

Mallacoota and District Recovery Association Snapshot Survey April 2020

Overview

The purpose of the Snapshot Survey was to obtain some initial information about the communities' values, experiences, issues and hopes for the future arising out of the 2019/20 bushfires. A survey was sent to all members of the Mallacoota and District Recovery Association and was publicised to the wider community, including through the EGSC Community Newsletter and the EGSC Mallacoota district recovery web page. People were invited to make open-ended responses to broadly framed topics. Sixty-six people responded.

This report is organised under six broad headings reflecting the questions posed in the survey: two sections reflecting on values and the impact of the bushfires; four sections reflecting the four interconnected environments which frame community health and well-being – the social environment, the economic environment, the natural environment, and the built environment. In the interim, the communities have also been impacted by the constraints of the Covid-19 emergency so a seventh section has been included to address this.

The report is gifted to the incoming Committee with the intention that it may be a starting point for initial planning for the ongoing recovery of our communities and to take us forward. Tapping the perspectives of the broader community, filling in the details and determining priorities will be one of their tasks.

What the report does not offer

The report does not claim to be representative of all views within the communities. It does not prioritise experiences, issues or actions. The items are weighted or ordered in terms of numbers of respondents raising an issue or preferring a specific action. It does not attempt to resolve issues where differing, and sometimes conflicting, views exist.

What the report does offer

The analysis has attempted to capture and reflect the scope of experiences, hopes and wishes expressed by those who responded. These are reported as broad themes, illustrated with examples and, where appropriate, specific suggestions for future priorities, actions and possible solutions to issues. An attempt has been made to group and order these responses in ways that assist in developing a general picture, an attempt at some logical order.

Summary of responses

Values

People valued the diverse natural landscape, living surrounded by and with easy access to wilderness, ocean and unspoilt areas. They appreciated the small, supportive communities, the people within them and the range of community activities. All of this contributes to a lifestyle where the benefits outweigh the disadvantages associated with living in a remote area.

Impact of the fires

When discussing the impact of the bushfires people described their personal experiences of living through the fire, of being evacuated and unable to return and how the whole experience brought the community together. They also described having lost a home, suffering property damage, having to continue living amid the destroyed houses or being dismayed by the losses suffered by friends and neighbours. The sense of collective trauma and the impact of the loss of town amenities and infrastructure were also mentioned.

Social Environment

People described the impact of the fires on the social environment, the support received, the challenge of having to rebuild homes and lives and a sense of displacement and uncertainty. They raised the importance of maintaining psychosocial well-being and community connections through ongoing mental and physical support. They noted the withdrawal of support agencies and the need for enhanced health and medical services. They also discussed the importance of community get-togethers, restoring a sense of community and working together. The role of education, including support for both students and teachers, and encouraging the work of the youth group were recognised as contributing to community well-being. There was recognition of tensions within the community that will need to be taken into account.

Economic Environment

Funding support, both personal and for businesses, was raised in relation to all levels of government and in relation to the distribution of donations. The need to support the local economy and restore normal business was addressed through suggestions including shopping locally, maximising local employment opportunities, creating new job opportunities and encouraging the return of spending visitors. Within this there is recognition of a need to balance increasing tourism with respect for the needs and wishes of permanent residents. Other suggestions included ways of encouraging greater economic diversity.

Natural Environment

The natural environment was argued to be our greatest asset and attraction, requiring a master plan for environmental development which balances maximising biodiversity and enhancing fire safety. There was recognition of opportunities for community engagement with nature including restoring and extending walking tracks and beach access. Researching/monitoring of regrowth and recovery of native species could include replanting, control/mitigation of erosion, invasive weeds and feral species. Fuel mitigation planning to reduce fire risk was discussed with suggestions about a variety of ways of achieving effective fuel reduction and firebreaks.

Built Environment

The importance of rebuilding homes, the urgency of clearing of properties and the need for comfortable accommodation for the displaced were all mentioned. There were suggestions for rebuilding to higher standards, rebuilding and extending community infrastructure and recognition of the need for reliable internet services. There was also discussion around examining the big questions and taking time to think things through when looking at rebuilding for the future: to have a proper recovery plan, prioritise projects, develop a strategic tourism plan and evaluate projects. A comprehensive list of longer term infrastructure proposals was put forward to improve facilities associated with fire and emergency safety, establish independent electricity generation to ensure reliability of supply and increase water storage. Other proposals addressed: community facilities including for fragile aged residents; recreation, exercise and sports facilities and support for education and research.

COVID-19 multiplying the effects of the bushfires

The point was made that the community needs to feel safe, especially given the demographics. We need to find new ways to connect and come together in the face of the Covid-19 restrictions, to identify and implement appropriate communication platforms and plan to return to connectedness once restrictions are eased. The amplifying effect of the Covid-19 restrictions in these post-bushfire communities was acknowledged, especially the economic impact on both individuals and businesses.

Appendix

Values

Natural environment

- Sense of connection to the diverse natural landscape
 - Familiar with the natural environment
 - Always learning about it
- Living surrounded by bushland, National Park
 - Easy access to wilderness, ocean, unspoiled and undeveloped areas

Small, supportive, active community

- The people and connections
 - Community independently minded
 - Young families in the community
 - Love the tiny community at Gypsy Point
- Community activities and values
 - Artistic events, music entertainment, sport and recreation
 - Community involvement, socialisation, working together
 - The environmental awareness of recycling
 - Friendship networks built on enjoyment of nature

Lifestyle, remoteness, safety, small village

- Small town surrounded by bushland
 - Growth restricted by surrounding National Park
 - Relatively undeveloped foreshore and bush areas.
 - Without overdevelopment, or high-rise
- Ideal place to live
 - Social connectedness or seclusion possible
 - Safe and great environment to raise children.
 - It is HOME
 - Dog friendly (Run dogs off leash)
- Assistance, support available, health and social
 - Enough services for day to day needs
 - Maintain services, some growth, especially for families
- Lifestyle benefits outweigh hardships, fewer services.
 - Accept the danger of bushfires
 - Being off the highway positive, but not after bushfire
- Many activities can be undertaken to suit many people's choices

Bushfire impact

Personal impact

- Living through the fire
 - Saved our house
 - Fear
 - Worrying more could have been done to save homes
 - Family member fought in the fires
 - Fought ember attack after the fire

Evacuation

- Evacuated, away before the fire
- Hard to be away, to get home, separation
- Family split by evacuation
- Shock, distress, on return
- Expenses
- Official communication during this time was limited

Collective trauma, health, emotional impacts

- Event took its toll, mental health, stress, anxiety
Exhaustion, sleep impacted, stress, fatigue, trauma
- The distress, losses of others
Some people contributed strongly to recovery despite their own losses
Some strident distress, over-reactions, persistently blaming others
Cut off from family who couldn't join me
- Air quality, Asbestos fears
- Genoa undefended, how that felt
- Ghouls driving around and photographing burnt property for entertainment
- Deep sadness, horror at loss of bush and wildlife in reserves and NP
- Loss of employment and business

Property impact

- Home, belongings lost
Other members of family lost home
- Home damaged
- Property affected, sheds fences farm garden losses
Investment houses lost, damaged
- Loss of professional facilities, equipment, material
- No property impact but..
Living surrounded by fire damage, uncleared houses
Guilt, relief our house ok, lethargy

Loss of town amenities, isolation

- The lack of reliable power to the town
- Roads closed in all directions,
- Loss of favourite activities
- Closure of walking tracks
- Heritage bridge lost

Brought the community together in a positive way

- Feelings of resilience in family, community
- Felt supported by friends, neighbours and others
- The kindness of community members to support one another has been life affirming.
- The willingness of people to start work on recovery project is invaluable.

Bushfires a fact of Australian life, we must live accordingly

- Reduce camp park in size and density
- Cap bookings at Foreshore Caravan Park, when fire conditions are dangerous
- Forced evacuation of campers when bushfire threatens

Social Environment

After the bush fires

- The support from formal government and other services through the emergency was impressive
- The challenge to rebuild homes, lives and psyche is massive
 - Rebuilding phase is not going to be quick or easy, we are at the start
 - Recovery needs a steady response, not rushed
 - Town will recover in time, won't be a quick fix
 - We have to be seeing things happening
- Displacement, sense of alienation, uncertainty in the future
 - The town is changed, bush unrecognisable
 - Lost close neighbours
 - Family member now living with us

Maintain psychosocial wellbeing and community connections for all

- Ensure mental and physical support for those impacted by the bushfire
 - Door to door visits by social workers
 - Easy access to mental health support be it socially or professionally
 - Support people to avail themselves of available services
 - Special support now for those not tech savvy
 - Financial assistance to those in most need - under or uninsured
 - Rebuilding uninsured properties, fairness
- Monitor domestic violence.

Enhance health and medical services support

- Cooperation between the Medical Centre and MDHSS

Professional support agencies withdrawn now, it's up to us collectively

- Our empathy, compassion, common sense
- Keeping in touch, by phone at present
- Listening to the experiences of people
- Encourage those trying to help
- Help those who are struggling with isolation and grief, sharing the burden.

Mallacoota get-togethers important

- Art, entertainment, culture initiatives to keep people connected
- Sporting, music and arts community will self-establish after Covid
- Social get-togethers with a focus on well being
 - Inspirational speakers
 - Open debates around any initiatives proposed by or to the committee
 - To remember the things about Mallacoota that connect us -
 - World kitchen helped us socialise

Encourage youth group Sanctuary- long term sustainability

Restoration of services, sense of normality, to enhance community

- Good and frequent communication to keep people informed
 - Encourage the local newsletters (Funding to support weekly publication of The Mouth throughout the year)
 - Support 3MGB to provide more local content and improve coverage during emergencies
 - Dedicated town webpage to assist communication across all organisations
 - Online presentations on matters of local interest -provide the infrastructure and training
 - Communication needs to be improved
 - Get together with online tools (support for those who need help with this)

Restore the sense of community - working together

- Elderly residents being looked after.
- Firewood available for all community members.
- Working bees to restore people's gardens, sheds and fences.
- Recreation and sport activities
- Safe access for to enjoy the outdoors, ocean, forest

Support for education

- Reopen schools as soon as possible
- Support for our kids as they adapt to an unsettled school year

- Support for families having difficulty accessing online education.
- Support for teachers
- Teach children to be ambitious and independent
- Camps/support for school kids

Strong recovery organisation with a wide community representation

- Consultation to work out priorities for the recovery
- Importance of autonomy - independence from shire control

Dislike community tensions and inability to debate

- Tension between town modernisers and those who want no change
- Social side of town unfairly influenced by some business owners
- Destructive Facebook experiences in Mallacoota
- Mallacoota residents need to take regular times away

Economic Environment

Funding support

- Support from state and federal governments, donations
 - Apply for bushfire recovery funds now - be ready to go when restrictions lift
 - Sourcing funding opportunities quickly, given the competition from other disasters.
- Basic financial assistance, continuing support from MDHSS
- Financial support for businesses - not fire-damaged but revenue lost due to isolation
 - Equitable, easy to navigate support for small business
 - Assistance to businesses in accessing government support
- Council needs to re-invest some of the funds it skims from the camp park

Support local economy

- Shop locally
 - Supermarkets
 - Tradespeople
 - Lucky to have the businesses we do
- Maximise local employment opportunities
 - Employ locals where possible
 - Support for those who have lost their livelihood
 - Underemployment
 - People with multiple jobs to survive
- Create new job opportunities within the town
 - Crews to assist with clearing and rebuilding
 - Provide training to upskill locals for emerging projects e.g. Parks
 - Rebuilding damaged Parks infrastructure
- Restore normal business
 - Support Abalone industry restart
 - Encourage an entrepreneurial spirit among local businesses
 - Shire Information Centre should advertise local business for free
 - MADBATA or some business organisation should be active
- Encourage the return of spending visitors
 - Year round tourism
 - More eco-tourism, wilderness at our doorstep
 - Marketing campaign for 20-21 holidays
 - Businesses need cash flow from tourism
 - Rebuild, expand infrastructure to restore tourism
 - Festival and markets
 - Reinstate parks and waterside infrastructure
 - Fly people in
 - Bike and/or car access to Sandpatch area

Balance tourist-based support of local businesses and respect for the needs and wishes of permanent residents

- Tourists bring income to businesses, but it also changes the dynamics of the town.
- Limit tourism peaks to what the town can support
- SLOWLY, don't swamp us with well-meaning visitors
- Tourism valuable but we don't want to sell the town's soul for it

Encourage economic diversity. Other industry, health, education, services

- More self-sufficient economy, don't over rely on tourism
- Research into business options that respect and improve the natural environment
- Funding for Parks Victoria to enable increased employment
- Employment and work experience opportunities - particularly for young people.

Reverse the demographic, attract young families

- Senior led recovery will bring back families to provide services

Restore confidence in the safety of residents, visitors and property

Natural Environment

Natural environment is our greatest asset, attraction

- Conserve and protect remaining habitat and ecosystems
- Improve environmental sustainability of our town to the level that is worthy of its Biosphere setting
- Properly fund DELWP and ParksVic to do their job

There should be a master plan of environmental development

- Maximise biodiversity outcomes and balance the need for fire safety and public amenity.
- Fire safety without severely diminishing the visual and biodiversity values of the forest and beach environments.
- Protect the natural environment in the future rebuilding
- Better plans for reducing the risk of wildfire in the national park and town environs
- Fire safe revegetation in consultation with environmental experts

Opportunities for community engagement in nature as bush regrows

- Restore, open up, extend walking tracks around town, beaches and in NP
 - Keep paths closed for safety as long as necessary
- Landcare regeneration near lake, walks and beaches
 - Create a tube stock nursery for revegetation here and beyond
 - Weed identification information
- Make it easier for community groups to apply for environmental grants
- Higher profile and support for Parks Victoria to engage with the community
- Explanations from authorities about processes of regeneration
 - Advice about things individuals can do to assist regeneration
 - How to encourage habitat for wildlife in our gardens
 - Report to the community on progress towards recovery of the natural environment.
 - Help locals maintain the bush so it can be better managed

Research, monitor regrowth, recovery of native species

- Don't rush in, wait to see what comes back, what needs action
- Monitor returning vegetation to get on top of any weed invasion
 - Fund and staff weed control -contractors and grants for community groups
 - Lift recent onerous directions on contractors in using herbicides
 - Prohibit use of poisons by Shire and local weeding group
- Take account of the specific needs of impacted species
 - Designate particular "reserves" for certain species
 - Heathland and teatree areas may need some support
 - Reintroductions may be necessary
- Support existing habitat and bush regeneration, nature doing a good job
 - Planting to replace what was lost to the fire
 - Control feral pests.
 - Removal of glass, rubbish from the bush.
- Support animal habitat, care, rescue, return
- Limit vegetation clearance
 - Too much rushed clearing
 - Keep, protect old trees
 - Halt unnecessary clearing within the town and on Crown land, including roadsides.
 - Stop bulldozing burned trees,
 - Don't allow the logging industry free reign

Erosion control, mitigation

- Drainage lines need to be stabilised to prevent sediment runoff
- Enhance soil hydrology post fire
- Plant in high use and exposed areas
- Analysis of water quality and sediment impact
- Reopen walking tracks to avoid foot traffic on vulnerable ecosystems.
- Limit people visiting badly burnt areas for 12 months

Fuel mitigation plan to reduce future fire risk.

- Fully fund fuel mitigation
- Rebuilding and protecting the town from further fires
 - Widen along Mallacoota Genoa Rd

- Community consultation as key to planning fire mitigation
 - Build on work done already by Fire Management group
 - Fuel break planning in conjunction with the community
 - Fire safety in times of climate change
- Effective firebreaks
 - Hazard reduction in vegetation overlays eg Lakeside Drive
 - Managed green buffers - trees, grasses, walkways etc.
 - Slashing and controlled burns
 - Allow tree clearing on properties without permits
 - Replace burnt tea tree areas with appropriate fire resistant vegetation
- Large scale clearing not scientifically proven to prevent bush fire
 - Trees are not our enemy
 - Investigate indigenous methods of land management (traditional owners to help)
- Remove hazardous materials and vegetation from the natural environment
 - Mulch fallen trees to lessen erosion and fuel load
 - Clear fallen trees on road verges (firewood and mulching)

Managing the lake

- Allow mouth to open naturally
- Find a solution to rising lake levels, blockage
- Ban jet skis, erosion, noise pollution

Built Environment

Rebuilding homes - give hope, offer help, advice

- Clearing properties urgent
 - Ensure that fire debris/asbestos sites are cleared as quickly as possible.
- Provision of comfortable accommodation for the displaced
 - Rebuilding will be slow
 - Increase support next summer when rentals expire and insurance support ends
 - Build homes for families. Community housing.
 - Work addressing homelessness - MDHSS
 - Make pods or caravans available for people on their block
 - Promised shipping containers still not delivered
- Rebuilding to higher standards
 - Helping people who need to rebuild with access to experts
 - Support people to build to a higher standard
 - Building consultants to help people design beautiful, compliant houses
 - Training for builders, designers, landscapers, owners etc. in bushfire resistant building and landscape design
 - Rebuilding to cope with fires- sprinklers, bunkers
 - Assist building upgrades for existing homes in higher risk parts of town
 - While more builders here also improve home access for elderly, disabled
 - Fire safe house materials irrelevant, keep flammable bush away
- All levels of government to expedite rebuilding requirements
 - Council to fast track building approvals for lost homes
 - Building permits and BAL ratings should be finalised without delay
 - Delays with BAL ratings requires state government intervention
- Accommodation for the workers who help rebuild the town

Rebuild, extend community infrastructure

- Boardwalks, jetties, tracks, footpaths, steps etc. to give access to the landscape
 - Prioritise shared Pathway on Lakeside Drive.
 - Safe footpaths town, Mirrabooka and along Genoa-Mallacoota Rd
 - Walking tracks repaired sensitively
 - Replacement of interpretative signs.
 - Cater for people with disabilities
 - Steps to all beaches between Bastion and Secret beach.
 - Reconnect Bastion Point shower point
 - Install water points for filling bottles and refreshment in town, beach etc.
- Complete sporting club rooms
- Miva fully functioning
- Complete Davis Creek bridge for locals and tourists
- Replacement of road signage

Rebuilding community assets to give a sense of normality

- Well started by Lions and Shire making popular facilities accessible
- Local labour where possible
- Encourage other tradies to come to town
- Regular maintenance of existing community buildings
- Kitchen to Compost programme restored
- Restore green waste so we can garden
- People will leave town if it drags on too long
- Shire procrastinating on infrastructure rebuild

Reliable internet services needed urgently

- Now and in another emergency

Rebuild for the future, examine the big questions, think things through

- Development of a local emergency plan with community input
 - Planning for protection of our essential services from fire including what assets should be relocated
- A proper disaster recovery plan,
 - Mallacoota needs good access by air, sea and land

- **Prioritise projects**
 - Prioritise human aspects of recovery, not economic ones.
 - Support projects with social and economic benefits
 - Have a project the community can own, with artistic, social connections
 - **Develop ten year tourism strategic plan**
 - Major project to attract holiday makers and to employ locals
 - **Evaluate projects**
 - Don't allow the shire to circumvent the rules for monetary gain
 - No relaxation of building regulations
 - Rebuilding, new building should not encroach on existing public space
- Longer term infrastructure projects funded with bushfire recovery**
- **Improve facilities found wanting during the fire - public refuge, fire safe building(s) for CFA, SES, Coast Guard.**
 - Bushfire Safe House suitable to save lives in another emergency
 - Smaller refuges Safer Places throughout the community
 - Upgrade emergency shelter ready for next time.
 - Prioritise joint facility for emergency service SES, Coast Guard, SLSC
 - Facilities for Life Saving Club
 - **Independent electricity generation to ensure reliable supply**
 - Backup essential service options
 - Renewable energy production within the community
 - The development of a micro-grid for the town.
 - Powerlines underground
 - Include Gypsy Point and Genoa in electricity generation plan
 - **Increase water storage capacity**
 - **Community-scale gas storage and supply to homes**
 - **Community facilities, premises**
 - A larger community building or undercover structure for community events
 - Mallacoota's multiple organisations need premises to call 'home'
 - Small high care facility for our frail aged
 - Hydrotherapy pool
 - In-patient health care capacity in the town
 - Genoa - a new foot bridge.
 - Community vegetable garden on council land
 - **Recreation, exercise and sport facilities**
 - Designed skate park - top priority for kids
 - Swimming pool
 - Swimming pool in the council caravan park
 - Heated community swimming pool for year round use
 - An ocean swimming pool,
 - A seniors exercise park
 - Public park facilities to the left of Bastion Point
 - A reflection park be established for the whole community
 - Establish infrastructure to attract different groups of tourists
 - Hikers huts, track from Mallacoota to Marlo
 - Mountain bike trails, competition standard
 - Mallacoota Dark Skies project to attract visitors
 - Wildflower enthusiasts
 - Hides for bird watching
 - Access for boating
 - Permanent ongoing dredging for ocean access
 - Maintenance of navigation channels in the lower lake
 - Boat ramp user pays and existing rules of use enforced
 - Easier ocean access for boats to do charters,
 - Decent golf course
 - **Support for education, research**
 - Build the new Kindergarten as soon as possible
 - Campus for the school of student leadership
 - Tertiary research institutions
 - Research station with scientists, academics, volunteers
 - An environment education campus/research centre

Covid-19 multiplying the effects of the bushfires

Essential services have been maintained

Community needs to feel safe given our demographics

Find new ways to connect and come together amid the coronavirus restrictions.

- Special care during stay-at-home restrictions for those who lost homes

Urgent need to identify appropriate communication platforms

- Need for clear lines of communication with all levels of government,
- Remote provision of professional services less than satisfactory for some
- Many do not have internet access or have limited ability to use online technologies

Return to connectedness as soon as possible after Covid-19

- Have town get-togethers to celebrate achievements, survival

Limitations under Covid-19

- Stay at home rules difficult but important
- Loss of tourist income
- Our support of local businesses restricted at the moment
- Rebuilding progress slowed further
- Must moderate our expectations of funding recovery money
- Support those suffering economically
- Many missing out on Covid-19 relief packages - casuals, shire employees

Covid-19 stopped the ghouls coming to gawk