



An Australian Government Initiative



Upper Murray Bushfire Recovery

Forestry Australia 2022 Symposium

Mary Hoodless

Chair - Regional Development Australia Murray



An Australian Government Initiative



I acknowledge the tragic death of NSW RFS Firefighter Samuel McPaul and the ongoing impact of this catastrophic event on our community.

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

Regional Development Australia Murray

Our region:



Our purpose:

- Facilitating regional economic development
- Investment, procurement and jobs
- Connecting our region with Government
- Championing regional policy development
- Coordinating regional strategy

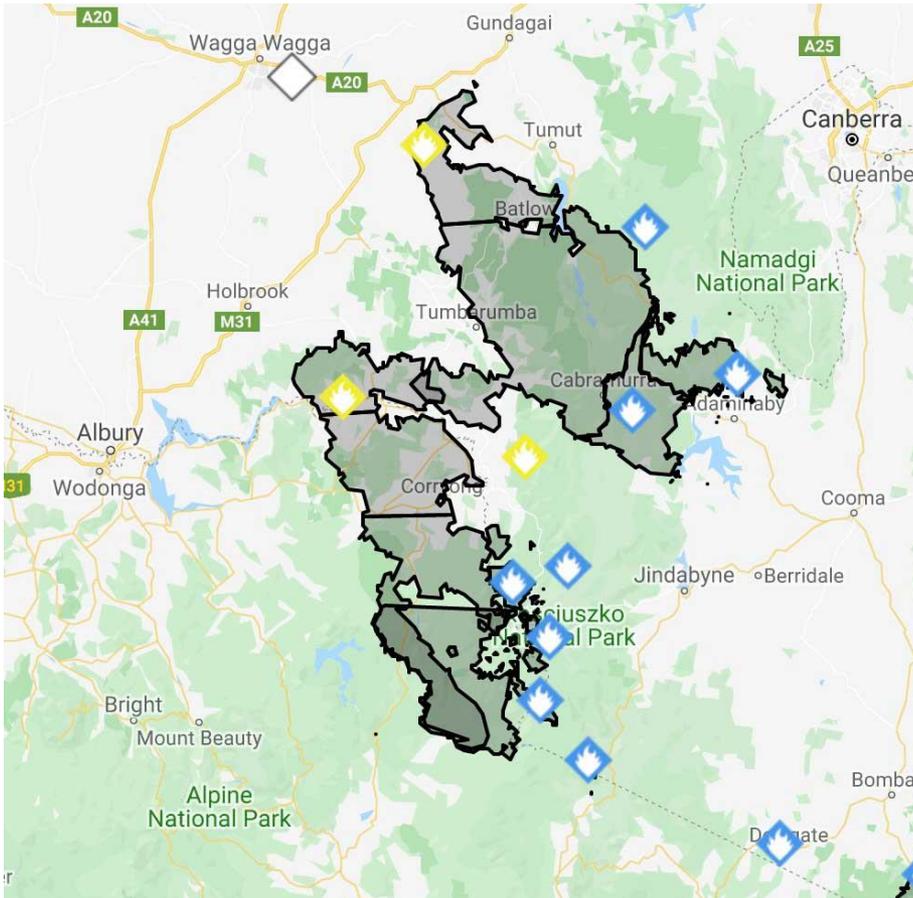


RDA Murray Board

Who we are:

- Mary Hoodless - *Chair*
- Geoff Lowe - *Deputy Chair*
- Alex Anthony - *Treasurer*
- Deanne Armstrong
- Ben Foley
- Brian Millar
- Lynnette O'Reilly
- Murray Scholz
- Gerard Van Emmerik
- Rachel Williams

2019-2020 Bushfires



“Six bushfires in two Australian states have merged, forming a huge blaze covering 1,532,484 acres (632,315 hectares) slightly smaller than the size of Delaware in the United States. The fires in Victoria and New South Wales met near Jingellic, NSW between Canberra and Albury.”

Source: <https://wildfiretoday.com/2020/01/10/six-bushfires-merge-in-australia-to-burn-1-5-million-acres/>

Green Valley/Dunns Road Complex

- 600,000 hectares burned
- 201 homes lost
- 9,042 livestock (counted, many more were lost)
- 17 injuries
- 1 fatality
- 8 weeks to extinguish
- 1,541 individual personnel, 525 truck shifts, 347 heavy plant and 100 aircraft shifts involved to extinguish the blaze.

Sources: GHC: Greater Hume Council Submission to NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry (May 2020). SVC: Snowy Valleys Council Submission to the Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements (April 2020)

RDA Murray's role during the fire

- Active, boots on the ground, local leadership and comfort.
 - Being with and alongside people through shock, suffering and grief
 - Communicating emergency situational information, where to find help via website and socials - Facebook, Twitter and email groups
 - Radio and television interviews about the impact and supports available
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RDA Murray's role after the fires

- Participation on Snowy Valleys Local Government Recovery Action Committee and three sub-committees; Community Advisory Group, Tourism and Business and, Environment and Agriculture.
 - Preparing and supporting information collection, analysis and advice to government and NSW Inquiry submissions
 - Participating in Royal Commission hearings (NSW and National)
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How RDA Murray helped

- Collect information in Ministerial and administrative briefings for all levels of government
 - Engaging NRRRA (NEMA), NSW DPI, NSW and VIC Cross Border Commissioners, NSW Health, VIC Albury Wodonga Area Health Service, Primary Health Care and charitable organisations in local issues
 - Leading a mental health mapping exercise to document and connect service providers and community members
 - Supporting recovery project development, funding applications and delivery
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My Lived Experience

- Local Jingellic resident – 37 yrs. Property owner located adjacent to Woomargama NP
 - Jingellic RFS Welfare and Community Engagement Officer
 - Professional background – Nursing, Health Service Management
 - Former President of Jingellic Hub - partly responsible for the successful funding applications to establish an Emergency Welfare Centre. (Fully equipped with bathrooms and catering facilities)
 - Pre-fire, the Hub hosted monthly Friday Fun nights – the organising committee were the core group who worked tirelessly to support our community, emergency services and others for 3 weeks.
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River Road, Jingellic

Monday 30 December 2019



Day 1 - AM

Sunday 29 December 2019

- Fire ignites by lightning – Green Valley

Monday 30 December 2019

- 6:00am - Consent to set up the Hub for welfare
- 8:00am - Travelled to Tumbarumba to get supplies
- 9:30am - Request for 60 meals on the fire ground

During this time, we were receiving unofficial mixed messages to evacuate - people arriving concerned, confused asking for updates – some with cars packed and wanting to know where to go

- 11: 30am - Core group prepared meals and found eskies for delivery to the fire grounds

Day 1 - PM

Monday 30 December 2019

- Notified of several serious incidents, confusion around detail, continued to prepare food and request urgent need for water
 - Trucks, cars, people moving through smoke and ash filled atmosphere
 - Fire Control working on bonnets of cars - Temp 40°+
 - Providing first aid to victim in the fatal accident- later airlifted to Melbourne
 - Multiple attempts by a Vic ambulance to access the facility
 - NSW Ambulance deployed – multiple casualties
 - Tragic death of Sam McPaul
 - Confusion continued with roadblocks
 - No communication and no mobile network – failed 6 days before the tower was destroyed
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Sam McPaul Memorial River Road, Jingellic

Jingellic Hub

Tuesday 31 December 2019 – Saturday 4 January 2020

A huge community effort to provide:

- An average of 300-400 meals/day
- 24hr respite, emergency accommodation, first aid, pet and human refuge, information, supplies – food, fuel, water etc.
- Fire control on site





Tuesday 31 December 2019



*New Years Eve 2019
View from Karoo*

*31 December 2019
The Night Sky*



Friday 3 - Saturday 4 January 2020

7:00pm Friday 3 January 2020:

- Section 44 enacted; Evacuation Hub closed, we all had to relocate, roads congested, visibility extremely poor, local communications difficult

Saturday 4 January 2020:

- Catastrophic weather conditions – Properties surrounding Jingellic, including my property, were burnt out
 - 99% of Karoo burnt - saved the house and machinery shed. Minimal stock losses, however lost all our fodder
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“Karoo”



October 2019

January 2020



Sunday 5 January 2020

Following a Catastrophic Day:

- Satellite Wi-Fi call at 6:00am to reopen the Hub despite the opening of Holbrook control and relief centre
 - The Hub continued to operate 24hrs/day until Thursday 16 January 2020
 - We initiated a community led, local Jingellic Recovery Committee, bringing together mental health, RFS, waste recovery, welfare, local coordinator and later local government, RFS, MDHS, MPs, NSW Farmers & LLS
 - The Recovery Committee had a key role in coordinating recovery as well as informing Local Government, Members of Parliament and RFS
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Jingellic's Resilience

The resilient community response in Jingellic was aided by:

- Fit for purpose facilities
 - Strong local network
 - Demonstrated local leadership
 - Volunteer ethic and commitment to community despite personal loss
 - Family and broader community support
 - Not reliant on government or others to initiate response or recovery
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NSW DPI Recovery Officer Role

April – October 2020

Case management/advocacy/support role connecting locals to support

Area:

- Greater Hume Council and southern part of the Dunns Road fire scar – Jingellic, Ournie, Mannus, Weleregang, Tooma- Maragle

Skills used:

- Local knowledge, case management experience, awareness of services and support, funding and social support available

Issues:

- Communication, community resources, access to information, resilience, relationships, mental health issues

Funding Needs Identified

Evidence collected and recovery funding sought and delivered by NSW Bushfire Industry Recovery Package for

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dairy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• apiculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• horticulture
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• viticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• aquaculture

In the aftermath, the peak bodies representing the livestock industry were unable to organise, collect and represent regional losses despite significant industry loss.

NSW DPI Recovery Officers surveyed and presented papers demonstrating need and extent of losses.

Beef and Sheep Industry Survey

Greater Hume and Snowy Valley Council Producers (N=94)

- 9,042 livestock lost (000's were not reported)
- Average percentage of each property burnt 78%
- Estimated loss ranged from \$240k - \$ 1.3m
- Costs to producers was estimated to be \$1,200 per hectare of burnt area. This did not include damage to housing or loss of income over the recovery period

'A feeling of being forgotten/undervalued as smaller industries have had support packages but the red meat sector was not considered'.

What I heard from landholders

Upper Murray landholder community fairly unanimously expressed fierce, generalised blame, anger, mistrust and resentment at pine plantations

Issues raised consistently included

- weed control
- pest animal control
- road damage and maintenance
- impacts on water in the landscape
- poor communication and relationships
- feelings of abandonment as neighbours and
- being dismissed as not worthy of adequate fire responses

Reputation and social licence

- Repair local trust as responsible and accountable corporate citizens
 - Branded community activities and investments e.g. in person neighbour visits, sponsor community events, invest in housing and accommodation in the local area
 - Develop branded relationships with community groups and peak bodies
 - Lead opportunities for mutual accountability and responsibility. Share information, invite auditing, create evidence-based awareness
 - Demonstrate branded public leadership expected of large companies and corporations.
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Continue the conversation..

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And on all the socials!