

# GRANITE BELT BUSHFIRES

## 1 Year on



Community survey findings

November 2020

The Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre wishes to thank the:

- 62 individuals and families who replied to GBNC's bushfire survey
- 22 Granite Belt's Rural Fire Brigades for their input, advice, and guidance
- Collective wisdom of the CDS Inc Board of Management
- Numerous GBNC staff who played a role in making this survey happen and the compilation of findings and writing the final report

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GBNC acknowledges some funding from the following Departments was used to enable this survey and associated project work to happen to such an effective outcome / response:



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services



Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors

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## Background

The Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre (GBNC), the trading name of Community Development Services Inc, undertook a community input process targeted at reaching those residents directly affected by the 2019 bushfires.

Respondent's comments formed the basis of GBNC's distribution of additional one-off funds provided by the Federal Government specifically tied to Emergency Relief for "those directly impacted by bushfire". These funds are to be fully expended by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

GBNC will return a hardcopy of this report to each respondent who provided contact details for their use at will. In addition, GBNC will, via the community's two facebook noticeboards, report back to the community on how it has decided to allocate this one-off funding and that electronic copies of the report is available upon request.



Further, GBNC will also give a copy of this report to 3 key stakeholders who have key roles in the prevention of not only future fire events, but also repetition of the issues highlighted in this report. These stakeholders being:

- All members of the Southern Downs Regional Council
- James Lister, Member for Southern Downs, State Government
- David Littleproud, Minister for Emergency Management

Appendix A is the raw data, i.e. all respondents' comments, without any editing. This de-identified information is included to aid the work by any other agency interested in the comments of those who went through the 2019 Granite Belt bushfires.

Appendix B is a summary of the unmet needs of the Granite Belt's Rural Fire Brigades also surveyed during this project work.

GBNC hopes that any/all of the 3 levels of Government will see fit to provide funding to address residents' needs. Further, the Brigades' needs are so meagre, when compared with the financial windfall for NSW Fire Brigades alone which were reportedly given \$10,000 each from the Celeste Barber fundraising effort, that their needs will be met by one or all levels of government.

## Methodology

Across September and October 2020 GBNC conducted an online survey (via Survey Monkey) that was promoted via Stanthorpe's two Community Noticeboard Facebook pages. As phase two, a paper-based distribution of the same questionnaire to fire affected areas of the Granite Belt also occurred.

Except for 8 returns where no name or contact details were provided, the remaining 54 respondents provided contact names and details (which have been removed from this report for Privacy Act compliance). This greatly improves the veracity and

reliability of the findings in the knowledge there is very little likelihood of double counting the same respondent.

## Findings' themes

### Q1 How impacted

GBNC is confident through this survey that it has a more in-depth appreciation of how fire directly impacted people, beyond the reported 4 instances of home/property loss alone.



Respondents' comments indicate greater psycho-social impacts – eg. ongoing grief/loss of gardens, living with implicit threat from dead trees or neighbour's long grass - that persist well beyond the rebuilding phase of recovery.

*“46 years of gardens destroyed –  
house was saved”*

Collectively the responses also attest to the need for all levels of Government to reconsider how it defines “directly impacted” persons by bushfire for the purposes of follow on disaster recovery-tied funding to local community groups.

***Recommendation 1: “Directly impacted” is much more subtle than solely loss of infrastructure. It clearly includes things like loss of food due to power outages, having to live for years potentially with implied threat, loss of wages (and not just those of the volunteer firies).***

### Q2 Unmet needs

One year on, 60% of respondents report having no remaining unmet needs, with only 1 respondent still awaiting repairs.

However, there remains evident need for 3 larger and longer-term assistance:

- Financial assistance to undertake larger tasks eg. fencing, to fell dead trees and the need for heavy machinery to mound this timber for future burning under permit.
- Action to require neighbours to attend to long grass on their property.
- Advocacy with home insurers to extend their fire coverage to include removal of dead trees and fencing, and not just sheds/houses/infrastructure.

Whilst the above are the theme issues from this question, there are additional unmet needs provided as answers to question 5 which should also be considered as indicators of unmet need.

Removal of dead trees is beyond the funding resources provided to GBNC through the Department of Social Services' Emergency Relief (specifically tied to Bushfire) or even eligible for funding by the Department of Communities' disaster funding.

However, each of the three tiers of government have both the individual remit and responsibility to address respondents' suggestions and GBNC's recommendations, through various cross-jurisdiction, machinery of government processes such as local

level disaster management committees. The foci of their efforts vary but from GBNC's perspective they include such as the following.

Minister Littleproud as Minister for Emergency Management is better positioned to raise and influence such aspects as the:

- emergency planning process by the involved authorities at the time of crisis and post-crisis
- financial assistance to address the larger and more costly tasks post-fire such as tree removal, fencing
- faster response to Federal Government funding via Emergency Relief other than the provisions of funding 1 year post event
- insurance industry to consider an extension to its home insurance products to include the costs of dead tree removal post-fire events.

The State Government's Disaster Management Committee for Southern Downs region can review responses with a view to quality improvement opportunities in relation to such aspects as:

- evacuation centres being inclusive of the needs of people with disabilities, able to include domestic pets
- creation locally of a register of vulnerable people both in rural and urban parts of the Granite Belt region so authorities are aware of them in the need to evacuate due to whichever type of disaster (fire or flood).
- information dissemination – advice to evacuate to include address of possible options, information updates on event progress to counter misinformation that occurs
- such aspects as:
  - eligibility criteria for immediate disaster funding through the State Government (eg. working versus non-working, providing actual essential food box to last approximately the initial 3 days)
  - the amount of funds immediately provided at the time of event crisis and
  - the speed of Federal Government's post disaster funding and the amount of ER tied funding provided (eg. consider larger amounts of money tied to a street level so as to create cooperative response (rather than individual resident level) to cleaning up and tree removal and facilitate/model people working together to self-help addressing their and their neighbour's needs/issues.
- changing the Department of Communities disaster-recovery process timelines whereby local agencies, approached by the Department to apply for funding for specific short-term assistance programs, are given only days to apply for funds which then take the Department some 6 weeks to make a decision and subsequently funds flow. It is positive that the reporting requirements tied to such funding was not onerous or irrelevant to real world circumstances

The Southern Downs Regional Council has the capability to influence such aspects as:

- any way/s it can require property owners to maintain their properties to prevent fire
- fund local agencies to undertake regular (eg yearly) education sessions on how to maintain property so it reduces risk in event of fire, flood or severe wind events

- providing each house with a one-stop educative resource on what to do at key stages eg prevention, crisis, immediate post-event, longer term. This could take the form of the 'Be Ready Central West Flipbook' currently under development by the Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Longreach and Winton councils through funding from the State Government's Get Ready Queensland program.
- shaping the work in the Granite Belt undertaken by SDRC's fixed-term funded Bushfire Recovery Community Development Officer

**Recommendation 2: GBNC would be willing (if appropriately funded to develop a one-stop, phased resource which we believe would better resource the public than the 1year post-event issued emergency backpack recently distributed by SDRC. SDRC is better positioned to distribute this proposed resource to each household which could be factored into its community development work, bushfire related.**

### Q3 What helped at the time of crisis

There was a diverse range of responses about what helped at the time of crisis; overwhelmingly a sense of thanks to those on the frontline of the fire and those working to keep people out of the way of harm.

There was little indication of any delay in various forms of assistance from local agencies/groups/people coming at the time of crisis for those directly impacted eg. evacuation centres, provision of food, immediate financial help of \$180, notification texts.

*"We were very impressed with the "gift" bags we were given (food stuffs etc) it probably wasn't necessary but felt so "nice" that people were considering us"*

Despite this sense of gratitude and general lack of negative comments the next questions' responses revealed aspects respondents thought also could be done faster, earlier, or better.

### Q4 What should happen faster or earlier

Comments in response to this question are rich in suggestions of areas that could be improved and useful to a wide range of stakeholders that each could take on to address so in any future events we demonstrate learning from past experiences.



There was a wide range of issues including (but not limited to):

- State government financial assistance was slow in coming
- when State Government's financial assistance came it wasn't provided (or eligible) to those not directly affected by fire. There were a larger number of people impacted by prolonged power outages leading to food spoilage etc; it's more of a hidden ripple impact than burnt houses or sheds.
- no immediate support to some people. It took the use facebook to ask what help was available for action to occur or to do it oneself as there was no one available at the time to help.

- more than 1 comment indicating various evacuation centres were not physically accessible or equipped to support people with a disability.
- ongoing updates of the situation seemed patchy both for those who remained in their homes and for those in evacuation centres. One comment indicated that the alert to evacuate to an evacuation centre didn't include the address of the centre/s.

Two months past the fire crisis GBNC was asked by Department of Communities to submit a quote to provide counselling support for a 3-month period. However, the take up for this service was very low, unlike the greatly increased demand it dealt with via its Emergency Relief funding-from the Department of Social Services. It was very helpful that the Dept Communities refunded to GBNC \$5,200 it had spent on ER bushfire related services during and immediately post the fire event.

However, this survey's responses may show that short-term funding for psycho-social support may come too early in the recovery process or that it needs to be factored in by Government at two different timeframes – within 2 months of event and 1 year on. Soon after the event it may be that people are too focused on reinstating their life and lifestyle to seek support.

Another factor that may have impacted the take up of counselling post event and still one year on is the reality that people may not be willing to give voice to the need for such assistance.

Consideration of the survey's findings, the availability of counselling support by GBNC could have been better promoted by GBNC given the low take up rate clearly belied the true need for it – at that time and still to this day. Equally it may have been too early in the recovery process for many people, maybe 6-months post event more people may want this support.

***Recommendation 3: This survey highlights the need for a range of psycho-social assistance to be available not just in the 2 to 4 months following a fire event but for a longer period, given issues persists for some people 1 year on. Assistance in such areas as emotional support/counselling, dealing with fear/implies threat from nature around them and assistance with longer term life planning is still needed.***

#### *Q5 Preventative actions*

Whilst question 3 identified larger unmet needs/issues they should be considered alongside the suggestions of preventative actions, including (but not limited to):

- Counselling / psycho-social support
- Teaching Fire Brigades and interested residents how to undertake 'cool burns'
- Better preventative management of a person's property via training/education
- One-stop source of information as a preventative and remedial self-help tool given free to all house owners and renters. This resource should be written in a way that mirrors what we have learnt is the progression of people's needs eg. prevention, event crisis, immediate post crisis up to first 2 weeks, post crisis 2 weeks to 6 months+.
- Financial support at a higher dollar level to accommodate the larger tasks that remain and to assist general remediation needs eg replacement of household items, wash out water tanks and refill, garden plants,

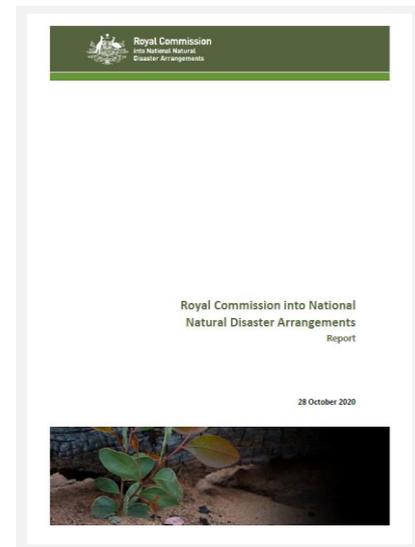
- Ongoing more regular burn offs to reduce the fuel load

## Summary

During this survey, the Royal Commission into the 2019 bushfires released its final report in October 2020.

It is interesting to note that the various issues, suggestions, and comments of survey respondents speak to issues identified in several of the chapters in this report, in particular:

- Chapter 10 Community education
- Chapter 11 Emergency planning
- Chapter 12 Evacuation planning and shelters
- Chapter 13 Emergency information and planning
- Chapter 15 Health
- Chapter 17 Public and private land management
- Chapter 18 Indigenous land and fire management
- Chapter 20 Insurance
- Chapter 21 Coordinating relief and recovery
- Chapter 22 Delivery of recovery services and financial assistance



Working collaboratively and cross-jurisdictionally there is much that can be done to ensure we have learnt from the past when faced with future fire events.

## What GBNC is doing

GBNC, has reviewed its practices and operations to identify areas for improvement and why there was a poor take up of the State funded disaster recovery counselling service 2 months post the fire.

Changes were made in how GBNC reaches into the Granite Belt community (and on an ongoing basis). Now its reach into the broader community is far more effective as both this survey's response and attendance numbers at GBNC events, workshops and programs now attests.

Through the Department of Social Services' tied bushfire grant via its Emergency Relief program, GBNC by the end of December 2020 proposes to use these funds for these proactive, community capacity purposes:

- Fund 3 workshops by a recognised and skilled person to teach our community how to do a 'cool burn'. One workshop will be only for the Fire Brigade and all Rural Fire Brigades. Two workshops (1 north and 1 south of Stanthorpe township) will be open to any community resident.
- provide \$500 in vouchers to each of the Granite Belt fire brigades for them to use to meet individual brigade needs
- provide every identified respondent, each fire brigade, all SDRC councillors and Federal and State Members of Parliament with a hardcopy of this report for use by them however he/she wishes.

### Questionnaire responses as written by respondents (no editing)

#### Q1 How were you affected by last year's bush fire?

- Evacuated
- Week of lost income due to volunteer firefighting. I am a single parent of 3 kids
- Mental issues of stress as I'm a fire fighter and fought the fires
- Burnt property and lost everything outside including water tanks, septic tanks, sheds etc
- There was high anxiety and concern for ourselves and our township and area. We were in the thick of the smoke haze and were evacuated once. financially, lost power, food, curtains etc.
- Traumatized by what I had witnessed. Nightmares and anxiety for a few weeks after. We were displaced for the night, but property was safe.
- Fire went completely through our block we lost 2 sheds, 2 bridges all our fencing. Lucky house was safe. Evacuated for 4 days. Lived with smoke, ash, dust for weeks
- Smoke and had to relocate
- We were evacuated and came right to our fence
- Evacuated on Friday 6th September
- evacuated / told by police to get out
- smoke damage, power outage, food spoilage
- first came to property boundary and burnt several timber fence posts
- emotionally upset and concerned for our family, others in the community and our town and livelihoods. Very sad and worried for native animals and livestock and environmental impacts + concerned for the elderly and those with lung conditions
- evacuated from the summit, but not directly affected by fire
- most of our fencing and some superstructure was destroyed. Our large garden was burnt and many plants and exotic trees were destroyed
- mostly mentally. There was even a police issue. We had it come up to us (fence), and we were upset by various documents
- 11.5 acres of our 12 acres were burned. 46 yrs of gardens destroyed – house was saved
- We were away in north Qld at the time, but had burnt around our property at showground lane before the fire came and we prevented any problems
- Evacuated with kids and animals as fire was close to yards. Fence knocked down by fire brigade
- Smoke, washing, breathing
- Fire surrounded our property in the early hours of Saturday morning
- Had to vacate my house close to midnight
- Substantial loss of fences and outbuildings
- We were evacuated, as the fire was the end of my street, Stanthorpe, the fire did go behind my home also
- We were away and due to come home. Neighbours informed us of street evacuation. We slept in our car at Australia Park Warwick, due to the fact that pets were not allowed in the evacuation centre at Leslie Dam, we have 2 dogs.
- No property damage apart from minor burning of stored “firewood” and ute canopy at rear of area bordering rear neighbour fence. “Emotional” aspect as reminder of incidents in past unrelated connection.

- Fire came to within 20 mtrs of house some garden burnt out.
- My property is located about 3km from Amiens Rd, Myself and visitors who were trying to get through were cut off initially. Later in the evening of the fire we couldn't return from town, had to do a trip right around through Poziers & Bapaume to get back
- The fire was across the road from our property – we had smoke – we were evacuated – but we weren't impacted directly, apart from smoke.
- We were evacuated in the Ballandean fire (which occurred just after the Stanthorpe fire). The bush burned on our property (2<sup>nd</sup> time in five years)
- Several acres of pasture burnt and 1500meters of fencing
- Evacuated Twice – some property damage
- I was evacuated while my husband was out fighting fires
- Greatly our railway station and contents vanished as did our sheds and boats and showers and chainsaws etc
- The fire went right through our property taking out our railway station, shed, fences, electricity watering system, trees, plants, tools no longer had handles.
- Indirectly, No fire on my property. Police evacuation for 3 nights, property damage caused by R.F.S
- Lost shed, Destroyed bushland and wildlife, weeks of cleaning up -dump, no water
- Had to evacuate for 2 days
- Having to evacuate at such short notice. I went for a walk around the block about 7:00 pm & thought it get up and burn along the bypass & the paddock of any dry grass up to the NE of us, at High St & NE Hwy, I came home and went to bed, but about 9:30pm I got told to get out of the place by my family, so I took off and spent the next 4 hrs sitting in a car near the YMCA, The rest of my family unknown to me had made arrangements to stay at a friends place in Wattle Ct
- We were evacuated for 4 days because the fire started across the road from my house.
- Our property was burnt out and the fences lost, but the buildings were not affected.
- Fire penetrated to rear boundary of our property approx. 50 meters from structures
- 2/3rds of our property was burned along with two sheds and gardens, house and important sheds saved.
- We were forced to evacuate our home
- We were effected quite very seriously by the fire at Ballandean on the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2019. We had to evacuate our property, only grabbing our 2 dogs. We had to stay out for 2 nights, 2 days. Our property was surrounded by fire, 1 house and garage were within 5 meters of the fire.
- Property devastated. Including Lost 1 of 2 houses on the property and farm shed – fencing & list goes on.
- 80% of our property was burnt. Backburn was started on our property. Was a very hot burn.
- Lost fences and feed
- Our 100 acre property was severely burnt and our house came very close to being destroyed
- Severely – the house burned down!
- Evacuated
- Not affected

- I was evacuated and had to go stay with my sister
- The fire came to within 2 metres of our house and several of our buildings were affected but only mildly because of the wonderful fires. We were evacuated and all help was given
- I live at end of Glenlyon Dr Evacuated from Fri-Mon, still had fires on property up to Thurs. whole property burnt out. Taken until last week (mid oct) to finish clean-up.
- My 2ha property was badly burnt – almost in entirety. My house and tanks were safe and shed also. I lost some outside stuff such as wheelbarrow, tools, irrigation system and my access road collapsed due to a culvert pipe burning out.
- I was evacuated. We could not return home for a week, our power was cut and we had no water. We lost some external structures (shed with many belongings, water tank), but our house was saved.
- Lost everything we had except our cars and animals
- We had to evacuate our house and stayed with friends for 3 days. The fires destroyed our plants and gardens, burning to within 1.5 meters of our house and separate garage. No fire damage to either the house or the garage. My partner is still nervy about fires (even those that are controlled burns) or when she smells smoke.
- Loss of gardens and bushland around property.
- We had to evacuate, and the fire went straight over our home. We couldn't go home for about 5 days as there was no power or water as our tanks had melted

**Q2 If you still have unmet needs what are they? What help/assistance would help you right now?**

- no unmet needs
- None
- None, being taken care of through fire care
- Still waiting on repairs to take place. Assistance with removal of dead trees as they are still dying and falling over
- We have recovered. lost lots of items
- N/A
- Clearing burnt trees. Every day I have to drive past hundreds of burnt dead trees
- Fresh bottled water or any help available
- Was not able to get any commonwealth financial assistance even though I was evacuated and with power outages, lost food in the fridge/freezer (tripped circuit breaker) and my computers
- on pension so always tight financially
- Nil
- nothing
- not applicable
- help to replace some of the trees / plants that were destroyed. Insurance doesn't cover that
- we have overgrown bush in our neighbour's place that scares us
- I have been working on dead trees and already fallen timber which followed the drought and the fire. I have to do this slowly with under 2m x 2 in fires, as I do not have any machinery to handle large heaps under permit. This falling of the dead trees, their stacking and burning would help
- No thank you we are fine

- Dams are only ½ full. Grass dry and needs slashing or burning. Need fire breaks. Hopefully we will be able to attend to this. Being elderly makes this difficult
- n/a
- Everything is Ok
- Nil
- Nothing!
- No everything is OK Here.
- Nil unmet needs
- Not applicable here. Long-term mental/emotional aspect is on-going and at 73 years of age unlikely to change. Long-time trauma is just that! No help needed or sought. Thank you.
- No unmet needs
- No unmet needs
- We don't have any needs that still need to be met.
- We have met our own needs, as nothing appeared to be forthcoming, despite assurances. We have washed our own roof with our own water and replaced burnt irrigation pipe at our own expense.
- We have resolved issues now by replacing fencing and clearing a firebreak.
- Boundaries needs clean up removal of old dead trees
- No – Nil unmet needs
- Quite a few large trees need to be felled to make the bush safe o walk/work in
- The services of an arborist, fencing
- I do not want any help from CDS. As I don't trust this organisation
- Unnecessary damage caused by Rural Fire Brigade idiots. Running over gate – cutting new fence on my property. RFB untrained personnel with little or no knowledge about Rural Fire
- None. Thankyou, Insurance was very helpful
- Nil
- We still have a grass paddock to the south of our residence, although I go around and clear the grass away with the neighbours permission on the opposite side of our wooden paling fence. The rest of our neighbours have steel panel fences with plenty of grass growing to the opposite side to their lawns! If all that grass died off with their lawns just as dry. The steel panels don't touch ground level, the fire could still creep onto a dry lawn.
- Nil
- We do not have any unmet needs at this time
- Urgently need burn off regrowth of grass and bushes since rains in January and February 2020
- All needs met, still have many dead trees to cut down and take to dump, but will do in due course
- Nil
- No
- A hazard reduction clean-up of the footpaths of Paling yard road
- Stock feed and the road cleared both sides
- No all needs met
- I manage
- N/A
- Rain
- I am being assisted by blue care services

- We are still clearing dead trees etc, but have had help from the Broadwater Firies. It is an ongoing thing, happening due to weather.
- One more load/ couple hours with someone with bobcat or trailer to finish clean up
- There is still a lot of dead timber that I would like to remove – have done a massive amount of this already – but it's not critical
- We/I am/ am recovered now. We were well supported by GBSS, employer community. We were offered so much support we sometimes felt like frauds (taking support that we did not deserve)
- Someone to build me a fern/shade house
- We have no unmet needs
- Nil
- We have had an outpouring of help from all over organisations. We are more than happy with the outcome.

**Q3 Reflecting on last year's fire what was provided really quickly that you thought really helped you and you would recommend occurs/happens again?**

- easy way to advise authorities if you have already left your property
- Good food on the fire line
- Food packs - kept you going and you didn't have to add going shopping to the list of things you had to cope with. SES came and cleared an entrance to our front door.
- The aircraft came very quickly.
- n/a
- The hub at the civic centre; council updates on Facebook were very helpful on updating info. Immediate assistance for debriefing and counselling was lacking. The assistance provided at the Showgrounds was excellent. We need to have a response prepared, involving a sanctioned group, which can't be shut down by council.
- Welfare checks by the police. And the fire brigade who checked our hot spots regularly. Including the fly overs
- Great community help financially
- Probably including the people in town with more assistance. I feel we were overlooked in the mental health care
- Offer of accommodation in town at the local caravan park when it was too uncertain to me to travel home each day
- Evac centre at Leslie Dam was extremely helpful but had no fire updates. Was stressful as we had lost a house in the 2011 Grantham floods so it bought back all the bad memories and the stress that goes with that experience. Most need cash to help immediately.
- The notice everyone was given via emergency text messages were great
- Financial assistance for power outage – frozen food damage
- Amazing community support, kindness, volunteers, Firies knowledge, reporting. We were given a sense of security and that everyone was working together with passion and empathy and great skill
- The evacuation process went smoothly. The way the community pulled together, set up the food for firefighters and volunteers was outstanding

- We simply evacuated at the last minute. The fire service may have helped in saving our home and other structures. We received no report of this but we are most grateful for the assistance of the fire brigade. We thought all was lost
- Multiple safe areas, including the showgrounds (where we could take our pets)
- Nothing
- Prevention by strategic burning
- I only received the \$180 or whatever it was for being put out after being evacuated
- Nil
- Updates on radio, visit from police, evacuation centre at Stanthorpe fitness
- Nil
- I got no useful support. I managed to put out spot fires myself and saved the house. No one else was available to help
- There was police and fire fighters in the street and had warned us in plenty of time.
- CDS provided no help at all
- Roof washing extremely helpful as we have a rainwater tank.
- Radio updates, police presence as fire approached area.
- Advice to evacuate
- When the fire front changed direction the rural fire brigade did back burning within the state forest where it borders my property, this stopped the threat of the fire crossing into my property
- Assistance to replace food in freezer due to loss of power – this was really good.
- Lots of visitors who offered plastic bottles of water and the promise of “some money that might be thrown around”, however nothing eventuated. Fire mob were good.
- Fire service assistance to extinguish fires
- No help was provided apart from police advising us to leave.
- Our roof was washed down, after contamination from retardant from aerial “fire attack”. – Thankyou
- Our insurance company was quick off the mark and our claim was processed quickly
- The water was the absolute best thing, it gave the us the ability to have drinking water and wash our hands. Just wonderful we could have had help in setting up the pod it was a major effort.
- Nothing. Ignorance by RFS (Lack of Skills) too many fools
- Street meeting/ support, Gift card – community, Southern Downs Regional Council -remove dump fees, washdown of roof
- Door knock by Police
- On Saturday morning we were let know early enough when to come back & we were able to go out to pack apples at Poziers later that day.
- I noticed smoke and within a half an hour, we had received evacuation orders. We were regularly updated on what was happening while we were away.
- The immediate response of the fire brigade was the most assuring thing
- Fortunately fire fighting appliances were in the area after fires in Stanthorpe so were able to reopen very quickly
- Fireman came to check all Ok the next day very good, Police were good in evacuating people.
- Evacuate centre

- We received no immediate assistance financially. We had to have our water tank emptied and cleaned out as it was full of fire retardant. On a later date we were supplied with bottled water. The R.F.B. were situated on our property as we have a good view of the surrounding area.
- Rural fire services responded quite quickly. Information was given quite readily. They really did a great job.
- Nothing
- Potable water was provided quickly which was great. Also the cleaning of our roof to remove ash and debris was quick and helpful
- Community help
- N/A
- Nil
- I was advised by SES and they stayed with me until my sister came to pick me up
- We were very impressed with the “gift” bags we were given (food stuffs etc) it probably wasn’t necessary but it felt so “nice” that people were considering us.
- To be honest nothing was provided. I had to ask for food and water I think it was the Thursday on Facebook as I had nothing
- SDRC called a meeting at the Civic Centre the next day which was very good for getting information out, Emergency aid (financial) was quick, making roads accessible and getting power back on was quite quick
- I was given immediate respite at GBSS and remained there with a carer for a week. My family were able to continue without worrying about me. My mother and my carer were given accommodation where my mother works. She worked all that weekend.
- Clothes, Accommodation, Animal housing (cats)
- The police ordered us out which was the first indication that we had that something was up. The range of services provided by the SDRC and others at the Civic Centre was much appreciated as was the follow-up visits to our home by the fire services (daily) and by social workers (twice).
- Support from Rural Fire Brigade
- Without a doubt it was the rural fire brigade. Without their commitment and dedication we would be homeless. Also friends and neighbours that happened to be driving past and extinguishing spot fires.

**Q4 Reflecting on last year's fire was any help missing or slow to happen that you think would have been of more help at that crisis moment?**

- no
- Assistance for people responding to the incident
- Too many sightseers and getting in the way of fire fighters
- Council said they would provide water but tanks arrived later than their cut off date. Removal of trees is never ending and costs a fortune as it is not covered by insurance. However some trees did regrow and others died so it’s probably not until now 1 year later that you can really see the dead trees that require removal.
- The YMCA was not equipped to handle disabled persons either with toileting or bedding. This is difficult
- No
- I don’t know as I was told I was not entitled to anything else as I work
- Can’t comment

- Samaritan's purse promised men with chainsaws to cut down dead trees in the house yard. We were relieved to get some support. But they NEVER CAME. We felt very let down! No explanation was given.
- Information – missing information, slow to filter out, didn't get told when it jumped onto the town side
- No. There was nothing that could have stopped the fury of the fire. We were not advised to evacuate officially. We evacuated ourselves when we saw it was necessary
- I think it would be a good idea to have signs available to say property evacuated, so the police and SES didn't need to waste valuable time checking properties already vacated. Perhaps a sign specific to police and firefighters to prevent looting! Or maybe a registry of some sort
- No. I don't think so
- We did not receive information that our tank water could have been contaminated by chemicals used by the fire – who were bloody terrific
- No
- The major thing in reflection is there should be well paid people paid to burn off at least every 2-3 years in July, August. THAT NOT HAPPENING IS THE MAJOR PROBLEM.
- More help on the ground in the midst of the emergency. Availability of water – I had no water or electricity – so my pumps didn't work
- No they all did an excellent job, saved all the homes around this area.
- Our dogs are estate trained. Would be very helpful if pets were allowed in the evacuation centres, they are family & we would not leave our pets! Tea coffee offered at evacuation centre rather than a can of water.
- Radio advice to shelter at Community Centre great, but as "newly arrived" residents the address of the community centre was not forthcoming and would have been helpful (CRUCIAL)
- No. we had excellent help and advice
- All that could be done was undertaken, the fire originated close by so help was quickly organised.
- CDS workers do not work at weekends. Fire was on Friday there was NO assistance over that weekend except from a private person from Warwick.
- No
- Our house was sprayed with foam, which we would have denied consent for had it been requested. We were extremely short of water but hosed down our roof on what we had left in the tank. I rang council and they promised to replace that water via Granite Belt Water but when I contacted them I was not eligible. We appeared also not eligible for any roof washing service offered.
- No
- There was not much that anyone could do any differently
- Neighbour evacuated me before police arrived to do same
- The electricity supply to our property was burnt out and it was a surprise to get the next electricity bill increased when there was no electricity supplied?? The company should have advised us to discontinue with no service
- Council could have responded to questions put through the state gov hub.
- Constant upgrades of fire position and spread, information by phone/radio broadcast. Somebody from fire service advising latest information to residents, \*compensation for unnecessary property damage.

- No 000 response from fire brigade, their services seemed to be reserved for government assets, Police tried to block volunteers from helping save my home.
- No
- On Friday morning 6-9-2019 I could see a little bit of smoke away in the distance. If only hazard reductions could have been carried out earlier things could have been different. It was about sundown when I started to watch in which direction it was heading.
- Nil
- The loss of power made things difficult, but everyone was facing the same problems, & I am sure there were many others requiring more urgent assistance. We also knew there was community help in town.
- Fortunately fire fighting appliances were in the area after fires in Stanthorpe so were able to respond very quickly, may have been another outcome had the response been left to local brigade. No comment on capability of local fireies. Experience has shown they are very good from previous burn offs
- Many people were there if we needed them, all our neighbours are great we help each other.
- Nil
- Yes. Because of the fire in Northern Stanthorpe previously, when we sought assistance from the Community Hub, and other places. We were told “We were not in the disaster area!”, communication between community support seems to be absent.
- Only one main reflection, they did not stay through the night long enough to monitor and the fire started again early hours which was scary but they did respond once called.
- Feed for the stock, when towns people were getting it for pets
- Not in our situation. We had insurance and our insurance company was very good
- No
- Had no idea where to go when evacuated
- No
- No
- We can’t fault the help and care we received.
- Food, water, support mentally, assistance cleaning up, support with plan on how to get through next week, next month, etc
- I would have liked to have known that my house was safe. Ergon Energy didn’t communicate with me at all
- I /we were well supported. We did not need any more help. We had insurance on home and contents so managed OK.
- Not that I can think of.
- We listened to ABC radio and found it worse than useless – it talked about fires at Mundubbera and not Stanthorpe. We received a message on our landline phone barely minutes before the police arrived. Maybe a “text message” type warning system could be in place.
- Nil
- For us everything went smoothly and without fuss. Communication from authorities as to where to go after we were evacuated.

**Q5 Thinking about last year's response to the fire was there any help that eventually came but you think should come earlier in the crisis?**

- no
- No
- No. It was really nice to receive vouchers from people and organisations at staggered times. This really kept you knowing that people in our community still cared and realised it wasn't over overnight. Maybe check up on people 1 year out. Another pack, voucher or chat to someone.
- Can't think of any
- Financial support, money to replace house hold items would have been useful.
- No
- Still waiting
- No
- No
- As I didn't receive any assistance. N/A
- yes, Government support was slow, but it was also slow when we lost a house in the 2011 Grantham floods
- Funding from the government, this would have been more useful closer to the event
- Nil
- Did not need
- No – housing commission were very good – checking on everyone
- Can't comment
- It has cost us \$10,000 to knock down and burn the burnt and dead trees. No government or community assistance
- REAL info from the source (eg firies). I know they are busy, but there was also harmful mis-information
- No. however since the fire we have heard a lot about controlled burning and believe this would help greatly in the lead up to the fire season
- I did not receive any help from CDS All local Services were aware of who lost houses in this community but no assistance was given.
- I think the response all in all was well orchestrated and in a timely manner. Well done to all involved
- No
- No
- Nil
- Doing fire burns and much much better land management would have made a little bit of difference. Reduced its intensity I think.
- No
- No all good and timely
- No comment – not informed opinion, service was excellent as perceived at the moment. The community spirit was alive and very well in my opinion and made us feel welcome, warm and fuzzy through this time. We were pleased we made the decision to reside in this area.
- No
- No, it was organised pretty quickly
- No
- No, none came
- No we didn't require help, as we were able to manage ourselves

- Nil
- Nil
- The rural fire brigade came to put out some burning trees
- Council could have set up a hub earlier
- Slow response to fire, Some idiots can't be trained
- No help came even when we called, those that should have helped, hindered us
- No
- I keep my rainfall records and my responses is that with the 150ml of rain in Oct 2018 made a lot of growth that dried off to make such a fire 11 months later
- Nil
- Not for us. We did receive visits much later with vouchers – this was so appreciated – this made us feel that the community really cared. We were feeling 'very flat' the first night/morning after the fire- a quick visit from others to check would probably be very helpful for many who may not have family etc.
- Girraween fire info was a bit confused. Friends in Eukey road were ordered to evacuate, we closer to New England Hway were not.
- For us I don't think so
- Nil
- We estimated that the fire (though no property damage), cost us approximately \$1000 dollars. As we are pensioners it is a considerable amount. Accommodation, having our tank cleaned cost \$400, firewood undercover \$300, accommodation approx. \$200, food while we were out of our home cost ?? can't remember. After 3 months the C.W.A gave us \$1300 in grocery vouchers and cash.
- Only monitoring for longer on first night of burn
- Stock feed
- Not in our situation
- No
- N/A Firies did a great job
- No
- No
- No
- All of it. I am disabled, on my own, don't drive, am wildlife carer, lots of people would have been unable or unwilling to leave in those first few weeks for various reasons. I had no way of getting into evacuation centre, couldn't stay at centre due to disabilities, neighbour has animals and 4 kids so couldn't impose on her, parents were in the middle of Applethorpe fire.
- Advice about funds available. Found out about \$1000 odd was available many months after it started and only via a neighbour. Also received a bag of food and personal items via Men's shed a year later!!
- In our case we had all the help that we required
- Not really, everyone was very supportive and thoughtful.
- The help we received was timely and adequate.
- Nil
- Nothing at all. Everybody involved have been exceptional.

**Q6 What could we do now that would help in a preventative way in the event of another fire?**

- Overgrown areas irrespective of ownership by government or private persons maintained or back burned at owners cost if necessary
- Education of land holders to reduce fire hazards. Enforcement of reduction if fire hazards by state and local governments
- Stay home and safe let fire fighters do what there trained for
- Help people with installing preventative measures around their own homes - roof sprinkler systems, better guttering, clearly around homes, etc. Maybe help with increasing knowledge and uptake on one preventative measure.
- More clearing burns and allowance of landowners to do this. Control of tracks into the national parks and reserves.
- Burn off scrub and bush. Make property owners responsible for correct property management. make people responsible. I f you have the money to purchase acreage, you should be able to manage it.
- Public awareness campaigns. Have a response team ready to swing into action.
- Control burns. And put up signs of fire safety in rentals showed in other languages.
- More control burning
- Not much really
- Education programs
- Immediate support for affected / evacuated. Cash / fuel vouchers, food vouchers / food, clothing, blankets etc for those that require help -- especially if displaced / evacuated.
- Educate re: fire safety. Have an up to date and professional fire plan organised. Keep fire fuel at minimum. Be aware of climate change and listen to scientific research and act
- Better management of overgrown areas, especially those in bushfire prone areas. \*\*\* More water storage – both in town and rural (council)
- After the first frosts in winter the grass dies, leaves drop as do branches etc. We have this situation occurring continually then to the fire season in September. Controlled burning would assist greatly in this regard
- Pre-determined safe locations, predetermined steps of action for different groups. Centralised information
- I don't know
- Educate the public to control burn in winter when no wind is present and the frost will stop the fire
- Well we got nothing from you so at the end of the day nothing
- Back burn more often
- Nil
- Council and Main roads could provide maintenance on verges on highway, assistance could be given to elderly residents to slash weeds and keep growth down
- Please read comment on other side (Paid people to burn off every 2-3yrs in July/August)
- Better land management of bush land and road edges. More attention paid to land holders who won't clean up their property. Have Council Demand action of these people.
- Back burn behind homes in Manning Street over to the Quartpot creek??

- Clean up on road verges, clear trees around houses (although only 3 lost in this area) Animals (Cattle etc) allowed in state forests to clear underbrush. Aboriginal burning practices.
- Property owners need to be more responsible for the “neglected state”. Too much fuel for fire is still evident in many areas adjoining or connecting infrastructure.
- Remove shrubs
- Hazard reduction by way of controlled burning helps a lot. I had done controlled burning off at my property with the aid of the Broadwater RFB for a few years leading up to the bushfire.
- Fire management prevention
- 1) Register no foam use on my property, 2) Register for delivery of water to my property, 3) Part fund the purchase of a petrol generator to run a domestic pressure pump when power is out.
- Clear undergrowth from nature reserves of fire hazard material. National Parks and Wildlife Dept need to do better maintenance!
- Help clean up Boundaries of rubbish and dead trees
- More back burning, more control burns, more mosaic burning.
- We could have saved some fencing if we had been allowed onto our land – Stopped by Police.
- People are entitled to defend their property but if you choose to leave you should be allowed back to put our fires even though it is dangerous
- Back burning got out of control, Compulsory fire break. Clear useless native scrub, keep a list of all machinery (Dozer, grader, water truck) owners and call on them immediately fires start.
- Improve Confidentiality from your staff to encourage people to actually access your services. Advertise what help you can provide.
- Have in place a workable community bushfire plan that has tips like- block downpipes and fill gutters with water, - contact police to notify to let volunteers through, - assign fire crew to street/lane and provide contact numbers
- Nil
- Putting some thought into when it rains and if it stops, to give some thought to hazard reduction. After the fire I must admit that I got over that paling fence to the south of us and got into action with a mattock, reap hook, and pitchfork.
- Keep the bushy areas tidy – regularly burn undergrowth
- Perhaps more signage – for rentals/ visitors emphasising what is not allowed, more education for visitors
- Ensure information is current, not hours later.
- We have been able to make access better for fire brigades to get to the fire should another occur.
- Regular burning off
- We requested on 2 occasions of the head of the R.F.B to have our property “burnt off”. This was a few years before the 2019 fire. The answer we got on both occasions was ‘you are on the bottom of the list’ we gave up asking, we feel if this was a flippant answer to a genuine request – it was not good enough!!
- We believe there should be a clean up and possibly a hazard reduction burn on the footpath of Paling Yard road, quite a substantial fuel load in this area. We have cleaned up our footpath.
- Keep the Nat park burned regularly.
- Be allowed to do more controlled burning
- Well managed back burning

- N/A
- Nil
- Not sure
- We have been working at keeping the fuel load down around our property so that it isn't a problem should another fire occur
- Phone numbers of vulnerable people to be logged so that in the event of an emergency – thunderstorm, fire – at least one person would check up on you.
- Safe refuge / respite was the greatest assistance to us. Such assistance would help others in a crisis. It was the biggest plus during the fires. GBSS were wonderful.
- SDRC needs to take human induced climate change seriously and move the SD in a direction of lowering carbon emissions as a community and encourage individuals to take responsibility. All the rest is 'band aid'. If people want to live in close proximity to the bush they should by aw, have to build houses and buildings that are "flame proof". Continued clearing large tracts of bushland and vegetation is not the answer. It lowers the biodiversity and less trees means more drought and more carbon. We need to live in harmony with our environment. Respect it and know what is causing the extreme weather. Prevention is best.
- For local fire person to reply to letters left for them.
- Text message warning would be good.
- Nil
- Education, as a lot of itinerant workers come to our region at this time of year. In our area we have regular fire meetings at Happy Valley.

### Rural Fire Brigades Requests

#### Brigades lost wages

Majority of brigades indicated no members technically went without wages due to brigade members either being retired people, self-employed so worked time elsewhere to cover, or employers covered wages while at the fire line during Stanthorpe fires.

Other brigades had a mixture of some members severely impacted due to loss of wages, to a few that it was not requested to recoup wages.

#### Desired Help

Desired help from brigades were mixed: – from BBQ's, microwaves, fridges, tables and chairs to computers, or help funding a workshop from Victor Steffensen, to help get more volunteers.

A number of fire brigades have recently had grants for building new sheds, so these are in various stages of planning, building and fitting out with equipment to make the shed usable for training purposes, and base of operations if necessary during fires.

Several gave requests for food or vouchers for the purchase of non-perishable food to be placed in the trucks in the event of call outs going over a substantial time and no easy availability of sustenance for brigade members at that time.

Other specific requested items:

- Air compressor for truck tyres, grease gun, rattle guns, microwave
- Microwave
- Tables, Chairs, small air compressor for truck tyres (Recent shed built)
- Unspecific new shed being built help with fitting out
- Fridge, pressure pump for shed for water inside building (needs to be energy efficient -solar power shed)
- BBQ, BBQ hot plate
- Vouchers for food snack for in the trucks
- Food vouchers for snacks in the trucks
- BBQ, food vouchers for snacks, furnishings for new shed (table chairs, cupboards, lockers, furnishings)
- Hiking type food packs for trucks, laptop, face masks (different to ones currently supplied)
- Nothing specific at present
- Tables, chairs, furnishings for recent built shed
- Support members by funding cool burn workshop by Victor Steffensen

NSW Brigade received a \$10,000 grant from Celest money, state funded for employment for wages although difficult to obtain



If you need to talk to someone please give us a call.

CONTACT US

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