

Community Recovery Information #4

This newsletter contains recovery information for people recently impacted by bush fires in the Northern Tablelands, North Coast and Mid North Coast regions.

Health and wellbeing

Looking after yourself and others

Major events, such as the current NSW bush fires, that cause widespread loss and distress impact the whole community.

If you have been impacted by the recent fires, you might feel things like frustration, sadness and anxiety, or have trouble sleeping or remembering things.

This is a normal reaction to an abnormal event. Having someone to listen and support you at times like this is important.

People recovering from bush fires are being encouraged to access mental health and counselling services.

The resilience of people in regional communities is well known, but no one should feel like they need to go it alone in the coming days, weeks, or months.

Coping with Christmas

Occasions like Christmas can bring up feelings of sadness and grief.

Sometimes it's difficult to talk about what's going on but it's important to reach out if you need help.

This could be as simple as sending a text, a message on social media, inviting someone over for a cuppa or making a phone call.

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

- **Beyondblue: 1300 22 4636**
- **Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511**
- **Lifeline: 13 11 14**
- **Mensline: 1300 789 978**
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800**

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

Tips for managing your recovery

Some tips on managing your recovery:

- Spend time with family and friends
- Try to get back into a routine
- Continue a healthy lifestyle (eating, sleeping, exercise)
- Take time out but don't isolate yourself
- Express your feelings in your own way
- Accept help when it is offered
- Limit the amount of media coverage you are exposed to
- Don't expect to have all the answers
- Understand you are not alone in your experience.

Keep checking in with your friends and neighbours and looking out for each other.

Free face-to-face support

Free face-to-face services with a mental health practitioner, such as a psychologist or mental health social worker, to provide people with strategies and techniques to manage mental health.

- **Hunter/New England – Healthwise 1800 931 540**
- **North Coast - Connect to Wellbeing 1300 160 339**

Disaster Welfare Assistance Points – transitioning to council

Disaster welfare and recovery services are transitioning to council from 20 December 2019.

Over the holiday period, assistance is still available:

Housing: 1800 422 322 (24/7)

Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511

Animal and Agriculture Hotline:

1800 814 647

**Disaster Welfare Assistance Line:
1800 018 444 (8.30am to 4.30pm business hours)**

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line – holiday season opening hours

Call on **1800 018 444** every day over the Christmas period if you need assistance.

DISASTER WELFARE ASSISTANCE LINE

23 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
24 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
25 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
26 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
27 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
28 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
29 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
30 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
31 December:	8.30am to 4.30pm
1 January:	8.30am to 4.30pm

Bushfire clean-up assistance and waste management

The NSW Government is providing \$25 million to help cover the cost of cleaning up home sites, concrete slab removal, and ensuring that hazardous materials, including asbestos, are removed and handled in a safe and orderly manner.

This means that your insurance money is maximised towards rebuilding your home. This funding also covers those whose homes are uninsured.

If you are insured:

For insured homes that have been damaged or destroyed, insurance companies will arrange clean-up and removal of bushfire debris.

1. Talk to your insurance company as soon as possible about how to make a claim.
2. Take photos or video of damage to your property and possessions as evidence for your claim.
3. If you have clearance from your insurer and evidence for your claim, you can start cleaning up.

The **Insurance Council of Australia** can be contacted with any questions, complaints or concerns about insurance on **1800 734 621**.

If you are uninsured:

For uninsured homes that have been damaged or destroyed, Public Works Advisory can arrange for the clean-up and removal of bushfire debris from residences and immediately adjacent outbuildings, including the removal of asbestos and concrete slabs.

Public Works Advisory: 1800 88 55 39

Clean-up health and safety

- Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by emergency services, utilities companies or your local council.
- Electrical hazards could exist such as live power lines that may be down or active solar panels.
- Buildings and other structures may be unstable to enter or walk over.
- Sewerage and septic systems may be disrupted causing health risks.
- Be aware that hot, smouldering coals and other potentially hazardous materials may be hidden under the rubble.
- Building rubble should not be buried as it may contain hazardous materials.
- Waste generated as a result of the fires needs to go to lawful facilities to ensure soil, water and human health is protected.
- Don't spread ash around your property, particularly if asbestos materials were used in your home or other structures, or CCA-treated timber was burnt.
- Moisten the ash with water to minimise dust and keep damp but do not use high pressure water sprays.
- Asbestos dust and fibres have the potential to present a health risk.
- Asbestos clean-up and removal must be done by a licensed asbestos removalist.

Fire retardant information

Coloured foam dropped from the air to suppress fires may have landed on some properties.

This retardant will need to be flushed from roofs and water sources.

To stop retardant or ash getting into water tanks, disconnect your downpipe/s from water tank/s, so that the first flush (either rain or washing) does not wash anything from the roof into tanks.

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line: 1800 018 444 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays).

Hazard Identification Notices

You may find a hazard identification notice on your property when you return after a bushfire. This notice indicates your property has been visited and dangers like electrical risks, falling branches or asbestos may have been identified.

Only return home when you have been given approval. When you do, even if there is no sign, there may still be hazards on your property.

Please ensure you wear a P2 face mask, which can filter out very fine particles from the air.

If the Hazard Identification Notice indicates asbestos is suspected on your property, you can get further information from the **Public Works Advisory** on **1800 88 55 39**.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION NOTICE		
THIS PROPERTY HAS BEEN INSPECTED AFTER THE FIRE. For your safety, we have indicated the possible hazards that may be present.		
ASSESSMENT DATE:		
SITE DETAILS:		
ASSESSING OFFICER:		
IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL HAZARDS:		
Electricity (Mains)	Suspected Asbestos (no sample taken)	Dangerous Tree / Branches
Electricity (Solar)	Suspected Asbestos (sample taken)	Structural Instability
Gas (Mains)	Respiratory Irritant (Fibreglass etc.)	Shrubs
Gas (Cylinder)	Bulk Flammable Liquids	Exposed edge (Fall Hazard)
Sewage	Chemicals	Pool Fencing
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: These hazards may cause serious injury. If asbestos is suspected, it is recommended you do not enter the property. For further information or advice please contact 1800 88 55 39.		

Beware dodgy tradies

Beware of travelling conmen and unlicensed traders, who target disaster-affected areas, offering cheap, cash-only repairs.

If you take up such offers, you run the risk of:

- Substandard work
- Being left out of pocket if the trader disappears before finishing the job
- Being unable to contact the trader once they

have been paid

- Paying more to have a legitimate tradesperson repair shoddy work

Before you employ a tradesperson:

- Check your insurance policy and find out if you are covered
- Ask around for suitable tradespeople and get quotes
- Ask for a tradesperson's full name and licence number and check they are licensed to do the work
- Do not pay in full up front
- Be wary of door-to-door offers - get proof that the tradesperson is offering the deal legally and appropriately
- Check with your local council if a building permit or other approval is needed.

For more information, see www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/news-and-updates/news/natural-disasters.

Support for individuals

Disaster Relief Grants

Grants are available for eligible individuals and families whose homes and essential household contents have been damaged or destroyed by a natural disaster.

To be eligible for this assistance you must:

- Be a low-income earner and meet an income assets test
- Demonstrate that the affected home is your principal place of residence
- Not be covered by insurance
- Demonstrate that the damage was caused by the disaster
- Lodge the application within four months of the disaster occurring

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line: 1800 018 444 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays).

Disaster Recovery Allowance

The Disaster Recovery Allowance has been activated by the Australian Government for people affected by the NSW Bush Fires.

This provides short term support payment to assist those whose income has been affected as a direct result of the bush fires.

Human Services: 180 2266 or humanservices.gov.au

Disaster Recovery Payment

The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment has been activated for people

severely affected by the NSW Bush Fires.

This provides a one-off payment of \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child if your home has been destroyed or severely damaged (including smoke damage).

**Human Services: 180 2266 or
humanservices.gov.au**

Domestic water assistance

If your potable water has been used by a fire fighting agency to fight the fire, you may be eligible to have it replaced.

This assistance is for residential properties in rural areas.

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line: 1800 018 444
(8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays).

Emergency temporary accommodation

Emergency accommodation is available to people affected as a direct result of the recent fires.

Short-term housing support for up to three months is available to all people in urgent need of housing because of a natural disaster. This also covers people who would not normally be eligible for social housing.

Housing Contact Centre: 1800 422 322
(available 24/7)

Telstra disaster relief

Telstra customers who have suffered severe damage or loss of their premises can access free call diversion from their Telstra fixed phone service for a maximum period of six months from the date of the fire.

In addition, Telstra will apply a one off credit to the value of \$500 including GST to the customer's Telstra fixed phone account to help cover the costs of the following, if required:

- Connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at one temporary residence;
- Re-connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at the customer's original permanent premises.

Call **Telstra** on **132 203** to register for assistance.

Support for landholders

Local Land Services and NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) are providing assistance to landholders who have been impacted by bush fire through the Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area (AASFA). Their priority is assisting you to ensure the survival and welfare of animals.

Emergency fodder

AASFA provides emergency fodder and assistance for short-term relief (usually up to three days) to enable landholders to make alternative arrangements for livestock feed.

Animal and Agriculture Hotline: 1800 814 647

Emergency water supplies

AASFA is providing water to manage immediate animal welfare issues and are contacting those who have requested water.

Prioritisation of emergency water provision will depend on the:

- Significance of the impact on animal welfare; and
- Significance of the impact on other agricultural activities.

Assistance for minor/temporary repairs to infrastructure to enable water supply is also available.

Animal and Agriculture Hotline: 1800 814 647

Reporting stock loss and damage

Landholders are encouraged to report damage to property.

This enables DPI to determine where and what assistance or resources may be needed.

Animal and Agriculture Hotline: 1800 814 647
or **www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rrp**

Primary Producer Grants

Grants of up to \$15,000 are available for bush fire affected primary producers.

Eligibility criteria apply.

**Rural Assistance Authority: 1800 678 593 or
www.raa.nsw.gov.au/disaster-
assistance/disaster-recovery-grants**

Title searches and plan images

NSW Land Registry Services (NSW LRS) is helping landholders affected by the recent NSW bushfires by providing title searches and plan images of their property free of charge.

Property searches and plans can assist landholders with insurance claims and development applications to council, as well as provide peace of mind regarding land ownership following natural disasters.

NSW LRS: 1300 396 076 or (02) 8776 3575

Fire-damaged fences

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) offers assistance under certain conditions to repair or replace fences bordering national parks in accordance with the NPWS boundary fencing policy.

This is of particular relevance to landholders who immediately border national parks and nature reserves affected by the recent fires.

NPWS is offering to purchase and supply an agreed quantity of fencing materials to reconstruct boundary fences.

This offer applies to the replacement or repair of pre-existing boundary fences only.

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment: 1300 361 967

Small business support

Small Business Grants

Grants of up to \$15,000 are available if your business has been directly affected by bush fire.

Eligibility criteria apply.

Rural Assistance Authority: 1800 678 593 or www.raa.nsw.gov.au/disaster-assistance/disaster-recovery-grants

Business Connect

A free mobile advisory service is available to small businesses. A local advisor can meet you at a convenient place and discuss your business needs. Advice is offered about managing cash flow, planning the next steps, accessing financial support schemes and connecting to additional support.

1300 134 359 or register at industry.nsw.gov.au/businessconnect

Dispute Resolution Service

A confidential and free dispute resolution service has been set up to help small businesses needing assistance to work through problems with other businesses or government.

1300 795 534 or visit smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au/dispute-resolution

General information for Regional NSW

Information, advice and assistance is available for people managing a business, including business tools to analyse profitability and prepare for export.

6760 2670 or visit nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/regional-nsw

Over the holiday period, assistance is still available:

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Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511 (24/7)

Animal and Agriculture Hotline:

1800 814 647 (business hours)

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line:

1800 018 444 (8.30am-4.30pm)

For more recovery information and updates visit:

Website:

www.emergency.nsw.gov.au

Facebook:

[@NSWDisasterRecovery](https://www.facebook.com/NSWDisasterRecovery)