

Chapter Three – Our Bushfire Recovery Framework

Our bushfire recovery framework is driven by:

- Our understanding of what is meant by community led recovery.
- Our priorities for bushfire recovery in Mallacoota and District (MAD).
- Our understanding of the broad frameworks which influence how we recover and within which we work.
- Knowing the projects and initiatives which are already underway or planned and how we might influence design and other considerations, such as priorities.

What is community led recovery?

In the past, the experience of some communities is input into government led proposals has been sought or volunteered but ultimately not reflected in the final product. The reasons and context for a lack of local tailoring are often not explained and solutions feel imposed and less than optimal. The resulting frustration has led to the desire for community led recovery.¹

There is no one framework or formula for community led recovery as every community is unique. At its heart, community led recovery is about communities identifying problems and proposing solutions based on local knowledge, preferences and priorities.

Our community led bushfire recovery process is shaped by a number of factors including:

- Our understanding of our community, its circumstances, needs, values and aspirations.
- Our ability as a community to embrace, implement and sustain opportunities and initiatives.
- Understanding the broader economic, social and environmental conditions which influence bushfire recovery and using that knowledge to identify recovery opportunities going forward.
- Thinking ‘outside the box’ by putting forward solutions driven by local knowledge and being able to demonstrate how community proposed solutions can lead to better outcomes including safety, durability, resilience and cost effectiveness.
- Our willingness to engage in respectful and productive debate about what can be achieved in the recovery space.
- Anticipating and identifying potential blockages and objections to recovery proposals and offering viable alternatives.
- Drawing on the skills and knowledge of our community.
- A willingness to respectfully engage with response and recovery agencies.
- Working with funding and service delivery partners to deliver optimal outcomes.
- Utilising and leveraging our many community networks for action, information and advice.
- Our capacity as volunteers.

¹ (Moreton, 2018) ‘Community Resilience and Community Led Recovery: One is Reality, the Other an Achievable Goal’ 2017 Australian & New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference.

Community led recovery is also about advocacy. Our advocacy role is about influencing those ideas and initiatives which are not community led – such as government processes and policies - and ‘sticking up’ for individuals, organisations and our community as needed.

Legal and Funding Arrangements

We have gone down the path of being a charitable organisation with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status as it allows us to access a wider range of donations and assistance than would have been possible had we just been an incorporated association.

As a charitable organisation with DGR status, we must focus our endeavours on bushfire recovery. We are liable to disciplinary action from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) if we cannot establish a clear link.

Irrespective of our organisational status, our mandate is bushfire recovery and any formal funding assistance we seek will need to establish a bushfire recovery link.

To ensure we are on the right track, we sought legal advice on the content of this Recovery Plan. The advice we received is that most of the initiatives herein can be linked to bushfire recovery.

This is not to dismiss community ideas for which a bushfire recovery link might be perceived as tenuous by funding bodies. Our strategy is to deliver on bushfire recovery initiatives now while funding is available for those purposes. We envisage MADRA may eventually morph into a broader community organisation (without DGR status) which can address a broader range of initiatives. In other words, our Vision and beyond.

This does not mean some of the ‘big ideas’ put forward by our community will not be pursued. Wherever possible, we will support community organisations which have a mandate and the desire to undertake such projects. Many of these projects will be long term and require extensive community consultation and an enduring owner (for example, EGSC).

Our Recovery Priorities

We have grouped recovery projects into three timeframes: Right Now, Short Term (two to three years) and Strategic (Our Vision and beyond). Our aim is to prioritise recovery initiatives in terms of need and funding availability.

Right Now

Our immediate priorities are:

- Using our friendships and networks to ensure no-one slips between the recovery cracks.
- Identifying gaps and shortfalls in recovery service delivery and advocating for affected individuals, groups and organisations with the responsible authorities.

- Working with emergency services groups and agencies on disaster preparedness including infrastructure, services, community education and plans (including local emergency and fuel management plans).
- Working with EGSC and Parks Victoria on designs for, and timely replacement of, infrastructure such as jetties, steps, boardwalks and lookouts.
- Conveying community concerns and preferences to our local elected representatives on issues such as roads, economic and communications infrastructure.
- Planning how to restore and protect our natural environment, cultural and historical assets.
- Working with philanthropic organisations re possible uses for donations and gifts.
- Working with our funding and service delivery partners with the aim of the 'right help in the right place at the right time'.
- Where possible, managing media interest in our bushfire recovery to reduce trauma and protect privacy.

At the same time, we also have to 'make hay while the sun shines' with available grant and donation opportunities which have an application expiry date. This means matching projects and initiatives with funding opportunities.

Short term (two to three years)

Our next set of priorities moves beyond replacement and repair. Projects derive from bushfire 'lessons learned' and include:

- Infrastructure and services which were not in place during the bushfires and are needed in the event of future disasters.
- Initiatives for enhancing our social connections and networks.
- Projects and initiatives for strengthening our local economy.

Strategic (Our Vision and beyond)

As the recovery process unfolds, our priorities start to shift from immediate recovery needs to longer term resilience. These longer-term projects have a longer incubation period and require extensive community consultation and commitment. Some require a structured implementation approach; others will be more organic in nature.

This might encompass:

- Revisiting our town planning framework.
- Supporting 'big ideas' for new community facilities.
- Adding value to major infrastructure projects through increased amenity (for example, adding foot and bike paths as part of road works).

Recovery Pillars

The BRV State Recovery framework has five lines of recovery depicted in the table beneath. These lines of recovery have also been adopted by our other major service delivery and funding party, EGSC.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Aboriginal healing and culture | Prioritising culture, addressing trauma and supporting healing, promoting cultural safety and promoting participation and ownership. |
| People and wellbeing | Safety and security, health and well-being and social cohesion and community connection. |
| Buildings and infrastructure | Utilities, public infrastructure and residential and commercial buildings. |
| Business and economy | Industry and business, employment, community resilience and regional infrastructure. |
| Environment and biodiversity | Biodiversity, amenity and natural resources. |

Figure 17 Bushfire Recovery Victoria recovery pillars

Considerations

MADRA Working Groups and Subcommittees generally have a functional focus in line with the five BRV recovery pillars. Notwithstanding, a holistic approach across all pillars is necessary.

We apply the following considerations across all our activities:

- Is this project/action compatible across all our social, environmental (built and natural), cultural and economic values?
- Does this project/action complement other MADRA projects/activities?
- What are the intended consequences of this project/activity? What might be the unintended consequences? (Trajectory planning).
- How do we define success? (Measurable outcomes and outputs - both qualitative and quantitative).
- Have we considered the needs of all our stakeholder groups?
- Have we considered the needs of all members of our community in terms of ability, age, stage, vulnerability and culture?
- Do we need to seek expert advice before proposing a course of action?
- How do we consult our community?

Projects in the Pipeline

We are working with EGSC and Park Victoria on replacement infrastructure. An inventory of projects and initiatives - both underway and planned - has been obtained from EGSC and Parks Victoria. This has provided us with an opportunity to influence design aspects through our understanding of previous shortfalls and to provide input on priorities.