

Toowoomba Regional Council

Eastern Queensland Bushfires Local Recovery Plan

Approved by LDMG on 28 February 2020



Recovery narrative

About our community

The Toowoomba Region makes up part of South Queensland, a dynamic region that generates one-fifth of Australia's economic growth and is home to one in seven Australians. The Toowoomba region is Queensland's largest inland centre. It is also the gateway to South West Queensland.

The Region spans almost 13,000 km² including the Toowoomba City and the regional centres of Cambooya, Cecil Plains Clifton, Crows Nest, Goombungee, Greenmount, Highfields, Millmerran, Oakey, Pittsworth and Yarraman, along with numerous smaller townships. Each area has its own unique history and stunning landscapes. In 2018, the Toowoomba region had a population of 167,657. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes of the Western Wakka Wakka, Giabal and Jarowair peoples inhabited the Darling Downs.

The Toowoomba Region has transformed its agricultural base into a diverse and strong economy, offering a range of business, investment and employment opportunities. The Toowoomba Region was a \$10.8 billion economy in 2017/18 and hosted 85,369 jobs, 15,968 registered businesses and 167,657 people.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing contributes \$811 million to the Toowoomba Region economy with key outputs including grain, poultry, cotton, beef, pork and dairy products. Manufacturing contributes \$644 million and is the region's largest international exporter. Growth in mining operations in the Surat Basin has added to the Toowoomba Region economy with exceptionally strong growth in mining support services (e.g. well drilling and servicing businesses locating to the region). Mining contributed \$941 million in 2017/18.

Tourism has contributed to the diversity of the Toowoomba Region economy. The growth of sports and event tourism is expected to help grow this sector.

About the disaster event

The Toowoomba Region is drought declared and has been since 1 March 2014, which has substantially impacted residents. In November 2019, the Eastern Queensland Bushfires impacted communities across the Toowoomba region, specifically Pechey (Ravensbourne), Crows Nest, Cressbrook, Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge (Millmerran).

Local Recovery Group

Chaired by: Cr Paul Antonio, Mayor

Key stakeholders

Toowoomba Regional Council, Toowoomba Region community members, Australian Red Cross, Lifeline, Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, Department of Housing and Public Works, Queensland Health and Hospital Services, Queensland Fire and Emergency Service, Queensland Police Service, Rural Fire Services Queensland, State Emergency Services, Queensland Reconstruction Authority, GIVIT, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Ambulance Service, Department of Environment and Science, Department of Education and Ergon Energy.

Recovery objectives

- 1 Immediate relief and recovery activities ensure community has access to essential services.
- 2 Immediate relief and ongoing recovery activities ensure community has access to psychosocial support services.
- 3 Immediate relief and ongoing recovery activities ensure community has access to financial support services.
- 4 Implement effective and efficient process to support community members return to permanent residence/dwellings informed by existing protocols.
- 5 Implement effective and efficient process to enable community members to transition to temporary accommodation, if applicable, informed by protocols.
- 6 Implement effective and efficient system for managing the distribution of donated goods and services and gift vouchers to ensure they reach those in need.
- 7 The prevention of the spread of weeds program has been developed, implemented and progress is monitored.
- 8 A program to support the environmental restoration and protection of unique flora and fauna endemic to the region has been developed, implemented and progress is monitored.
- 9 Design and deliver disaster resilience education programs to identified schools/students.
- 10 Recovery activities ensure businesses have access to financial support services to restore/rebuild infrastructure.
- 11 Funding streams are identified to support community organisations and not-for-profits.
- 12 Identify and promote funding opportunities to support sustainable bushfire mitigations programs.
- 13 Identify and promote funding opportunities to stimulate tourism across the region.
- 14 Education initiatives to build bushfire resilience through knowledge of hazard and risk assessments have been developed, implemented and progress monitored.
- 15 Implement processes to support the testing and reporting on water quality.
- 16 Implement process to undertake repairs of council owned facilities/recreational areas.

Measures of success

Human and social

- Coordinated outreach visits to all areas identified on the rapid damage assessment have been completed and human and social impacts have been identified and referrals made to relevant partner agencies where required.
- Gift vouchers and food vouchers for the local Millmerran IGA have been distributed.
- Community Information Points have been established at Hampton Visitor Information Centre and Crows Nest Service Centre.
- Community meetings have been held in Hampton and Crows Nest.
- Community recovery information sessions have been held at Millmerran Showgrounds and Wylahra Grove Hall, Millmerran Downs.
- Community members have returned home.
- Community members have transitioned from evacuation centres into temporary/long-term accommodation.
- Community members have returned to work.
- Children have returned to school.
- Community members have accessed financial assistance where available.
- Community members have accessed psychosocial support where required.
- Community and visitors support and participate in community events.
- Funding secured to support community recovery and resilience strategies.
- Education initiatives to build resilience through knowledge of risk assessments have been implemented.
- Stronger partnerships and relationships built with communities and local non-government organisations.
- Pillowcase Program has been delivered to Years 3 and 4 at Crows Nest and Millmerran State Schools.
- Year 10 Digital Technology class at Crows Nest State School has developed and presented their Bushfire project to impacted Crows Nest community members.
- Water has been provided to those affected properties in Millmerran, not on town water supply to assist with wash down of dwellings to remove ash and suppressant used by QFES on bushfires.

Economic

- Agriculture and viticulture businesses (blueberry, avocado and olive oil) are trading at capacity.
- Funding secured for High Country Hamlets moveable feast concept to stimulate tourism and the economy resulting in an increase in tourists.
- Financial funding support has been provided to businesses affected by event.
- National parks, reserves, hiking and walking trails and camping grounds have been reopened and are resulting in an increase of tourists.

Environment

- Damage assessments have been completed.
- Injured wildlife have fully recovered from their injuries and returned to their native habitats.

- Wildlife numbers have increased in impacted areas.
- National parks, reserves, hiking and walking trails have reopened and are being used by the community.
- Hazardous fire affected trees blocking road corridors have been removed.
- Effective waste disposal has been undertaken.
- Power has been restored to Cressbrook Dam water pumping stations and they are fully operational.
- Power has been fully restored to the Telstra tower in Millmerran.
- Green waste and other hazardous waste items have been removed from the Crows Nest Waste Facility.
- Hazard and risk assessments for bushfires have been undertaken and education initiatives to build resilience through knowledge of their risk have been developed, implemented and are successful.
- Ravensbourne National Park, reserves, hiking and walking trails and camping grounds across impacted areas have been re-opened.
- Recreational facilities and campgrounds at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dams have been re-opened.
- Conservation and pest management programs have been implemented.
- Water quality maintained to regulations.
- Essential services (power and telecommunications) have been restored to Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge within 48 hours.

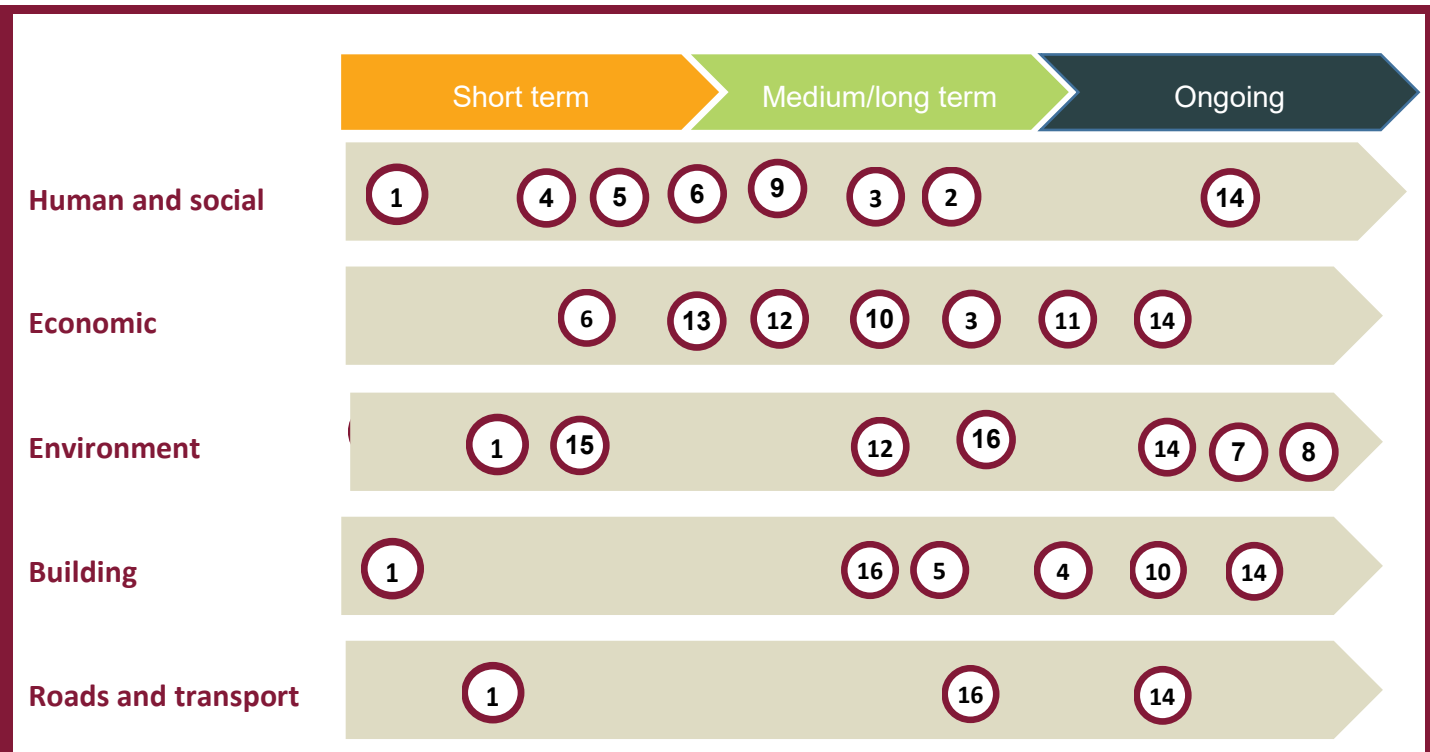
Building

- Damage assessments have been completed.
- Fencing on properties in Crows Nest, Pechey (Ravensbourne), Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge has been repaired and/or replaced.
- Powerlines severely damaged/destroyed as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran) bushfire have been repaired/replaced and are fully operational.
- Telstra roadside cabinet damaged as a result of Cypress Gardens' bushfire has been repaired/replaced and is fully operational.
- Landlines disabled as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran) have been restored and are fully operational.
- Ergon pole damaged in the vicinity of Perseverance Dam causeway has been repaired/replaced.
- Damage to recreational infrastructure at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dam reserves has been repaired and infrastructure is fully operational.

Roads and transport

- Damage assessments have been completed.
- Roads are open and fully operational.
- Asset damage has been identified and rectified.

Recovery timeframes



Human and social

- Psychosocial impacts on individuals and families experiencing lasting effects of the Region's most severe drought exacerbated by bushfire impacts.
- Psychosocial impacts exacerbated for impacted individuals and families in Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge as a result of experiencing loss of power and telecommunications for three days due to bushfires.
- Community member evacuations of eastern areas of Crows Nest, Pechey, Ravensbourne, Cressbrook Creek, Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge communities:
 - Three people at Highfields Fitness and Recreation Centre at peak.
 - 150 people at Crows Nest Showgrounds and Evacuation Centre at the peak for food and information, and over 30 adults accommodated within the centre and the camp grounds. 40 adults and 30 children at Millmerran Showgrounds Evacuation Centre at the peak.
 - Aged Care evacuations of Church of Christ Aged Care Facility to hospitals and Warwick facility from Crows Nest.
- Bushfire impacts exacerbated existing disadvantage in community resulting in increased need for psychosocial support services.
- Increased burden on support service capacity due to increased need for psychosocial support services.
- Isolation for children due to:
 - closure of Crows Nest State School for three days
 - postponement of the school's swimming carnival
 - closure of Crows Nest Children's Centre
 - closure of Little Possum Learning Centre (Early Childhood Learning Centres).
- Potential for reduced tourist numbers at community events due to road closures and media's portrayal of impact.

Economic

- Increased financial burden for impacted individuals and families due to:
 - some properties not being insured and some properties being under-insured
 - not being able to work due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke
 - having to purchase additional medication due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke
 - not being able to work due to having to care for family members experiencing respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- Increased financial burden for pockets of acute disadvantaged community members as a result of increased costs of living.
- Loss of income to community members of Crows Nest, Pechey (Ravensbourne), Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge as they were unable to access work due to evacuations.
- Loss of income/profits to Blueberry Farm, Crows Nest and an avocado business, Crows Nest due to voluntary evacuations and road closures from 16-25 November 2019 as a result of bushfire impacts.
- Loss of income/profits to Olive Grove, Millmerran Downs due to tree loss and damage to catering facilities due to bushfire impacts.
- Loss of income/profits to forestry industry around Pechey due to bushfire impacts, road closures and firefighting operational costs.
- Damage to recreational infrastructure at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dam reserves.
- Potential impacts to tourism revenue due to closure of:
 - Esk-Hampton Road from 15-25 November 2019 (key tourist driving route)
 - Ravensbourne National Park, reserves, hiking and walking trails and camping grounds across impacted areas from 16-25 November 2019.

- Potential impacts on tourism revenue due to closure of recreational facilities and campgrounds at Cressbrook and Perseverance dams from 16-25 November 2019.
- Loss of income to Ravensbourne Waste Facility staff and contractors due to closure of the facility as a result of the bushfires.

Environment

- Loss of native fauna and flora, particularly the land burnt in the Cressbrook and Perseverance Dam reserves that are essential koala habitats.
- Large pockets of vegetation destroyed, native bushland around and inside impacted areas.
- Bushfire impacts to land exacerbated as a result the Region's most severe drought.
- Bushfire impacts to native fauna and flora exacerbated as a result the Region's most severe drought.
- Increase in waste and landfill requirements as a result of burnt items.
- Burnt trees in road corridors; risk of them falling onto roads.
- Biosecurity concerns for cattle due to animals crossing the tick line to Crows Nest Showgrounds.
- Loss of power to Cressbrook Dam water pumping stations due to damaged powerlines for five days 17-22 November 2019.
- Risk of power loss at Pechey Water Treatment Plant due to threat to other powerlines - planned for with generator moved on site.
- Loss of power to domestic dwellings as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran).
- Loss of power to Telstra tower as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran).

Building

- In Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge (Millmerran Downs), one dwelling was destroyed, three dwellings were significantly damaged and one dwelling lost their outdoor shower.
- Damage to fencing on properties in Crows Nest, Pechey (Ravensbourne), Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge.
- One shed destroyed and windmills damaged on one property and stockyards destroyed on a second property as a result of the Pechey (Ravensbourne) bushfire
- Damage to fencing, signage and recreational infrastructure at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dam reserves.
- Powerlines severely damaged/destroyed as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Telstra roadside cabinet in the Cypress Gardens area damaged.
- Some landlines disabled as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Ergon reported pole damaged in the vicinity of Perseverance Dam causeway, and there were some restoration issues due to the nature of the terrain.
- Powerlines severely damaged/destroyed as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Loss of power and telecommunications for three days due to bushfires.

Roads and transport

- Esk-Hampton Road closed from 15-25 November 2019 as a result of the Pechey (Ravensbourne)/Crows Nest bushfires.
- Gore Highway closed for 24 hours on 4 December 2019 as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Safety concerns due to hazardous trees potentially falling into road corridors.
- Several local roads closed from 12-25 November 2019 as a result of the Pechey (Ravensbourne), Crows Nest:
 - Grapetree, Perseverance Dam, Mount Jockey, McQuillan, Post Office and Esk-Hampton Roads.
 - Roving closures to protect firefighters and tree arborist crews.

Human and social

- In partnership with relevant agencies:
 - coordinate outreach visits to all areas identified on the rapid damage assessment to assess human and social impacts
 - provide emergency hardship payments where eligible
 - provide access to psychosocial support services when required with Lifeline and Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors
 - coordinate the distribution of donations, gift vouchers and vouchers to impacted community members when required
 - host community recovery information sessions at Millmerran Showgrounds; Wylahra Grove Hall, Millmerran Downs
 - transition community members from evacuation centres back to temporary accommodation.
- Establish Community Information Points at Hampton Visitor Information Centre and Crows Nest Service Centre.
- Sponsor a 'Thank your bushfire heroes' community event at Crows Nest.
- Partner with Crows Nest and Millmerran State Schools to deliver the Red Cross disaster resilience education program (the Pillowcase Program) to students in Years 3 and 4.
- Provide funding to support the Crows Nest State School Year 10 Digital Technology Class to develop and present back to impacted Crows Nest community members, 'The Bushfire Project'.
- Seek funding opportunities to support recovery and resilience across Human and Social; specifically accumulative effects of disasters.
- Investigate opportunities and advocate for programs that support the short and long-term wellbeing of the community.
- Assist short, medium and long-term recovery, and be a conduit to support services as required.
- Reopen schools.
- Transition community from evacuation centres back to their permanent residences/dwellings.
- Attend LDMG debrief to capture learnings.

Economic

- Assess the economic impact on tourism, agriculture and viticulture industries (blueberry, avocado, olive and wine) and promote opportunities to drive economic recovery.
- Assist with fencing replacement by directing businesses/properties to funding opportunities.
- Engage with local community groups and impacted businesses.
- Stimulate tourism through identification and promotion of funding opportunities to impacted businesses.

Environment

- Undertake damage assessments across impacted areas.
- Undertake a hazardous tree assessment and remove burnt trees as required from road corridors.
- Rescue and recovery or disposal of native fauna.
- In partnership with wildlife carers, support impacted animals.

- Restore power to:
 - Cressbrook Dam water pumping stations
 - domestic dwellings in Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs);
 - Telstra tower damaged as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Remove green waste and other hazardous waste items from the Crows Nest Waste Facility as emergency mitigation actions.
- Work in partnership with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and Darling Downs Fire Management Group to conduct hazard and risk assessments for bushfires and develop education initiatives to build resilience through knowledge of their risk.
- Repair and reopen park, reserves, hiking and walking trails and camping grounds across impacted areas.
- Reopen recreational facilities and campgrounds at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dams.
- Develop and implement conservation and pest management programs.
- Continue water quality monitoring.

Building

- Undertake damage assessments across impacted areas.
- Assess resilience of critical infrastructure across impacted areas.
- Repair damage to infrastructure at Cressbrook and Perseverance Dam reserves.
- Repair powerlines severely damaged/destroyed as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Repair and/or replace Telstra roadside cabinet damaged as a result of Cypress Gardens' bushfire.
- Repair landlines disabled as a result of the Cypress Gardens and Forest Ridge Fire (Millmerran Downs).
- Repair and/or replace Ergon supply damaged in the vicinity of Perseverance Dam.
- Provide water to those affected properties in Millmerran, not on town water supply to assist with wash down of dwellings to remove ash and suppressant used by QFES on bushfires.
- Reconnect essential services (power and telecommunications) in Cypress Garden and Forest Ridge within 48 hours.
- Investigate opportunities and lobby for programs that support bushfire mitigation.

Roads and transport

- Undertake damage assessments across impacted areas.
- Repair roadside furniture across impacted areas.
- Reopen Gore Highway and Grapetree, Perseverance Dam, Mount Jockey, McQuillan, Post Office and Esk-Hampton Roads.
- Investigate opportunities and lobby for programs that support bushfire mitigation.