

Alpine CRC

First Steps to Recovery – December 2020



Our purpose

The Alpine Community Recovery Committee (CRC) is made up of representatives from across the Alpine Shire and Alpine Resorts to help give a voice to the broad views and recovery goals of local communities.

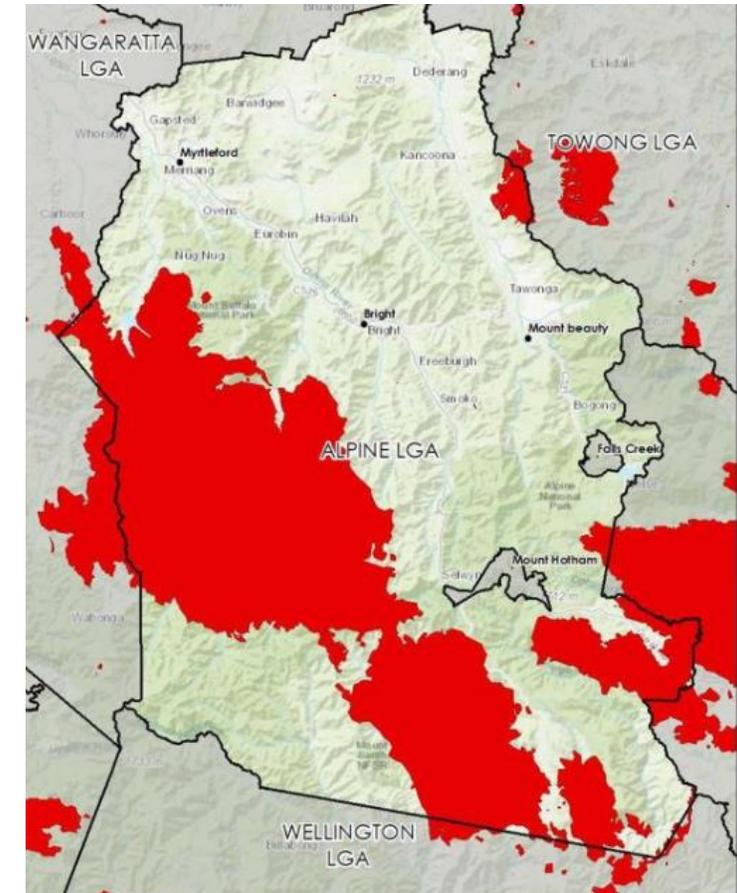
The key role of the committee is to advocate for community recovery programs, processes, services and activities that genuinely reflect the needs of our local communities. Community engagement and consultation will underpin the development of a Community Recovery Plan that will articulate recovery priorities that our community has identified. The Plan will become an essential communication and advocacy tool to use with Council and other relevant government and non-government agencies.

Through direct engagement, our recovery newsletter and other communication channels we will keep the community, Alpine Shire Council, Council's Municipal Recovery Committee, Bushfire Recovery Victoria and other stakeholders informed of issues, trends and progress.

We are keen to identify issues important to our communities and to advocate, support and encourage change and genuine community outcomes.

Our committee

Fiona Nicholls - Chairperson - Myrtleford and surrounds
Steve Belli – Deputy Chairperson - Mount Hotham
Sally McDonald – Myrtleford and surrounds
Lachlan Thomas – Harrietville and surrounds
Barbara Talbot – Kiewa Valley
Nicholas Wright – Kiewa Valley
Bruce Hore – Bright and surrounds
Kellie Gray - Bright and surrounds
Fiona Laird – Harrietville and surrounds
Dani Sheean – Falls Creek
Malcolm McPherson – Dinner Plain
Mark Hubbard – Dinner Plain – resigned November 2020
Gail Owen – Dinner Plain – commenced December 2020



Our community

Approximately 12,000 people live in Alpine Shire, which includes the Alpine Resorts of Mt Hotham, Dinner Plains and Falls Creek. The Shire is about 300kms north east of Melbourne and 70kms south of Albury Wodonga and covers around 4,790 square kilometres. 92% of that land is public land, including parts of the Alpine National Park and all of Mount Buffalo National Park.

Nearly one quarter of the population is under 24 and another quarter over 65 years. 44% have an individual income less than \$300 per week and 13% work in accommodation and food services.

About the disaster

Fourteen fires were ignited by lightning on 31 December 2019 in the King, Buffalo, Kiewa and Wongungarra River catchments. Five days later, under extreme fire weather conditions, these fires increased rapidly in size and merged with five other fires in the Buffalo River and Buckland River catchments to form the Ovens Fire Complex. The Ovens Fire Complex was declared contained on the 5th January 2020.

A lightning strike in the Dargo catchment on the 30th of December 2019 started a fire that moved towards the Dinner Plain Village on the 4th of January. A late afternoon wind shift caused the fire to swing into Victoria River towards Cobungra. This fire was declared contained on the 4th of February 2020.

During the fires the people within the Shire experienced multiple evacuations over a 22 day period. Tourists were strongly advised to leave the area and return home. It wasn't until 23 January that it was declared safe for visitors to return to the area.

29% of the Alpine Shire footprint was directly impacted by the fires. This was mainly public land, with 6% of the burnt area being private land.

The impacts of the bushfires combined with COVID-19 have severely impacted the local economy. It is estimated by Alpine Shire Council that the impacts of the bushfires cost the local economy over \$100million through the loss of tourism, softwood plantations and wine grapes.

Our Progress

- CRC was established in May 2020 through an Expression of Interest activity led by Alpine Shire Council. Adopted a Terms of Reference was adopted in July.
- Successfully advocated to ensure that Alpine Resort communities are included in the Bushfire Recovery Victoria / National Bushfire Recovery Agency grant processes.
- Implemented a comprehensive community survey, identifying key needs and next steps to support our communities in their recovery from the 2019 - 2020 bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. 327 surveys were received.
- Advocated for a grants officer to support the community in applying for any grants. This has now been approved and Bushfire Recovery Victoria are advertising for a projects officer.
- Formally evaluated 18 applications from local community groups and businesses to a range of grant programs, assessing them against community recovery priorities.
- Provided feedback to the state and federal agencies on improving the grant application and assessment process.

Our key focus areas for 2021

- Develop, adopt and circulate a data and community informed Community Recovery Plan (CRP)
- Ensure the CRP is in a format that can easily be used to make recommendations to Alpine Shire Council and other funding bodies
- Advocate to ensure recovery programs and projects include an emphasis on social and economic benefits
- Implement a Communication process to support the CRP
- Identify implementation pathways for the CRP actions including inclusion in the Municipal Recovery Plan

Fiona Nicholls
Chair
Alpine Community Recovery Committee
January 2021