



ANNUAL REPORT 17 August 2021

Welcome

With pleasure and pride, I welcome, and present to you, the members of MADRA, the first Annual Report of Mallacoota and District Recovery Association Inc.

MADRA was formed following the 2019/20 bushfires which devastated much of the east coast of Australia, but especially our beloved towns and district.

We lost a much-loved local, Fred Becker, who succumbed to a medical condition and died while fighting the fires. Eighty-three per cent of land area burned and 123 homes were destroyed. Many more properties suffered damage. There was significant loss and devastation of wildlife, forest, and infrastructure.

In our district's living memory, there has been no comparable event.

The fires were followed by flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of the triple disasters of fire, flood and pandemic are ongoing and include mental and other health issues, rebuilding challenges, damage to our natural environment and to our economy.

Acknowledgements

Shortly after the fires, a group of locals known as The Thinking Group proposed a model for community-led disaster recovery. I would like to acknowledge their foresight, energy, and achievement, for *their* work set the stage for our CRC's development. They worked with government agencies including the newly formed Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC), and I would like to applaud them all for their effort and achievements.

A formal election process followed, where 44 locals put up their hand for the twelve committee positions. Our community gave us a committee comprising a diverse mix of age, gender, interest, locality, and experience. MADRA now has a membership of 792, reflecting well the makeup of the community we represent.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all those on the MADRA committee, many of whom have put in an enormous effort, enabling MADRA to be where we are today. Thank you also to those family and friends of the committee members who tended to our needs over the year. No small feat, I can tell you.

Appreciation goes to all those on working groups associated with MADRA. Without you, our community would have not been able to achieve all that it has. A special mention going to Lyn Harwood and Helen Bryan. Their work has been amazing.

We have been very fortunate to have excellent administrative support, initially by Amy Preston and then by Sabine Amos and Maggie Langdon. Without these people, we would not have been able to manage the massive workload of administrative duties.

The support from BRV and East Gippsland Council has been critical, and I thank all those involved, especially Roberto Venturini, Stuart McConnell, Carmel Flynn and Jason Helps. Also, our local Hub and Place managers, Katie Symes and Eva Grunden, who hit the ground running and assisted with our establishment. And our Mayor, Mendy Urie.

Thanks also go to MinterEllison, for providing much appreciated pro bono legal advice, and to Glenda Phillips, who has helped with our financial management.

MADRA's first committee meeting was held in June 2020 and since then we have had 39 general committee meetings and many more executive meetings.

Relationships

Early on, we recognised the importance of developing close working relationships with community organisations, groups and external agencies. These relationships have been based upon mutual respect, and open and transparent communication. By reflecting the voice of our community in offering locally informed solutions, and not just outlining the problems, I believe that this approach has benefited us greatly. We are listened to, we are consulted and we are heard.

These relationships have been of great importance to our functioning, and have, amongst many others, included:

- Locally:

- The Mallacoota Community Bank
- MDBATA
- Halls and Rec. committee
- Lions Club

- Government agencies, with close contact at all levels of:

- BRV
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Parks Vic and DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)
- National Recovery and Resilience Agency (previously NBRA)

- Politicians: Both federal and state, notably Darren Chester and Tim Bull

- Multiple community members who have assisted with their time, energy, and expertise to further develop projects and assist in our recovery

- And the many MADRA members who have had input into, and voted upon, the Recovery Plan.

Advocacy

As a voice for our community, we 'stick up' for individuals, organisations, and our community, in matters which do not fit neatly within policy guidelines, are not taking place in a timely manner, are causing distress, or do not align with our community values and preferences. There have been more than 48 letters of advocacy written and many more phone calls and emails.

Areas of greatest need for our advocacy have, and continue to be:

- Housing, both with clean-up, rebuild and rental issues.
- Fuel Management, with assessment and development of plans for future disasters, and

- Mental health, social work and casework provision.

Letters of Support

Government funding bodies indicated that a letter of support from MADRA would strengthen bushfire recovery project funding applications from community groups. We have provided letters of support for more than 30 organisations and/or projects. These have been developed to represent a mini business case for each individual application.

Achievements

Forming from scratch into a fully functioning recovery organisation has had its challenges, but also many wins. We have become an incorporated association, with vision, mission and rules to reflect our perceived role. We acknowledge that others may have had a different approach to some aspects of this, and we have tried where so to inform them of the reasoning behind our decisions. We are a charity and have achieved Deductible Gift Recipient status, enabling donations from individuals and philanthropic organisations requiring that structure.

With a lot of hard work, expertly led by Jenny Lloyd, we have developed a very detailed and community-endorsed Recovery Plan. This plan has been used positively by multiple agencies, grant writers, and politicians to enable the maximum benefit to flow to our district.

Since the voting on projects for the Recovery Plan took place, we have commenced work with BRV, EGSC and others on the priority projects.

COVID restrictions have made the job of MADRA, along with many others, very difficult – challenging both us and the community to ensure adequate consultation and communication. This we believe we have achieved to the best of our ability.

Many people have worked hard on our recovery: volunteer organisations, sports and interest groups, our politicians, our funding and delivery partners, and many individuals.

By working together, much has already been achieved. Since the fires, well over \$34 million has already been committed, with indications of more to come. This is the result of the hard work of community groups and individuals, supported by MADRA.

Some of the projects that, through community effort, have been achieved include:

- The Mallacoota Main Hall, where so many people sheltered on the night of the fires, is to be refurbished, enabling us to be better prepared in the event of another disaster.
- The Mallacoota Mudbrick Pavilion has received an offer of funding for an upgrade.
- Genoa Bridge is well under way with its reconstruction.
- Funding for upgrade to the facilities at the Genoa Hall and tennis courts.
- Genoa-Mallacoota Road upgrade.
- Our Lakes and Beach Infrastructure is being built back better to suit our varying local conditions.
- Our volunteer emergency services will be enhanced by the expansion of the SES Shed to make a home for our Coast Guard and Surf Lifesavers.
- Fuel Management planning continues, with input from multiple agencies and locals, committed to achieve the best possible outcome for future events.
- Support services for mental health, youth work, case work and social work are ongoing.
- Complex site assessment for problematic rebuilds is available.
- Grant writing, business plan and other assistance provided through BRV's 'suite of services'.
- Wilderness Workspace feasibility study.

- Mallacoota and Genoa Streetscaping.
- A Skate Park for Mallacoota.
- Funds for Mallacoota Pony Club and Mallacoota Golf Club.
- Mallacoota Abalone Co-op rebuild.
- A new Kindergarten.
- The Bunker Museum Native Garden Walk.
- Emergency Equipment for the district.
- An equipped Fire Shed for Genoa.
- Croajingalong Centre for Communication the Arts building extension.
- Funding through efforts by MSEG (Mallacoota Sustainable Energy Group) for battery storage and generator, enhancing the energy resilience of Mallacoota. Work is underway for solar development also.
- NBN replaced underground and delivered ahead of schedule.
- Gipsy Point is to get a 4G base station for communication.
- Many Social Connection events.
- There have also been grants and ongoing support to business and community groups.
- And at a forthcoming announcement later this week, we expect to learn of a \$2 million investment to upgrade our Mobile Internet Services.

For more detailed information on the projects and strategic partnerships, I encourage you to read our Recovery Plan and view our Community Consultation video, links to which are available on our website: madrecovery.com

In summing up:

It has been a very full year, with more exciting things to come for the district and for MADRA. I can't overemphasize the importance of having a continuing community voice to direct and positively influence the process of recovery, and the development of future resilience. For certain, we will be faced with more disaster situations, and a well-functioning CRC is critical so that our voice will be there to help mitigate the effect of these events. Without a community voice, any future developments and recovery will be left to the agencies, potentially without local direction.

Again, I applaud and thank all of those who have participated in Mallacoota and District's recovery, and within MADRA itself. The support that I have had in this role, especially from Jenny Lloyd and the executive team, has been massive. It has been an honour and a privilege for us all to be able to contribute to the important role that has been offered to our community.

I encourage others to join in, as and when they are able. It is a win for our community, and a great thing to be a part of. To those standing for the next committee, I wish you success, and encourage you to have some fun in the process.

Together, Mallacoota and the District form an amazing community.

Thank you all.



David Appleton.

Chairperson Mallacoota and District Association Inc.