

Wingecarribee Today

Keeping the Southern Highlands in touch with Council

Black Summer

Not in recent memory has our Shire faced a crisis of the magnitude of the summer of 2019/20.

For nearly two months our Shire was monstered by two massive bush fires which threatened both our northern and southern villages.

The Green Wattle Creek blaze was the first to strike just days before Christmas tearing through the villages of Balmoral and Buxton. Just two weeks later and the villages of Bundanoon and Wingello would bear the brunt of the Morton Fire.

Our Shire's remote west was also impacted. Wombeyan Caves Road remains closed beyond Goodman's Ford as a result of fires and rock slides. The repair bill will be considerable.

Together the fires burnt almost 61,000 hectares or 22 percent of our Shire's total geographic area.

Some 70 houses and hundreds of outbuildings containing irreplaceable possessions and memories were lost.

Worse yet were the tragic deaths of Rural Fire Service volunteers Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer who died protecting properties in Buxton. We are forever in their debt.

However in the weeks since these fires our Shire has been drenched by welcoming rains and signs of our precious ecosystem recovering can already be found.



The recovery of our community is also underway. Rebuilding of private and public property has begun and measures are being undertaken to repair our Shire's social, economic and emotional wellbeing.

The recovery will take time but together we will move forward.

On behalf of Councillors and the staff of Wingecarribee Shire Council we thank all the volunteers of the Rural Fire Service, emergency services and first responders for protecting our Shire and helping the Southern Highlands get back on its feet.



**Support our bushfire
affected community**

*Help us get back
on our feet!*



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I get by with a little help from my friends

Cleaning up and recovering after the bush fires will be a major operation.

While much of the destruction occurred in bushland, the fires also caused extensive damage to private and public property.

Our inspections reveal more than \$280,000 worth of damage has been sustained to critical Council infrastructure including roads, guardrails, bus shelters, signs and guideposts. Damage to parks and public amenities including toilet blocks and fencing is estimated at a further \$90,000.

However it's the cost to clear burnt trees which will result in the largest bill.

We've already identified more than 1,000 trees, both fallen and still standing, which need to be removed. The majority of these are located in the village centres or on roadside verges. The cost to clear these trees will exceed \$1.5 million. At the time of publication over \$300,000 in tree remediation works had already been undertaken.

Fortunately for us we've had some help from neighbouring councils including teams from Liverpool, Blacktown and City of Sydney councils.



Staff of City of Sydney Council join Wingecarribee Shire Council teams onsite in Balmoral.

On behalf of the staff of Wingecarribee Shire Council we thank all of these crews for your mateship and generous assistance. Cheers!

Fire and flood force closure of Wombeyan Caves Road

Wombeyan Caves Road, between Goodman's Ford and the popular caves, will remain closed as Council staff continue inspections and begin repairing damage sustained after the summer fires and rain.



At the height of the Green Wattle Creek blaze the road was closed for intermittent periods however heavy rain in February has forced the long-term closure of the road west of Goodman's Ford and Wombeyan Caves.

Council's Group Manager Infrastructure Services, Dominic Lucas said Council Engineers had only recently undertaken inspections on the road.

"Such was the ferocity of the fires and the subsequent damage caused by the rains that the road was deemed too dangerous to inspect," he said.

"The damage was so widespread that we needed a helicopter to assess the road as neither four-wheel drive

vehicles nor motorbikes could access the full length.

"It was only then the true extent of the damage could be fully appreciated."

Aerial inspections reveal that the road has been impacted by countless fallen trees and dozens of rock falls which has resulted in multiple sections of the road being washed away, culverts and causeways destroyed and retaining walls damaged.

"The surrounding hillside was immediately susceptible to rock slides once the trees were destroyed by the fires," Mr Lucas added. "And while the subsequent heavy rainfall may have doused the fires it unfortunately also exacerbated the land slippage."

Mr Lucas said the worst hit areas were found west of Goodman's Ford and nearby Barrallier Road.

"Given the extent of the damage, and pending final discussions with *Transport for NSW*, we suspect these roads will be closed for several months," Mr Lucas said.

"Until then we recommend motorists wishing to visit the caves once reopened, to do so via the existing Goulburn-Taralga-Oberon Road."

Wombeyan Caves is currently closed. For opening details visit www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au.

Mental health

It's completely normal to experience a range of emotions after a fire, including anxiety, forgetfulness, sleep disturbance and more.

Having someone to listen to and support you through this is very important.

Check in on your friends and neighbours, and if you or someone you know needs help, reach out.

The following are free services available 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- *Mental Health Line* - 1800 011 511
- *Lifeline Bushfire Recovery* - 13 43 57
- *Mensline* - 1300 789 978
- *Kids Helpline* - 1800 55 1800
- *Beyond Blue* - 1300 22 4636
- *ReFrame/You in Mind* - 0455 104 104

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger call 000.



New-look Adult Day Care Centre officially opens

Following four years of fundraising, building extension works are now complete at the *Bowral Wingecarribee Adult Day Care Centre* facility.



L-R: Wingecarribee Adult Day Care Centre's Bob and Catherine Constable with Mayor Duncan Gair and staff of Council.

Photo courtesy John Swainston

An official opening was held during the Shire's *NSW Seniors Festival* with Australia's queen of comedy, Noeline Brown OAM, on hand for the unveiling.

The new-look facility features additional recreation space, a new kitchen, sensory garden, accessible toilets and solar panels to aid in energy efficiency.

Mayor Duncan Gair said the additions would make a big difference to the Centre's users.

"The expansion of this facility will mean greater independence for people using the service as well as providing much needed respite for carers."

Wingecarribee Adult Day Care Centres provide support for people who are frail and/or aged and living in the Southern Highlands.

The Bowral Centre is located at 3 Hansen Street in Bowral.

For more information visit wadcc.org.au or call **4862 1774**.

Upcoming Works

Mittagong Tennis Courts, Lake Alexandra
Court re-surfacing and fence renewal

Merrigang Street, Bowral
Stage 2 road reconstruction

Kirkham Road, Bowral
Southern road reconstruction

Wilson Drive, Hill Top
Road widening

SES Mittagong
Construction of mezzanine floor

Bundanoon Skate Park
Final concrete works

Welby Hockey Fields
Final installations including synthetic turf and shock pads

Bowral Cemetery
Cemetery extension and refurbishments

Burrawang Oval, Burrawang
Construction of entrance wall and sign

Find out more about Council's current and future works including water and sewerage improvements at www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/road-closures.



Leaf it to us! Supporting koalas in care

Did you know that it can take up to six fresh eucalyptus branches per day to support a koala in care?

The *Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project* has developed an online *Koala Feed Tree Locator* that enables residents to nominate eucalyptus trees for leaf donation.

Council's Environment Officer Margot Law explained that the online database was a practical way for people to help koalas close to home.

"Our aim is to identify an adequate supply of food sources so our wildlife

carers can focus on the rehabilitation of injured koalas," she said.

Trees can be on private property, road reserves or Council land.

To nominate a tree or learn more about local koalas, visit www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/koalas.

The Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project is proudly supported by Council's *Environment Levy* and the NSW Government's *Saving Our Species* program.



CONTACT YOUR COUNCILLORS

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Bush Fire Recovery Hotline

We've created a dedicated *1800 Bush Fire Recovery* phone number to help bush fire affected residents quickly access information and assistance.

Residents can phone this number and speak to staff who can provide a range of advice on bush fire specific queries including:

- Planning matters surrounding bush fire recovery
- Bush fire related waste management requests
- Financial assistance queries
- Infrastructure maintenance requests from bush fire damaged communities

- Coordinating and arranging multi-agency requests, and
- General bush fire recovery requests

Wingecarribee Shire Council's Bush Fire Recovery phone number is **1800 316 500** and is operational 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Fridays.

Calls to the number after these hours will be attended to the next working day.

Financial help available

At the Extraordinary Meeting of 6 February 2020 Councillors unanimously agreed to waive all Council-related fees for bush fire affected residents wishing to rebuild.

This includes Development Application (DA) and Pre-Lodgement fees, Construction and Complying Development Certificates, Final Occupation Certificates and all plumbing and drainage inspection costs.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties due to the bush fires, please contact Council to discuss payment arrangement options which may be available to you.

Bush fire affected residents wishing to learn more how Council can assist financially can phone Council's dedicated *Bush Fire Recovery Hotline* on **1800 316 500**.



Connecting with Council

- ▶ **Online 24 hours/7 days:** www.wsc.nsw.gov.au
- Email:** mail@wsc.nsw.gov.au
- Phone:** 4868 0888 Fax: 4869 1203
- Post:** PO Box 141 Moss Vale, NSW 2577
- In person:** (8:30am to 4:30pm Mon – Fri) Civic Centre, 68 Elizabeth Street, Moss Vale
- Emergency after hours:** 4868 0888 (24 hour Contact Centre)