera down for five days and helped protect my friend's mum's house," he said.

In retrospect, Josh is glad he documented the lead-up to the New Year's Eve disaster and wishes he'd taken more video at the time.

"It's one of those things that I hope we never see again," he said. "But I think it's changed our community for the better, and I'm grateful for that."

Our thanks to Josh and to Lachlan Callender for providing beautiful images for this special edition.

# The things we must keep dear

When Liz Innes talks about the impact of bushfire, it's not from some ivory tower.

Liz and her family were on the frontline, protecting their home of 24 years as bushfire engulfed them on New Year's Eve. It was a scenario that Liz's late father Merv had long predicted.

"My father said fire had burnt from the mountains to the coast before and it would happen again - but with more people in the way," says Liz.

That chilling prophecy came true when the Currowan fire tore through the Mayor's property at Runnyford. Hearing the roar of the flames, a friend staying at the property woke Liz and her family about 2am.

**“My blood runs cold when I think people could still have been in their beds...”**

"We've lived out here for a long time, we knew what we were up for," says Liz. "We'd prepared the property for months - starting at the main house and working our way around the cottage and stable.

Liz wonders could they have done more to save the shed that "was last on our list and we lost, but you have to let that go".

Although Liz always planned to stay and defend, she says keeping daughter Ivy with her was a tough call.

"We knew we could be trapped and there'd be no getting in a car to out-run it," she said, "but this old house is solid brick and we were well prepared, with the river right there."

A little help from on-high never goes astray.

"I have one cotton shirt from my dad, he passed away 10 years ago - it's very precious. Ivy didn't want to put it on but I said: 'I need you to. I know he will have his wings wrapped around you and nothing will happen to you'."

As the flames raced closer, Liz called the shire's local emergency management officer Warren Sharpe.

"I rang Sharpy at 2.45am and said to get the warnings out; it was coming and coming fast. That was an important call because the fire wasn't predicted to hit until later in the day.

"My blood runs cold when I think people could still have been in their beds not knowing the monster was on their doorstep."

With no phone service by this time, Liz was desperate to check on her mum and the community in Batemans Bay. After the nightmarish fight to save the property it took seven hours to clear a path out to the road.

On reaching the evacuation centre, Liz says she was greeted by chaos, with overworked



support staff looking after "unimagined numbers of very scared people".

"I put on my mayor's hat and used my contacts to get what we needed," says Liz.

There was no time to stop, more needed to be done. She recalls driving through the smoke into Nerrigundah as apocalyptic.

While dealing with a devastated community in the shire's north, Liz - with emergency managers and other councillors - held meetings to prepare residents in the south. "When we were talking to the community at Moruya and Narooma, they knew the threat was real, they could see the raw emotion of what people were already going through."

Liz says her memory for much of that time is a blur. What stands clear is the strength of the community, the way people came together.

"Everyone putting their shoulder to the wheel, everyone wanting to help," says Liz.

**“I put on my mayor's hat and used my contacts to get what we needed”**

"One young homeless man - his swag under the footy-club deck - would do anything. If a box needed lifting, he'd lift it, if toilets needed cleaning, he'd clean them. On day five, with things calming down, I said 'you can go home now' and he replied 'I haven't got a home to go to, I want to stay and help'.

Liz knows how much needs to be done to get the shire back on its feet, particularly with the one-two punch of coronavirus.

"We've got some serious lessons to learn from this disaster but there are things we must keep dear. I want us to hold on to that connectedness, that feeling of community."

Essential Energy's Jy Fraser, Mayor Liz, Bega MP Andrew Constance, and Warren Sharpe at the EOC



Regrowth II, JOSH BURKINSHAW

## Eurobodalla says thank you

What a summer. I'm pretty sure every person in Eurobodalla is still on a roller-coaster of emotion after this season of bushfires, drought and flood.

In those dark times it was fantastic to see the outpouring of support - here in the shire and from across the country. Before, during and after the fires, neighbours were helping neighbours and we were blessed by the generosity of ordinary Australians across the nation donating goods and money, time and effort.

Over 100 days - between 26 November 2019 and 4 March 2020 - from when the Currowan fire first sparked until all fires in Eurobodalla were finally declared out, we saw 79 percent of our beautiful shire burn. That's more than 271,000 hectares of directly impacted land, including some of our towns and villages and over 90 percent of our state forests and national parks.

Through it all our emergency services worked tirelessly to keep us safe. On several occasions we had areas cut off, without power, without communications. It breaks my heart that three people lost their lives.

The firies are this country's true heroes and I want to again express my gratitude for the months and months of long hours and tremendous effort. My thanks join those of all Australians.

Over 2,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged in the Eurobodalla but that number would have been so much higher if it wasn't for these amazing people.

The firies were supported by agencies and community groups - too many to list by name. Some of that was formally coordinated work, drawing on a well of expertise and compassion from dedicated professionals. Other efforts were less formal but just as crucial - individuals and neighbourhoods banding together to get things done. It still brings a lump to my throat.

This recovery was always going to take a long time. As I write, the coronavirus lockdown is upon us, and that means our recovery will take even longer still. I encourage you to keep supporting our community, supporting our businesses and most of all, supporting each other.

Mayor Liz Innes, on behalf of Eurobodalla