

The Yea Chronicle

PO Box 5, Alexandra Vic. 3714

With which is incorporated The Yea Telegraph, The Yea Telephone and Upper Goulburn Advocate

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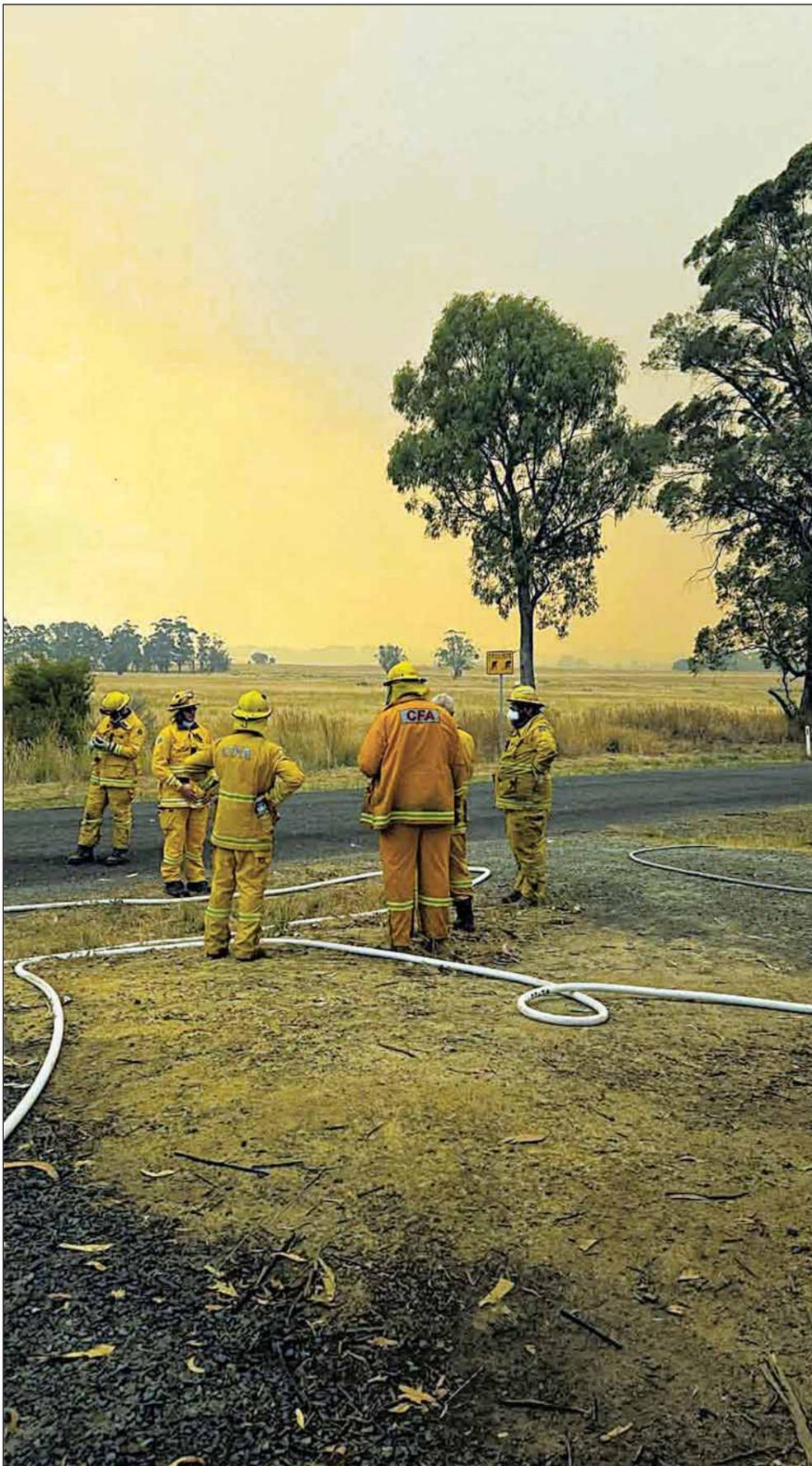
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Weekend sport



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Terip Terip Fire Brigade endured burnovers in fire fight



Members of the Terip Terip Fire Brigade during the fire. -S

SHANNON Roach, Captain of the Terip Terip Fire Brigade, spoke about the experiences of the brigade during the recent fire event.

She explained, "The Terip Fire Brigade turned out to the initial 'Make Takers 20' on Wednesday at the Longwood Fire."

From that time, "We had essentially manned the truck pretty much the whole way through, except for an hour and a half, in which we tried to go to sleep back at home, but we got paged back out again. Every other hour we were pretty much on the truck."

Most of the brigade members got up at 6am on the Wednesday morning, so by Thursday afternoon, they were running on adrenaline.

After Longwood, they got called back. "We were working up at Ruffy on the Wednesday night and then ended back up in Longwood doing asset protection. Then we got to a point where we knew the sun was starting to come up and we knew that Thursday was going to probably be a difficult day for Ruffy and Terip. We made a decision to head back up into Terip.

"We wanted to try and get a bit of rest and set the station up ready for asset protection as best we could, making sure we had everything we needed and that's what we did. We headed back up the hill and then from there we were back in Terip. We were just waiting at the station a little bit, just trying to get some rest as best we could. And then on Thursday, midday-ish, we headed in to start protecting Ruffy, which is where we essentially ended up getting caught in a burnover in Ruffy, and everything went downhill from there for us really because there was no stopping the fire," she said.

The brigade was in two trucks, "We had our own Terip Terip tanker, which is a 2002 tanker that's new to the brigade... and then we had a lone tanker from Taggerty. It was their tanker too, so that's a smaller tanker. I think that's a 2013 model. We had some issues with that. The low water indicator kept going off. We didn't know how much water was in the truck, so that was a bit challenging."

Both were single cab fire trucks. "The Taggerty Tanker One only has two people on it, so both of those were in the cab when driving around. But when trying to fight the fire, you have one in the front, one on the back. The Terip Tanker has room for three people on the back. In this instance, we had two on the back and two in the front.

"The burnover was essentially in Ruffy at Good Morning Bill, also known as Good

Morning Hill, and we thought we had a bit of time before the fire was due to meet us at the bottom of the hill. We were in a large open span paddock. We picked a good spot. We thought we were pretty okay there, but unfortunately the fire actually just went over top of us and burnt back towards us, as well as the front still coming through.

"We had to get through multiple different fire fronts and then we had to fight through the fire front to get back to Ruffy. We went through three burnovers trying to get back to Ruffy but we knew that we just reverted back to our training, the brigade, all the members that were there did an absolutely outstanding job and they were just reverted back to the training that we've done. We've done a lot of training on burnovers, that's what saved us."

Shannon said, "We headed back to Terip and we went into asset protection at the shed and by that time we were absolutely exhausted after trying to assist in Ruffy and we were heading back to Ruffy Fire Station and we ended back up in Terip."

Both the Terip and Ruffy communities were terribly damaged in the fire, but despite this, "The community's doing absolutely amazing," Shannon said. "We have had dinner pretty much every night together since at our rec reserve. We've really needed that and the brigade's really needed that too. It was a really challenging time for us and I think it scared a lot of us. But it's definitely brought us closer together. And it's something that we'll be working through probably for many years to come, I'd imagine. But the community has really rallied around us just as we have them. And it's been fantastic just coming together and having dinner and meeting each other."

Sadly, Shannon and her partner Jonathan Tofts, first lieutenant at the brigade, lost their house in the fire, as did a couple of other brigade members.

She was quite philosophical about it. "It just is what it is," she said. "We knew that we were going to lose the house, just the way the fire was coming over and we just accepted the fate, really."

Overall, she was so proud of the brigade, saying, "The brigade's done an outstanding job."

Shannon has only been in the captain role for three or four years, but she was supported by a highly experienced crew, including former captain Geoff Penny. "We had a wealth of knowledge across the vehicles," she said.

Gender balance in honours list a cause for concern

Statement from the Council of the Order of Australia

CONGRATULATIONS to the 680 Australians recognised in the Order of Australia in the 2026 Australia Day Honours list, which we the Council of the Order of Australia, recommended to the Governor-General. This represents the highest number since Australia Day 2024.

The recipients come from all parts of the country and their service, achievements and impact are remarkable. All are deserving of recognition through our nation's honours system for their service to the Australian community. It is particularly pleasing to note the significant number of people being recognised with the highest meritorious award in the system, the Companion of the Order of Australia, and on this occasion an equal representation between women and men.

However, the gender balance of this year's honours list more broadly is both a cause for concern and, the council hopes, a prompt for community action.

Honours in the Order of Australia are a result of nominations. Anyone can nominate a worthy Australian for recognition. In previous years the council has considered an even gender balance of nominations, however, over time, this has led to a significantly larger pool of nominations for men left to be considered. Many more nominations are still being received for men than women and the

council must consider the nominations for Australians that are in the system.

There is no doubt there are as many outstanding women contributing to our communities as there are men, the fact an equal number of women and men have been appointed Companions of the Order in this list underlines that. The council would like to see this balance reflected across all nominations and, therefore, outcomes at all levels of award. We need Australians nominating outstanding women for recognition.

Nominating is simple. The form is online and help is available. Nominators need to provide information about the person they are nominating and three referees who can attest to the person's service and impact.

We encourage all Australians to look around their community, their workplaces, and the whole of our society, identify the women, as well as the men, who make a difference and whose impact is profound and nominate them so they can be celebrated through the Order of Australia.

Water for fire-affected communities

GOULBURN Valley Water (GVW) is providing emergency drinking water relief to fire-affected communities across their service area.

A drinking water fill point has been set up in Ruffy opposite the Ruffy Town Hall. People from surrounding communities, including Terip Terip, are encouraged to access this supply of safe drinking water.

In Molesworth, a fill point is available at the Molesworth CFA Shed. People in and around Yarck can access another fill point at the Yarck Recreation Reserve.

GVW Managing Director Dr Steve Capewell said it was at times like this that borders become irrelevant and people do what they can to support each other.

"Our staff have worked around the clock to ensure our customers continue to have water and wastewater services during this emergency. In times like this we also want to provide drinking water to people

who need our help, including those not on our network."

"Water is an important part of fire recovery, and we want to help the regional communities that we are part of, start to recover," Dr Capewell said.

In addition to the temporary water supplies set up in Ruffy, Molesworth and Yarck, water fill points can be found at Euroa's Friendlies Oval, Yea Recreation Reserve, Bonnie Doon Recreation Reserve, and Rotary Park in Vickery Street Alexandria.

People with large water carting tankers can access water from GVW standpipes. Water from the standpipes at Euroa, Yea, Bonnie Doon, Alexandria and Seymour is currently available free of charge.

People can visit gvwater.vic.gov.au or contact GVW's 24-hour Customer Service Centre for more information on 1800 454 500 (24 hours).

Alexandra District Health
5772 0900
Yea & District Memorial Hospital
5736 0400
In an emergency dial 000

Standard The Yea Chronicle

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Weekly Weather

January 28 - February 3, 2026

Temperatures may be subject to change from date of publication

Alexandra			Yea		
DAY	LOW	HIGH	DAY	LOW	HIGH
Wednesday	19	37	Wednesday	18	35
Thursday	20	34	Thursday	19	32
Friday	20	37	Friday	20	38
Saturday	14	29	Saturday	14	27
Sunday	13	26	Sunday	13	25
Monday	15	29	Monday	14	29
Tuesday	15	30	Tuesday	15	30

Standard The Yea Chronicle

Rural Aid calls for farmer registrations

FARMERS across Australia, particularly those in disaster-impacted regions, are strongly encouraged to register with Rural Aid now, as ongoing natural disasters and worsening weather conditions continue to threaten rural communities.

Registering immediately ensures support can be delivered as quickly as possible when it is needed most.

"Disasters don't wait, and neither should farmers," Rural Aid Chief Executive Officer John Warlters said.

"Registering with Rural Aid now means we can act fast when conditions worsen, whether that's financial relief, counselling, or delivering hay and water to farmers who need it most."

Rural Aid is already responding in disaster-affected regions, providing direct financial assistance to farmers in north-west Queensland and Victoria to help cover urgent and unexpected expenses as they recover from floods, fires and severe weather events.

"Our teams are already working in disaster zones, supporting farmers who are exhausted, overwhelmed and facing enormous uncertainty," Mr Warlters said.

"By registering early, farmers ensure critical support can be delivered as quickly as possible when disasters strike."

Rural Aid provides free support to registered farmers and their families, including financial assistance for urgent and unexpected expenses, professional counselling and wellbeing support, hay deliveries to feed livestock, water deliveries for household needs, volunteer assistance through Farm Army and Farm Recovery Event programs.

Farmers can register for free immediately at faa.ruralaid.org.au or by calling 1300 327 624.

Letters to the Editor

Beware of scams

AT 3.30pm on January 22, I was told by a caller that due to an overcharge on my phone bill. It would be reduced. They wanted my bank number and I would be refunded \$200. I said it was too good to be true and was a scam because I've always had a small bill.

Then another man tried to sway me and asked for my card number. I said I don't have one. He said, "F*** off" and was gone.

They knew my details. Also, they checked my name, address and date of birth.

Name supplied but withheld by request, Alexandra

RIVER HEIGHTS FOR THE GOULBURN CATCHMENT

STATION NAME	TIME	HEIGHT	TENDENCY	FLOOD CLASS
Goulburn R at Lake Eildon (TW)	12.00PM Fri	2.11	LGH	steady
Rubicon River at Rubicon	11.00AM Mon	0.44	LGH	steady
Acheron River at Taggerty	12.00PM Fri	0.49	LGH	steady
Home Creek at Yarck			LGH	
Yea River at Devlins Bridge	11.25AM Fri	0.43	LGH	steady
Murrindindi River Above Colwells	07.00AM Fri	0.23	LGH	steady
Yea R at Old Killingworth Rd	12.00PM Fri	0.40	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Ghin Ghin	01.00PM Fri	4.00	LGH	steady
King Parrot Creek at Flowerdale	12.00PM Fri	0.30	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Trawool	12.00PM Fri	1.72	LGH	steady
Sunday Creek at Tallarook	12.00PM Fri	-0.04	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Seymour	12.00PM Fri	1.95	LGH	steady
Whiteheads Creek at Seymour	12.00PM Fri	0.79	LGH	steady

***ISSUED AT 01:09 PM AEDT FRIDAY 23 JANUARY 2026**

The Yea Chronicle

DEADLINES

Real Estate	Thursday 5pm
Trades & Services	Thursday noon
Early General News	Thursday 5pm
Classifieds	Monday noon
Editorial	Monday 9am
Sports Editorial	Monday 10am
Letters to the Editor	Monday 9am
Thumbs up/down	Monday 10am

If you have any enquiries please do not hesitate to contact the office on 5772 1002 or reception@alexandranewspapers.com.au

We thank you for your continued support

ALEXANDRA NEWSPAPERS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

can be submitted via email to editorial@alexandranewspapers.com.au or reception@alexandranewspapers.com.au or by mail to Alexandra Newspapers PO Box 5, Alexandra 3714.

Letters **must be 300 words or less**. We will not publish defamatory letters, or content which is offensive, threatening or containing personal attacks. Submitted letters may be edited before going to print.

All letters must contain writers name, address and contact number. (not necessarily for publication). Letters without these details supplied cannot not be published. Deadline for Letters to the Editor is 9am Monday.

Like us on Facebook

Standard The Yea Chronicle

An incredible and welcome delivery

THANK you to Need for Feed Australia and all who were involved in the delivery of hay, fodder and silage to Alexandra on Sunday, January 25.

There were 76 trucks and another 20 smaller vehicles, including utes and trailers. There were so many that at one stage the lead truck was in Molesworth while the last was just leaving Yea.

During the afternoon, most of the trucks were sent out to deliver hay direct to affected farmers across the area.

Graham Cockerell from Lions Need for Feed explained, "We're a registered charity. We had a board meeting four or five days after the fires to say that we thought the need was great enough. We originally had a straight hay run going to the Riverland in South Australia, which has been slow to recover from the drought over there. We're probably

in the fortunate position that we already had 25 or 30 guys signed up for that. We made a decision as a board to postpone that and concentrate on Victoria.

"We had some trucks drop out from South Australia because we couldn't guarantee the load over here, but in the end, we had four or five come over. Those spots were very quickly filled and then some once we'd put a post up on our Facebook page to say that we're going to do Victorian fires, without saying where

we're going necessarily. We've ended up with 76 trucks here [on Sunday]. I think 75 of them were delivered direct down on the farms. We had a B double load which was entirely vetch, which is very high quality product, so that's been unloaded here [at the Alexandra Rodeo grounds] so it can get shared out to be fair to everybody," he said.

He said that the smaller vehicles were carrying small bales and dog food, and things like that.

All of the hay has been donated via the Need for Feed website, needforfood.org

People can also volunteer on the website, donate fodder or donate funds.

Graham said, "We're operating purely on generosity of the Australian public and we haven't put our hand out for any government funding... All of our drivers are volunteers but they get their fuel reimbursed and a little bit toward their running cost. I think we had five trucks over from South Australia, there would be or four or five from New South Wales and one from Tassie that happened to be working over here."

People can also apply for assistance on the website. They will help people with one animal up to hundreds or thousands of animals, but for people with only a few animals may need to attend the depot to collect hay. They need to have been genuinely fire impacted. The registration is just one page of questions.

Graham said, "Once things settle down, we'll be asking all those people to register through us and they all end up out on the spreadsheets and they know who's had what. They can then let us know when they're running low and need some more.

"We would expect to be supporting circumstances like this for at least three months, I would think... If they don't get autumn rain, they'll need supporting for longer."

Need for Feed is a fantastic initiative which has been enormously appreciated by people in our local area following the fires.



An aerial shot of the trucks laden with hay at the Alexandra Rodeo site. -Alexandra Events

Support for fire affected farmers

If fire has affected your farm, immediate help is available.

We can support you to:

- Assess the welfare of your livestock
- Understand the impact of fire on your farm
- Access personal and financial support for you and your family.

If you have injured livestock, call the VicEmergency Hotline on **1800 226 226**.

Your local council can help with urgent water supply for livestock.

The Victorian Farmers Federation is also on hand to assist with emergency fodder. Contact **1300 882 833** or visit **vff.org.au**

You're not in this alone. In the months ahead, our specialist staff will be available to provide practical, on farm advice to support your recovery.



Find out more at
agriculture.vic.gov.au/bushfires

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA

Managing and treating dams in fire affected areas

by Clem Sturmfels, Land Management Extension Officer, Agriculture Victoria

FARMERS in fire affected areas are encouraged to monitor their dams and remove floating debris as soon as possible following heavy or prolonged rain. They should also consider installing sediment traps upstream of their bigger dams.

Following fires, many dams became unusable due to pollution from decomposing organic matter or after being filled with soil, sand and gravel.

While little can be done in the short term to remove the heavier materials, quick action to remove floating materials can be highly effective in maintaining water quality. Typically, these floating materials consist of ash, charcoal, straw, grass, leaves, and manure. These materials can cause issues for the water supply if they aren't quickly removed.

Within a couple of days, debris will sink and begin to break-down causing the water to become putrid and potentially unusable for livestock.

There are many ways to remove debris from dams, including dragging the material to the

bank using a chain mesh boom. Use of chain mesh, which is commonly used to construct tennis court fences, suspended from a series of floats to create a boom to clear the debris. The boom can then be dragged across the dam using ropes attached to each end.

Once the debris has been dragged to the side of the dam, it can be removed using a small weldmesh cage or with a sieving bucket on an excavator. While upstream sediment traps will reduce the risk of pollution, it is inevitable that some dams will become contaminated. When time permits, sediment traps can be installed to prevent debris from entering dams.

There are a number of ways that farmers can establish a sediment trap.

Common approaches include attaching wire netting on the upstream side of existing fences where they cross the drainage line

(to trap the flood debris) or establishing a temporary netting fence across a drainage line if there is no existing fence.

For more information on organic pollution in farm dams visit the Agriculture Victoria at agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/water/managing-dams/organic-pollution-in-farm-dams

For more information on managing stock water impacted by bushfire, ash and debris visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/emergency-management/bushfires/what-to-do-after-a-bushfire/stock-water-impacted-by-bushfire-ash-and-debris or call 136 186.

For current available bushfire support visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/bushfires

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EMERGENCY 000

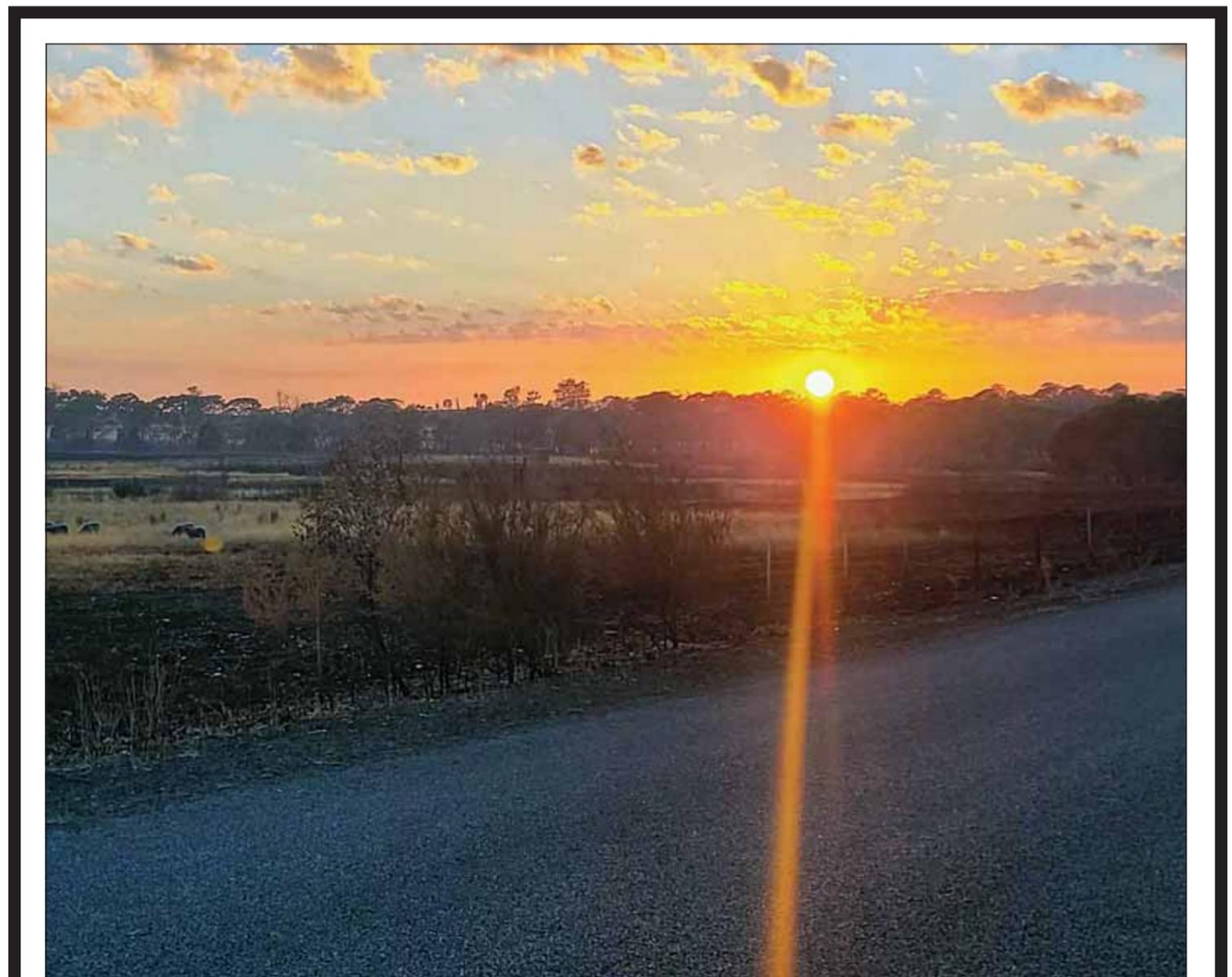
Local Radio Frequency
UGFM 88.9 Yea / Highlands
UGFM 98.9 Flowerdale/Hazeldene
UGFM 94.5 Kinglake Ranges

MONTHLY COMMUNITY GROUPS

1st Mon St Luke's Seniors, St Lukes Hall, Ph Jenny 0407 972 099
1st Thu Yea Hospital/Rosebank Aux 2pm. Ph 5797 3057
2nd Wed Molesworth Patchwork & Craft, Molesworth Hall 10am-4pm.
4th Wed Molesworth Patchwork & Craft, Molesworth Hall 10am-4pm.
Last Fri Yea-Kinglake RSL, 11.30am RSL Hall, Ph 5796 9353

ALEXANDRA NEWSPAPERS

For a \$10 annual fee for one line, your club or organisation's regular meeting dates will be listed each week. Not only is this a reminder to your regular members but also a good source of what groups are available in the community, when they meet and a contact phone number.



Sunrise along the fire-impacted Longwood-Ruffy Road. -BD

Disaster hit communities urged to contact their lenders for support

AUSTRALIANS impacted by natural disasters across the country, including bushfires, are being reminded that financial hardship assistance is available and does not affect their credit score.

Arca, the peak industry body for consumer credit, is encouraging anyone experiencing financial difficulty due to a natural disaster to prioritise their safety first and then contact their lender once they are able to discuss available support options.

Michael Blyth, Acting CEO at Arca, said many people worry about the impact missed payments may have on their credit, particularly during periods of disruption.

"In the aftermath of a natural disaster, people have enough to worry about. If you're unable to make repayments because your income has been disrupted, you've lost access to internet banking, or you

can't get to work, lenders understand that," he said.

"Financial hardship assistance is there to help people get back on track, and importantly, accessing hardship support does not negatively affect your credit score."

Blyth emphasised that hardship assistance can also be backdated for people affected by natural disasters. This means that if someone is unable to contact their lender immediately due to the impacts of a natural disaster, their missed or late payments can still be addressed once they reconnect.

"If it takes some time to get in touch, that's okay. When you do contact your lender, they can apply hardship support from when the disruption began, so your credit report isn't impacted by

circumstances outside your control," Michael said.

Support options may vary depending on individual circumstances, but can include reduced repayments, payment deferrals or temporary pauses on repayments. Some lenders may proactively reach out to customers in affected areas, and Arca encourages people to consider these offers if they suit their situation.

While financial matters are important, Arca stressed that personal safety should always come first.

"We urge you to look after yourself and your family first. When you're ready, reach out to your lender and have a conversation about your options," said Blyth.

For more information about financial hardship support and how credit reporting works during times of disruption, visit creditsmart.org.au

Church Services

ST PETER'S MEMORIAL ANGLICAN CHURCH

Cnr Bald Spur/Whittlesea Kinglake Rds,
Sunday Services, 8.30am Communion.
Minister: Rev. Ruwan Palapathwala
0458 113 099

ST LUKE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH OF YEA

Sunday Service time 11am
Prayerful Reflection - held each Tuesday,
10am to 11am - all welcome
Father Mario Hendricks
Ph: 0435 953 777

CATHOLIC PARISHES OF ALEXANDRA AND YEA

Parish Priest, Father Jose Mathew
0459 402 547
St Matthews Eildon, Saturday 5pm
Immaculate Conception Parish
Alexandra, Sunday 8.45am
Sacred Heart Yea, Sunday 10.45am

CATHOLIC PARISH OF KINGLAKE

Fr Martin Ashe, Parish Priest
Ph 9717 6482
St Mary's Kinglake - Sunday 8.30am

SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, YEA

Station Street Yea
Sunday Service 10.30am
Colin Whiteway
Ph 0457 340 525

UNITING CHURCH

1st and 3rd Sundays 9am, 1050 Main Road,
Kinglake West. 9716 2330

The Strathbogie Disaster Relief Fund is ready for donations

THE Tablelands is one of the small communities impacted by bushfires earlier this month, so the Strathbogie Disaster Relief Fund has been established to support individuals, families and community members devastated emotionally and financially.

The Tablelands area is located south and east of where the Longwood Fire ignited on the Hume Freeway on Wednesday, January 7 and it is situated up above the fog line in winter and the heat of the plains in summer.

The fire wreaked havoc and destruction across parts of Mitchell, Strathbogie and Murrindindi Shires and the fund has been created by the community, for the community to provide both immediate and longer-term recovery support as people rebuild their lives in the months ahead.

The Community Advisory Committee will work alongside the fund's administrator, the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF) to ensure decision making is fair and transparent, has strong governance and financial oversight. More importantly, its guided by a committee with lived experience of bushfires and deep knowledge of its communities.

The committee includes Mangalore resident and OAM Ray Cronin as Australia's most experienced helicopter and pilot instructor, and former Seymour Lions Club President, Gerard O'Sullivan. Avenel residents Carolyn Munckton and Chief Executive at Tahbilk Winery Alister Purbrick as its key advisors and Avenel resident, Laura Jeffery brings board member experience from Seymour Health along with committee positions for a number of organisations including the peak body of a federated organisation in the early childhood industry.

Former Ruffy residents Terry and Glen George had a hobby farm in the Tablelands on which they breed alpacas which proved to be not only adored pets but a lucrative investment. Upon retiring 12 years ago they were sold to overseas buyers for a considerable amount.

Unfortunately, the Longwood fire decimated Mr George's former property, and as a widower and a retiree he finds himself with time on his hands to help.

Mr George said, "Ruffy is a landscape of striking scenery where residents and weekenders cherish far reaching views, massive granite tors and magnificent fauna and flora."

"Today, its unrecognisable and irrevocably changed as dead animals lie in paddocks and along roadsides, homes that were once vibrant and welcoming are blackened wrecks with a coating of ash blowing in the now benign breeze," he said.

Ruffy's entire main street has only two buildings left standing, the CFA Fire Shed and the public hall. The recreation reserve is blackened by fire, the deciduous trees on the boundary fence didn't stand a chance. There may not be a social cricket match or gymkhana there for quite some time. The community centre, once its primary school between 1886 and 2005, is also gone.

Sadly, all around is a scene of Armageddon as homes, farming infrastructure and income have been destroyed and thankfully the communities' people, the most precious commodity is facing the reality of euthanising and disposal of prized livestock, clearing up infrastructure, and the realisation that insurance may not have covered 'everything.'

Immediate relief for this community includes transport and containment of livestock, animals or goods, the welfare of people and animals, and the repairs and replacement of critical buildings and assets.

In true country style, country people are caring for and looking out for each other also with offers of in-kind support and these include offers of goods and services.

Generally, offers of in-kind support are not tax deductible so where possible financial donations are preferred.

Any financial donations are going to be greatly appreciated, and these can be made 24/7. All monetary donations over \$2 are tax deductible and donors will be issued with a tax receipt from the Australian Communities Foundation.

Please scan the QR code on this page to contribute to existing relief programs with confidence that the households, individuals and businesses affected by the fires will be supported immediately.



Strathbogie Disaster Relief Fund

The Strathbogie Disaster Relief Fund has been established to support individuals, families and community members impacted by recent bushfires across the Strathbogie region.

The fund has been created by the community for the community to provide immediate assistance and longer-term recovery support as people rebuild in the months ahead.

DONATIONS:

Monetary donations can be made securely on-line via the Australian Communities Foundation platform accessed by the QR Code on the right.



All monetary donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Donors will be issued a tax receipt from the ACF upon donation.

Farm Drought Support Grants

Grants of up to **\$5,000** are available to **eligible primary producers** across Victoria.



Apply now:
ruralfinance.com.au/grants

Student financial support available

SERVICES Australia has a range of student payments to help you financially while you study and now is the time to apply. You don't need to wait for your course offer or your course to start before claiming a student payment.

Youth Allowance

Youth Allowance is a payment for young Australians aged 16-24 who are studying, training, or working in full-time apprenticeships or traineeships.

Applicants must be Australian residents and meet income and assets tests, including a parental means test if they're considered dependent.

Students can receive up to \$677.20 per fortnight while living away from home and up to \$482.40 per fortnight living at home.

ABSTUDY

If you're an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student or apprentice, ABSTUDY offers different payments and allowances tailored to your situation.

If you're thinking about university or TAFE, this can help with living costs, high essential course costs like union fees, library fees, laboratory fees and textbook costs, as well as travel and lodging.

Apprentices can also get support with living costs while they complete their training.

Other support available

There are additional supports available for students who are moving away from home to study or who need extra support with upfront costs.

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a payment of up to \$5000, designed to support students under 23 years of age, moving from regional or remote areas for their first year of tertiary study.

You can look up your address on the Services Australia website to work out if you're moving from an area eligible for the Tertiary Access Payment.

The Student Start Up Loan, which is a voluntary loan of \$1349, twice per year, which is available for students to help with the costs of textbooks, living expenses or laptops. It's important to remember that you will need to pay back the amount you borrow plus indexation.

Relocation Scholarship is also available for students moving from a regional or remote area for study. If you are receiving Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY, you could be entitled to an extra \$5707 in the first year of study.

There is also an allowance called Fares Allowance, which is available to students who are living away from home to study and are receiving a student payment. This covers the cost of the least expensive and most available form of public transport in Australia.

Lastly, you may also be entitled to Rent Assistance if you are receiving a student payment and paying rent. Depending on your situation, you could get up to an additional \$215.40 a fortnight, if you are single and your rent is more than \$152.00 a fortnight.

How to claim these payments

You'll need to link Centrelink to your myGov account to apply. If you don't have a myGov account, you'll need to create one.

After you've created one, you can link services to your account and lodge your claim.

You may need to provide supporting documents, including details about your course, your home location, and your parents' income.

THREE MURRINDINDI SHIRE RESIDENTS AWARDED OAMS

Geoffrey Penny OAM

GEOFFREY Penny, of Terip Terip, was awarded an OAM for service to the communities of Gobur and Terip Terip.

He has been a trustee of the Gobur Cemetery Trust since 2006, president of the Terip Terip Community Centre for approximately 22 years, and former president of Euroa Young Farmers. He was also on the Neighbourhood Watch committee in the early days of its establishment.

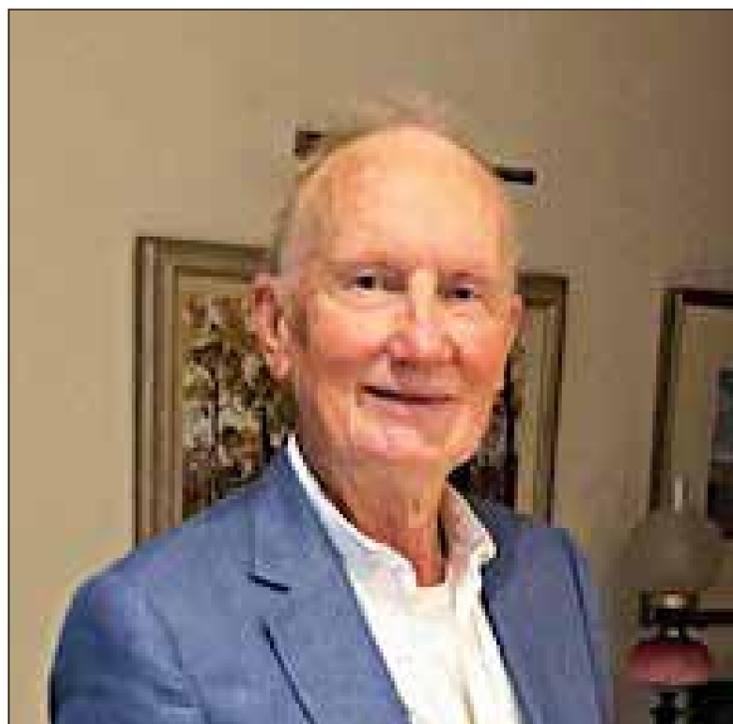
He was Captain of the Terip Terip CFA Brigade from 1992 to 2023, and has been a member since 1978.

He has worked as farm manager for GW JM Penny since 1980.

The award is a bright spot for Geoffrey following a very challenging time. He was fighting the recent fires with the brigade. Of his own losses he said, "We've got fair hammering. Our house is okay, but we've lost fencing and 50 per cent of our sheep and the cattle are all off on agistment. The paddocks are totally charcoal."



Geoff Penny. -S



Graeme Robb. -S

Graeme Robb OAM

GRAEME Robb, of Thornton, received an OAM in the Australia Day Awards for service to the community through emergency response organisations.

He began volunteering with the local CFA in 1966, spending 10 years as captain and 16 years as lieutenant. He has been treasurer since 2017.

He is also very well known locally for volunteering with Ambulance Victoria. He was a volunteer ambulance officer in Eildon from 1971 to 2008, and community officer from 2008 to 2023.

Speaking on the phone, he said that the award came "out of the blue" and noted that "Just this year actually, I think I've been in the CFA for 60 years." His time with Ambulance Victoria wasn't far behind, on 52 years. Although he's now retired from Ambulance Victoria, he said that he still misses it. He was also in the SES, the called Civil Defence, for quite a while, some time ago.

At 80 years old, he no longer goes out on the fire truck, but his work behind the scenes certainly fills an important role.

The awards are expected to be handed out in April or May. He was glad that the awards weren't being handed out on Australia Day. "It's a difficult time to hand out awards," he said, due to the recent fire, adding that the award did provide him with some light relief.

He encouraged everyone in the community to volunteer, saying that the fires might encourage more people to join. "We might get some more recruits for our brigade at Thornton," he said.

Gordon Simpson OAM

GORDON Simpson, of Alexandra was awarded an OAM in the Australia Day Awards for service to the community of Alexandra.

He has had a long history with the Alexandra CFA, starting in 1976. He has held a huge range of roles, including captaining the brigade from 1996 to 2008 and 2013 to 2016. He's been a life member of the brigade since 2024.

He was also president of Alexandra and District Traders and Tourism Association from 2020 to 2022, and current president.

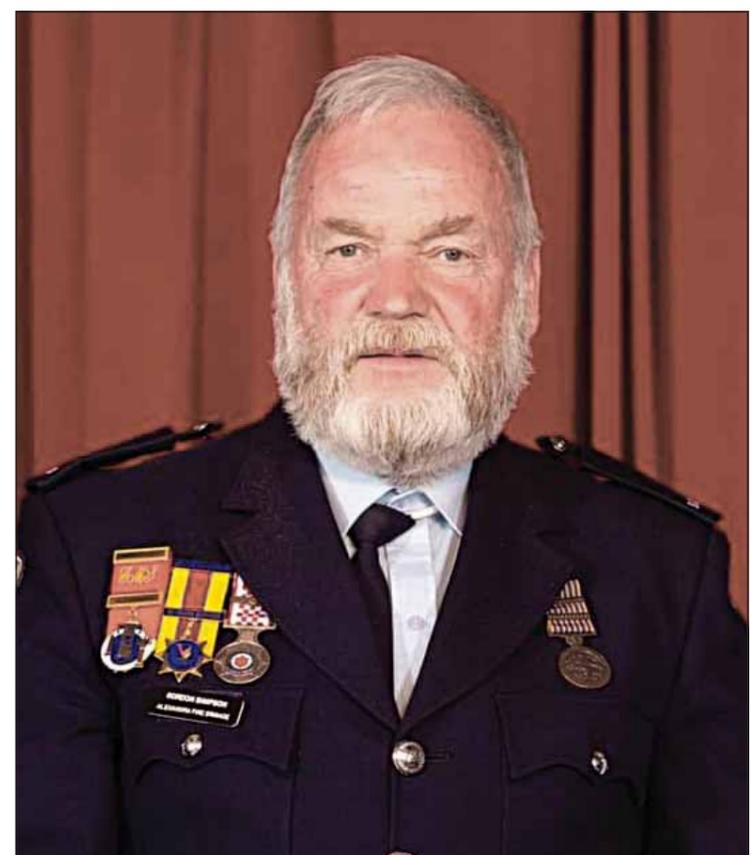
He's a founding committee member and coordinator of the Alexandra Truck Ute and Rod Show, the Eildon Big Fish Challenge, and the Alexandra Pro Rodeo, a founding Member of the Alexandra Events Corporation, and a founding committee member of the Victorian Truck Drivers Memorial.

He has been the owner/managing director of Simpson Fuel Alexandra since 1976.

He explained that when he received an email about it, he didn't initially open it, thinking that it was a scam. He didn't open it until about two weeks after he was meant to reply to them.

He strongly encouraged volunteering. He said, "Everything that I've done is fully volunteerism and I don't think we've got enough of it around now... Volunteerism is good, and after the couple of weeks we've had, that's a way to get together and be better for the community."

He spoke in particular about his time with the CFA and Alexandra Events, and was delighted that the Mobile Health Bus is now available to the community in the post-bushfire environment. "It's good for the town and it's good for the community," he said.



Gordon Simpson at the CFA Awards. -S



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- New V/Line timetable with 10 new weekly peak services for Seymour
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- Change to the City Loop at North Melbourne (Seymour/Shepparton services) or Southern Cross, then change to the Metro Tunnel



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Council conducts Special Meeting in wake of the fires

MURRINDINDI Shire Council conducted a special meeting on Wednesday, January 21. The purpose of the meeting was to approve delegations and budgetary adjustments to expedite the fire recovery.

Regarding procurement changes, the executive summary stated, "The Longwood bushfire, which began on January 8, has caused widespread damage across Murrindindi and neighbouring shires. It has burned approximately 142,000 hectares, destroyed over 170 homes in Murrindindi Shire, affected 17 Murrindindi communities, and tragically resulted in the death of a Murrindindi resident.

"As control for the incident transitions from response by the Incident Control Centre to relief and recovery by council, urgent works, particularly large-scale tree removal and road-clearing operations, are needed to safely reopen communities and support residents returning home. These works are expected to cost several millions of dollars.

"To ensure a fast and effective relief and recovery effort, the Municipal Emergency Management Officer has suspended key procurement thresholds in accordance with the Procurement Policy. In addition, it is recommended that council resolve to temporarily increase the CEO's financial delegation from \$500,000 to \$3 million until May 30. Monthly public reporting to council on emergency expenditure will support transparency and accountability while these arrangements are in place."

The change was approved by council.

An expenditure increases for Tree and Weed Services was put before. Council has spent just over \$3.2 million under the contract to date, which has a current maximum approved spend of \$4.5 million. To meet the significant increase in required tree works following the bushfire, council approved an increase to the contract's maximum spend, raising it from \$4.5 million to \$15 million, excluding GST.

Regarding civil works, council has spent \$9.6 million under this contract to date, which has a current maximum approved spend of \$20 million, leaving just over \$10 million remaining. To meet the significant increase in required civil works following the bushfire, council approved an increase to the contract's maximum spend, raising it from \$20 million to \$25 million, excluding GST.

Council will be using the existing 18 tree and weed services contractors and 18 civil works contractors.

There were also changes in delegations to role-based instead of named staff, enabling timely decision-making.

In the councillor reports section, the councillors spoke with compassion about the heartbreak and loss caused by the fire, and with thanks to those who fed and supported the fire victims.

The pop-up community hubs have been doing a great job distributing food and other items, and making sure that people are able to access the supports available.

Cr Carpenter commented, "The generosity of the community is visible in so many ways."

They also spoke about the advocacy being undertaken post-fire, including meetings with parliamentarians, both state and federal.

Cr McAulay noted that there will be a long recovery journey. Thanked the emergency services for their support, and spoke about the critical role that UGFM played during the emergency.

She said that there has been reduced visitation in the shire and therefore a significant downturn in trade. Council are seeking recovery assistance from government, and she encouraged people to spend locally.

Cr Hildebrand said that his heart goes out to all of the communities impacted, adding that impact doesn't stop at the farm gate. There's also loss of production and income.

He thanked the volunteer and paid firefighters, as well as people with private slip-ons, noting that both he and Cr Gallagher fought the fires with the CFA.

Cr Lording also provided words of thanks and support, adding that seeing the hay bales being brought into the shire made his heart glow.

Cr Carr honoured the life of Max Hobson who tragically died in the fire, and said that she is holding in her thoughts the residents with losses.

She added, "Recovery is a long journey but we will get through it together."

Mayor Gallagher said, "In these days following a cruel and indiscriminating fire, we find ourselves searching for the words. How do we begin to articulate the depth of gratitude we owe the volunteers and professionals who walked directly into the path of an unpredictable, unstoppable firestorm? How do we honour those who defended homes, farms, businesses, animals, and lives with a courage that is almost impossible to comprehend?"

"And what words could ever bring comfort to the family of Max Hobson, or to the families who stand before the ruins of what once held their memories, or to the children whose Christmas gifts now lie somewhere in the ashes? The truth is, there are no words that can make this right. But we can try, together, to speak and act with the compassion, solidarity, and dignity that this moment demands.

"What I can say with absolute conviction, is how deeply proud I am of this community. In the darkest hours, Murrindindi stepped forward. Not with hesitation, but with purpose. Not with despair, but with determination. You showed, once again, what it means to live in a place where we care fiercely for one another, where we refuse to leave anyone behind, where recovery is a shared journey undertaken shoulder to shoulder.

"I have been humbled by the communities of Highlands, Terip Terip, Yarck, Fawcett, Yea and Alexandra. For two relentless weeks you have poured your days and your energy; your hearts; into the wellbeing of others. You have fed crews, comforted neighbours, sheltered animals, cleared land, opened halls, and opened arms.

"To witness this has been to witness the very best of humanity. But then, this is who we are. This is what Murrindindi does. When faced with circumstances that shake us, when our own families are impacted and our own lives disrupted, we do not falter. We turn up for one another. We turn out for the emergency response. And when the flames are finally out, we wrap our arms around our neighbours and carry them through the aftermath.

"The Longwood fire emergency has laid bare the very best of our shire, our resilience, our solidarity, and our extraordinary capacity for care.

"I want to acknowledge all councillors for your visible presence across the community during this emergency, for recognising extraordinary efforts, for supporting responders, and for rolling up your sleeves when it counted most.

"As council prepares to take its place as the lead agency for emergency recovery, I can offer the community this reassurance: You are in capable hands. Our CEO, Livia Bonazzi, has embraced this responsibility with total commitment. She and her executive, management, and staff are shouldering recovery leadership while also carrying their day-to-day roles. They are tired, but they have not faltered. They are bringing onboard some of the most trusted, experienced figures in emergency recovery to guide our shire through the long and complex months ahead.

"I offer my full support to the Murrindindi Emergency Management Plan, and I thank every staff member who has served our community while also grappling with impacts on their own homes, families, and friends. Your service, quiet, steady, and selfless, has upheld the dignity and safety of countless community members. You have kept relief hubs operating, shared vital resources, and are ensuring that no one with a need goes unseen.

And finally, to the people of Murrindindi: I implore you to please keep doing 'you'. The future will look different. But we will rebuild that future together, with strength, with compassion, and with the same unwavering spirit that carried us through the long days and nights of this emergency. We are Murrindindi.

Together, we will find our way, one day, one step, one act of kindness at a time."

CEO Livia Bonazzi provided an update on the ongoing assessments of losses across the shire, and said that approximately one third of the shire area was impacted.

She also spoke about the community hubs led by volunteers and the psychological toll of the fire, including fatigue, stress, uncertainty and financial stress.

A large number of roads remain closed, and very significant works need to be conducted on roads, bridges, pedestrian bridges and culverts.

At the time she spoke, 562 customers remained without power and 100 power poles need to be replaced. Drinking water is available in key locations.

Council is beginning to return to business as usual where possible, with bin collection, libraries and customer service centres operating. The Road Management Plan has been suspended for three months as they are unable to meet the service levels due to diversions.

Fifty per cent of council staff have been either directly impacted or are supporting family or friends.

Council is now preparing for the recovery stage. The eight week transition plan will be focused on community connection, case management, safe access, reconnection of essential services, fodder, fencing, etcetera, and targeted well being initiatives.

She thanked the agencies and government partners, saying that there's a long road ahead and the shire will need every support available.

Urgent motion seeks support from governments

MURRINDINDI Shire Council is calling on all levels of government to work in close partnership with council and fire-affected communities to design and deliver a recovery effort that is locally informed, coordinated and sustained over the long term.

At the Special Council meeting held on Wednesday, January 21, Murrindindi Shire Council formally acknowledged the significant and far-reaching impacts of the January 2026 bushfires, including the loss of homes, livelihoods, livestock, wildlife, local business activity and tourism, as well as prolonged community isolation.

They passed an urgent motion calling for: state and federal governments to continue working in genuine partnership with council, recognising council's role as the designated recovery lead and the importance of community-led, locally informed decision-making. Explicit priority and targeted support for the recovery of the agricultural sector and local economy, acknowledging the essential role of farming, small business and tourism for the long-term resilience of the shire. Recognition and encouragement of ongoing public support, including financial donations, material aid, volunteer labour and skilled assistance, support that remains vital for the long recovery ahead.

Road Management Plan suspended due to Longwood Fire Event

THE Longwood Fire Event is a significant emergency event that is impacting large parts of Murrindindi Shire. As a result, council's ability to deliver normal services under the Road Management Plan has been heavily affected.

To ensure council can focus resources where they are needed most, the Chief Executive Officer has temporarily suspended the Road Management Plan for three months.

As the full impact of the fire event impact becomes clear, council officers will assess which parts of the plan can safely be reinstated and set timelines for reactivation. They will continue to provide updates, including how road work is being prioritised and the expected duration of impacts.

Updates will be posted on council's website, social media, and other public channels.

A suspension does not mean all works will stop. High-risk roads remain a priority, and reactive inspections and urgent repairs will be carried out where access and resources allow. If you have any questions, please contact council on 5772 0555.

Council appreciates the community's patience as they continue responding to this emergency and work toward restoring normal services as soon as possible.

Rapid Relief team helps out at Ruffy

THE Rapid Relief Team (RRT) remains on the ground in Victoria supporting the bushfire response, after answering a call from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to help at the Ruffy Recovery Centre.

RRT volunteers from Nathalia have provided more than 300 meals at Ruffy Town Hall to the CFA, other frontline responders, and locals who have been impacted by the Longwood fire.

RRT Global Managing Director Anthony Arkcoll said Ruffy Town Hall has become a haven as it is one of only two buildings still standing after the bushfire devastation.

"RRT volunteers have been providing hot lunches and dinners to the CFA to keep them going, and also to residents who are picking up the pieces after their township was destroyed," Anthony said.

"With RRT taking care of meals, locals can focus on recovery at their properties as they deal with the aftermath of the fires.

"Ruffy Town Hall has also provided a place for residents to come together and connect as they go through this stressful time."

The Longwood fire has been contained but there is still fire activity in the area and CFA crews remain hard at work.

"We are absolutely relieved to have the RRT here. It's allowed the locals to take a break and care for their own properties and start to work on their own recovery," CFA Community Safety Officer Felicity Sloman said.

"We've been in an active fire area for around 10 days, with around 70 percent of homes and businesses impacted, and locals are exhausted."

As the charitable arm of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, RRT supports frontline workers and emergency services by providing food, donations and other resources, as well as hosting events for the community.

Established in 2013 to assist emergency services in times of disaster and crisis by providing meals and other support, it's expanded to more than 16,000 volunteers and provides support to the community through charitable donations and events.

Their best start, starts with Free Kinder



Free Kinder is available for three- and four-year-old children at standalone sessional kindergartens and long day care centres across Victoria – saving families an average of \$2,400 per child, per year.

From 2026, some children will be eligible for more time at Four-Year-Old Kindergarten each week.

Visit vic.gov.au/pre-prep

Kindergarten is a safe environment for children to build skills, become more independent and make friends.

At kindergarten, children will learn:

- language, literacy and numeracy skills through play, art, music and dance
- skills and confidence before primary school.

Contact your preferred kinder service or local council to learn about how to enrol for 2026.

Visit vic.gov.au/kinder

Haines provides message of support for the community

MEMBER for Indi Helen Haines was asked for her thoughts after visiting Murrindindi Shire since the fires.

She said, "What I've seen on my visits to the Murrindindi Shire is shock at the scale of the devastation post this bushfire, extraordinary losses of homes, of fencing, of livestock and the landscape more broadly. The scale of it is enormous.

"I think for me that's devastating to witness, devastating to listen to the stories of people who have lost so much and need to rebuild, whether it be their farm, in terms of outbuildings and fencing and paddocks lost or their home or both. That's been truly shocking.

"I guess the part that doesn't surprise me is the community response and how fast that has been as well. The number of hours of volunteer time, the selflessness of CFA volunteers who protect others and lose their own homes."

She also noted how quickly the small communities were able to set up and help others out. "I've visited a couple. To go along to the tiny Fawcett Hall, which is really almost built of matchsticks itself and to see the response there and locals pitching in and helping each other out, right across Murrindindi Shire, to see that food donations and the way people are pulling together... I'm not surprised by that because that's the nature of this community. But I think the other thing to say is this is a community who had to respond to devastating bushfires before and many people are traumatised by it.

"So the scale of the recovery is really clear to me. It is a huge amount of work in front of Murrindindi Shire, individual communities and individual families, and it's why I brought the Federal Minister for Emergency Response down to Alexandra yesterday, and over to Ruffy in the Strathbogie Shire, to see first-hand the scale of the devastation to hear directly from local government and to hear directly from people affected.

"I think it was important from her perspective to see this, for her to continue to hear from me about including all the necessary towns and districts into the disaster relief funding. She and I have been in daily contact since the fires, making sure that everyone who needs help is eligible gets that help. So we're chipping away at that. We've got most

places now, there's still a couple outstanding, but I'm confident I'll get those included too.

"For her, it was really important to hear what are some of the longer-term resilience solutions that are being put forward and to continue the advocacy that I'm always on, but for her to hear it loud and clear from community members about resilience of telecommunications and power and things that just are so badly affected during a bushfire at this scale.

Asked what has been learnt from this fire and what changes are needed in similar emergencies moving forward, Helen responded, "I don't think we're quite there yet in terms of understanding that. It's two weeks now since the fire and I mean, of course, initially it's immediate response, then it's clean up and then it's the long, slow march to recovery.

"I think we'll learn more in the coming weeks and months about what could be improved for next time, because there will be a next time. But those two things that I just touched on before have been clear to me and others for a long time, and that is that we need to build in redundancies around our telecommunications, and that means we need to have more banks of generators, fuel power and telcos, and we need to have a whole lot of preventative checking and strategies in place before the bushfire season. But again, as I said, there'll be more to come out of the

wash up of this as we make sense of it in the coming months.

"I think they're all the things that we have to look at in the kit of what do our emergency services need. I mean, there's incidental things that happen. And as you know, there was the fibre cable was cut accidentally by a farmer digging and burying the stock. All sorts of things happen that you can't necessarily predict, but it tells you that we need more than one source of power or telecommunications in and out. We need backup... It's critical on a day-to-day basis for business as usual, but it's a matter of life or death in an emergency."

She was keen to say to the community as their federal member of parliament, "How proud I am of the people of the Murrindindi Shire and the way that they volunteer, support each other, and really pay an enormous personal cost for the efforts that they make in supporting each other in the broader community, and no greater example of that than our CFA officers who were out defending the town of Alexandra and properties more broadly while their own homes burnt, and how proud I am of the way everyday people from all walks of life have stepped up, rolled their sleeves up and are helping, and how committed I am to continuing to advocate through the Federal Government for the long-term support that our communities need to recover from this event and to build back better.

McLeish speaks on the fire crisis

MEMBER for Eildon Cindy McLeish was keen to add her support to the people impacted in the Longwood bushfire.

She said, "There's lots and lots of people who are really struggling through this process with the losses, but at the same time, the community support around them is sensational, and that's really locally, whether you're in Fawcett, Yarck, Highlands or Terip Terip. The small communities have really banded around each other and look out for each other. And this has been so heartening.

The strength of the support has almost been overwhelming. It's just so wonderful to see the community spirit. And the council and council staff and the councillors, including the CEO, have been outstanding in visiting communities.

"It was difficult at first because roads were blocked and no one could get in, so communities did feel isolated. I know that Highlands and Terip Terip felt very isolated, but it was for these reasons that the community-led recoveries began from within.

"Murrindindi Shire Council are doing all that they can. I know that they've faced a number of battles with the government in terms of getting things done. I've had a contact in the Premier's office who's been mostly responsive, very responsive up until yesterday, to progress issues and to try and solve problems quickly.

"There were lots of problems with access, particularly with the hay coming through and supplies coming through and we saw the community-led convoy situation. That should have happened. They did that following Black Saturday. They knew what to do, but it took days to try and get that.

"People lost their homes and their sheds and their machinery and stock losses are just gut wrenching. Farmers shouldn't have to put down their own stock. It was great in some instances where people came and did that for them," she said.

She noted the farmer support through the Victorian Farmers Federation and other programs that were announced quite early, but said that she's heard nothing around business support at this particular point. She hopes that this will be forthcoming in the future.

She said, "Councils have been advocating through the Incident Control Centre (ICC), and I've been advocating constantly through the Premier's office to try and get things moving as quickly as possible. But the work that's being done by locals on the ground is just outstanding. The other thing that people forget is, if you've got a buried stock, dead stock, and your machinery shed's gone up in smoke, you don't have the tools to do some of this. And I think Agriculture Victoria has been pretty good. I haven't heard any complaints."



Mayor Damien Gallagher, Dave Bowdern from Forest Fire Management Victoria, Minister for Emergency Management Kristy McBain, Member for Indi Helen Haines, Cr Anita Carr and shire CEO Livia Bonazzi.

Scots Church food replaced

VOLUNTEERS from Scots Church in Yea spent Monday, January 19, disposing of two large freezers full of pre-prepared meals. The disposal was necessitated because of the extended power loss as a result of the bushfires in the area.

Church volunteers provide meals for the community every Thursday night. The Thursday meals evening, which has up to 40 individuals attend, is open to everyone in the community who want to enjoy a meal, companionship and support from their local town.

The church also provides preprepared meals for emergency relief for individuals and families who need food support.

The cost of the food which needed to be destroyed was estimated at approximately \$2000.

By a wonderful twist of fate, someone heard volunteer Marg Kilmartin talking about the loss and put her in touch with Feed One Feed All (FOFA).

Representatives from the organisation came up in a refrigerated van and replaced the meals that were lost, as well as providing preserved fruit, baked beans, tuna and other items. They have also been checking in regularly to see if more is needed.

The food will be going to the fire-impacted area when their storage allows. As often happens, food donations are readily available in the early weeks, but such support is needed over a long period of time.

Marg was also keen to let people know that they provide food for all people in difficult circumstances, not just people who are fire-impacted.



The meals that were lost due to the power outage. -S



Members of Operation Veteran Assist with members of the Alexandra RSL. -AR

Veterans helping veterans after the fire

DREW Madison, Hawthorne RSL President is currently in Murrindindi Shire, helping with Operation Veteran Assist (OVA). The organisation is currently focused toward helping veterans who have been adversely impacted by the recent bushfire.

When we spoke, the team had just come back from the field, helping a couple of veterans down Spring Creek Road in Fawcett, clearing timber and rebuilding some fences.

OVA has brought around 20 people into the area. Drew said, "We're a small group but we know we can get in and get started."

They've found that many of the veterans in Murrindindi Shire are also CFA volunteers, who have obviously been very busy and are exhausted. Their own properties have also been impacted. "That's where we can come in and just say all right you sit back and let us get on with it," Drew said.

The OVA members come from across Melbourne, as well as a couple from Seymour and one from interstate. They have helped out in a variety of disaster locations, including Orbost and Rochester.

Team leader John Wilson and Eamon Hale also spoke about the organisation. John explained that they are also helping first responders with their properties. They had an advance reconnaissance, then an advance party, followed by the main group on Saturday.

They attended the Incident Control Centre in Seymour to receive briefings from control as well as local government, Victoria Police and so on. The various RSL sub-branches were able to not only provide them with briefing locations as well as advice on veterans who have been impacted by the fire.

John said that given their military background, they have also been able to help

through providing ammunition to farmers with animals that need to be put down.

Eamon added, "We've got people coming in and out and they're all getting inducted and there's a degree of safety to everything that's going on. It isn't amateurish, it's very professional. John's very strong on that. But for me, as a participant too, I find the veterans, and everyone here's a veteran, it's inspirational. We're not just helping the people who've been affected by the fires, we're helping the veterans who are part of it too."

He said, "We're not going to build you a new shed because we're not qualified to do that, but what we're doing is going out, identifying a tree that's fallen over a fence, chainsawing it up, dragging it away... and then we'll lift the fence back up, make it secure, and that farmer can put cattle back in their property, things like that. We're not

doing complex tasks, but we're saving weeks and months worth of effort."

"For a lot of these guys, they know the CFA, the CFA have come there to fight the fire, but the next group of people who are arriving at their property are a bunch of veterans who understand their experiences and what they might be going through. And we can connect on a different level to what a different organisation might be able to connect on. And that's been really special."

John said, "We don't want to get in the way. We're here to assist with the recovery. We're not here to fight a fire. We're not here to be on the front line... We want to leave this place better than we found it."

Their biggest week was last week, with about 30 to 35 veterans helping out. They may also return this week after the fire risk reduces. Smaller groups will then help out on a focused level, which could go on for months.

Regional Victorians hardest hit by melanoma diagnoses

PEOPLE living in regional Victoria are more likely to be diagnosed with and die from melanoma than people living in our state's major cities, according to concerning figures highlighted today by SunSmart.

The latest report by the Victorian Cancer Registry (VCR) found that 3179 Victorians were diagnosed with melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, in 2024.

More than one third (1150) of these diagnoses occurred in regional Victoria, where people are 51 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma compared to people living in major cities.

Notably, the data also shows people in regional Victoria are 35 per cent more likely to die from melanoma than their counterparts living in major cities (greater Melbourne and Geelong).

Director of the VCR, Professor Sue Evans, says these figures reveal an equity

gap when it comes to melanoma diagnoses and outcomes.

"From towns along the Victorian coastline to agricultural plains and the goldfields, our regional areas are known for their beautiful outdoors and unique outdoor lifestyle. But data we're spotlighting today shows these communities are also harder hit when it comes to melanoma.

"Regional Victorians are more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than those living in major cities and face poorer survival outcomes too. This gap raises serious equity concerns."

While melanoma is the most dangerous skin cancer, the number of non-melanoma skin cancers across Victoria reveals the scale of the public health challenge.

Medicare records show that in Victoria there's been an increase in treatments for non-melanoma skin cancers such as

basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. An estimated 170,743 treatments were recorded in Victoria in 2024, up from 164,736 in 2023 and 151,355 in 2022.

Head of SunSmart Victoria, Emma Glassenbury, says that 95 per cent of melanomas and 99 per cent of non-melanoma skin cancers are caused by overexposure to the sun's UV radiation, but the good news is skin cancer is largely preventable with the use of sun protection.

"While the exact causes are still being understood, it's possible the higher melanoma burden in regional communities is partially due to greater UV exposure from outdoor work and lifestyle, as well as barriers to early detection.

"But we must remember skin cancer isn't inevitable; it's one of the most preventable cancers. This data's a powerful reminder that Victoria cannot afford to skimp on

prevention programs and campaigns that help save lives, ease the burden on our health system and reduce health inequities," she said.

To prevent skin damage and lower your skin cancer risk, Ms Glassenbury suggests making a habit of checking the UV levels daily so you don't get caught off guard.

"Victorian summer means extreme UV levels on most days. That's why we encourage these five simple and potentially life-saving steps whenever the UV is three or above, slip on covering clothing, slop on sunscreen, slap on a hat, seek shade and slide on sunglasses."

Visit sunsmart.com.au to learn more or download the free SunSmart Global UV App for sun protection times in your location.

KID'S PUZZLES PUZZLES

SOLUTIONS
Page 15

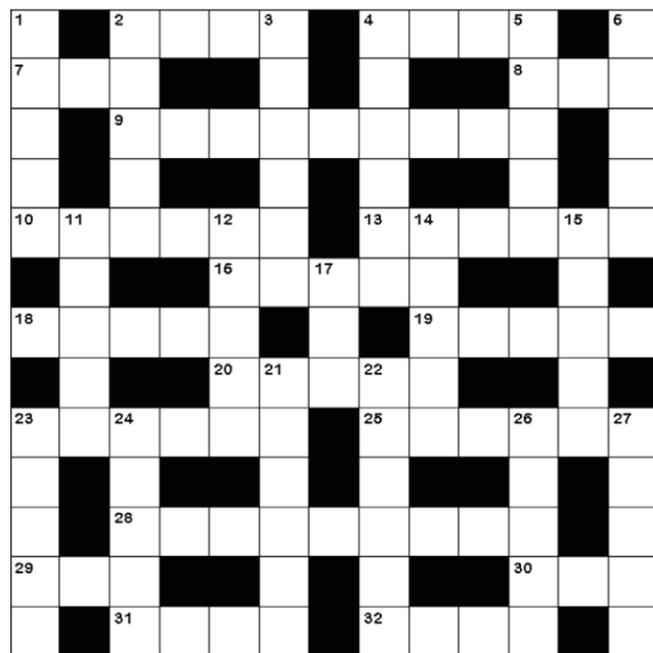
Colouring Page



Crossword

ACROSS

2. Lacking sufficient water or rainfall.
4. An entry endorsement made in a passport.
7. Paddle used to propel or steer a boat.
8. A room that is comfortable and secluded.
9. A facility equipped for physical training.
10. Food made from the pressed curds of milk.
13. Reptile with a bony shell and flipper-like limbs.
16. Certainty based on past experience.
18. Consider as a god or god-like.
19. Express gratitude or show appreciation to.
20. Not carefully arranged in a package.
23. Headstall for a horse with a rope for leading.
25. A flat-bladed hand tool for spreading mortar.
28. Greatness in significance or influence.
29. Take a short sleep.
30. A subdivision of a play, opera or ballet.
31. Set aside for future use.
32. Extremely malevolent and malicious.



DOWN

1. Of or relating to poison.
2. Engage in a quarrel with someone.
3. A source of risk or harm.
4. Regularly comes to stay as a guest.
5. Give access or entrance to.
6. Go fishing with a hook.
11. Doglike nocturnal mammal of Africa.
12. The popular taste at a given time.
14. Express in spoken or written words.
15. Make a thrusting forward movement.
17. An unidentified flying object.
21. A spectral colour between red and yellow.
22. A sculpture representing a human or animal.
23. Breed of heavy-coated Arctic sled dog.
24. Puts together indiscriminately.
26. A raised mark on the skin.
27. Unwillingness to do something.

Word Search - Back to School

BACKPACK	F	K	N	H	E	S	G	Q	S	M	S	P	S	M	Q
BOOKS	S	S	Q	W	P	B	W	R	I	R	S	Y	R	A	Y
CLASSROOM	V	Z	N	O	B	P	E	F	S	E	S	L	E	T	E
COMPUTERS	D	C	R	N	A	H	H	E	A	L	D	E	T	H	M
EDUCATION	N	T	P	P	C	E	C	P	W	M	N	A	U	E	P
ENGLISH	S	H	O	A	K	M	D	Y	C	B	E	R	P	M	P
FRIENDS	S	E	E	X	P	E	R	U	O	X	I	N	M	A	R
HOMEWORK	K	T	Y	S	A	S	J	O	C	L	R	I	O	T	B
LEARNING	P	L	P	O	C	N	K	D	F	A	F	N	C	I	M
MATHEMATICS	M	I	Q	R	K	S	G	M	B	I	T	G	S	C	E
PENCILCASE	E	S	A	C	L	I	C	N	E	P	N	I	Q	S	H
SPORTS	C	L	A	S	S	R	O	O	M	V	I	U	O	H	S
TEACHERS	E	N	G	L	I	S	H	A	K	C	B	S	R	N	U
UNIFORM	Z	B	K	R	O	W	E	M	O	H	Y	O	P	M	W
	X	O	D	T	Q	B	Y	C	S	N	Q	Z	Z	R	P

Word Search

H N U I T O G O U T N D P S C
R C N G R D N N C I D D U H N
S W E E Z T I O I N C N A S A
M G F A M I L Y E P S R C S T
O O N W L A I V Y H M I C O U
H E S I L U A T I P N A R N R
G B T Q F U S N N C L V C E E
Z R B G U R E P I P M G H E Z
E L I O N I U P S M N K H R F
K F J G T B T S Y I A K Y C J
Q E U G U G B O H H D Z Q S P
G N I M M I W S E D P F M N E
I Y J Q I D I D C S X X S U V
X S R F B F H I N F F P B S Y
T E K C I R C D R A Y K C A B

Sudoku

4	1	2	8	7				3
		3				1		
6			3					
	2			8				4
1		8	4		3	7		2
3				6				1
				8				5
		7				2		
5				4	7	6	3	8

Math Square

Fill in the missing numbers.

The missing values are the whole numbers between 1 and 9.

Each number is only used once.

Each row is a math equation.

Each column is a math equation.

Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

6	+		-		-1
+		+		+	
	-		-		4
-		+		-	
	+	5	+		16
8		8		7	

Outdoor

- | | | |
|------------|---------|-----------|
| BACKYARD | CRICKET | PICNICS |
| CAMPING | | SAILING |
| FAMILY | | SUNSCREEN |
| FISHING | | SUNSHINE |
| MOSQUITOES | | SURFING |
| NATURE | | SWIMMING |

Difficulty: Very Hard

Fill in the boxes using the numbers 1 to 9. Every row and column and every group of 9 boxes inside the thicker lines must contain each number and letter only once.

Math Square

	x		+	4	19
+		x		÷	
	+		+		11
+		+		-	
6	x		+		51
19		10		-7	

Fill in the missing numbers.

The missing values are the whole numbers between 1 and 9. Each number is only used once. Each row is a math equation. Each column is a math equation. Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

Jokes

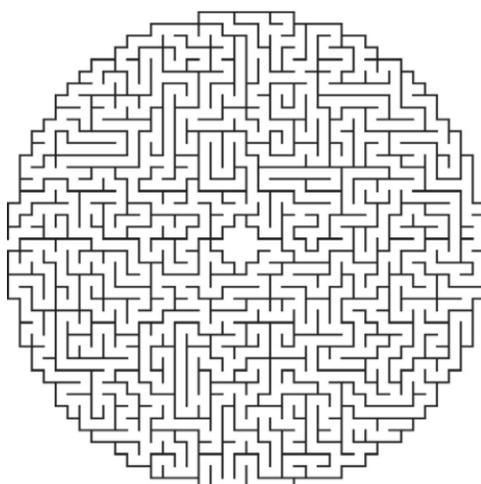
Q: Why was the cat sitting on the computer?

A: To keep an eye on the mouse.

Q: What do you call a sleeping bull?

A: A bulldozer.

Maze



Black Saturday survivors provide advice from experience

IN the wake of the recent fire, Black Saturday survivors were asked, what advice do you have for people impacted in the January 2026 fires?

Christine said, "Take time to work through what you want and need to do. To me there were a few stages. 1. In the first few days you are like a baby. You need cuddles, food and water. 2. Early toddler, learning to walk, starting to accept. What do you need, how do you get it, asking lots of questions. Need to

talk and keep talking. 3. Early teenager, angry, nothing moves fast enough, why can't you get what you want and need. 4. Late teenager or young adult. Becoming independent, looking to do things for your self. You can see you are able to move forward. This bit can take a long time.

"Don't be afraid to keep talking to people, don't be afraid to keep telling the same stories. Accept you want to be with your community for as long as you need, before adventuring out.

Communication is very different this time than 2009. Facebook was not being used as much. It seems to me the centres have been set up quickly and efficiently, which is great. A lot was learnt from 2009. 2009 survivors have empathy and are at your backs. When and if needed, we are here for you."

Chris agreed with Christine's comment and added, "The feeling of being lost I remember the most."

Jane said, "The younger the child, the greater the impact. Replace same with same. Replace the familiar toys. Stick to your usual routines as much as possible. Tactile messy art play, craft, music and inclusion. Include kids wherever you can with future planning. It's going to be ok."

Heather said, "Insure your property and leave. When the birds and insects fall silent things are not right."

Chris said, "Kindness can be exhausting. Giving and receiving. There is no shame in leaving when asked by Authorities at the time. It was the right thing to do. Fire isn't the only thing to consider. The stress of our loved ones can cause health problems as well."

Erica said, "Reassure children that there was a fire, but it's over now. Accept assistance. When you are ready, talk about your experiences as it may help others in the future. Remember that you are not alone. One step at a time to move forward. You can do it."

Sue said, "I think they learnt a bit from Black Saturday and hopefully things will be easier now but it was a long exhausting time and as a family you need to support each other and stay strong. One day you think you are good and all over it and the next you think, OMG, how am I going to do this. So many emotions. Get good advice and question anything you are not sure of."

Patricia said, "I was part of the 'nowhere people' in 2009. We were present, lost possessions, the parents lost their house (that we were visiting) and lost people we knew. This time we've lost property (non-primary residence) and the feels are the same. You'll feel that your situation is not as important. You'll feel that you don't belong. You'll feel that assistance is not for you. Reach out and help others, ask for advice and accept help as well. Know that it is a marathon, not a journey."

Adele said, "Don't be afraid to ask for help and don't be too proud to accept offers of help."

Liz said, "My inlaws lost their house and almost their lives because they waited until it was too late. If in doubt, just leave. Your life isn't worth your belongings."

Debbie said, "My youngest started primary school in 2009. One week on and her school burnt down. At the other end of her schooling on her VCE year we were in COVID-19 lockdowns. Keeping home and family tight and as normal as possible helped. She is now a well adjusted, good adult."

Amanda said, "Don't take life for granted, just take what you can, essentials, personal and sentimental items, what's closest to you. Everything else can be replaced. Make sure you have the right insurance. Do not under-insure either."

Rachelle said, "Don't make big decisions for a few months. They might not be the best ones."

Adam said, "I'm glad we left. Even though it was horrible not knowing if the house would go up, it was better knowing all lives were accounted for."

Christine said, "Breathe, take your time. There is no right or wrong way to deal with the aftermath of a bushfire. Hug those close to you and have open conversations together as a family when planning your futures. Remember we are all different and cope in different ways. Ask for help if needed and give yourself if you can. The community will understand."

Sue said, "Talk to others. You will find that you are not alone. Your feelings are shared by others who have experienced this. It's important to feel the emotions. I made a book that had many photos of everything that I wanted to remember as well as descriptions of various things. When I look back now, it was like journaling. It was so therapeutic and helped me to process my feelings and what we had gone through."

Celina said, "Survivor guilt is real. It's hard to accept but you were impacted. Go through the grief because you lost stuff or your community did and it impacts you and your life too."



Attendees of the most recent Man Walk attended Alexandra Fire Brigade. -S

Man Walk plans Yarck meet-up

THE Man Walk gathered at the Alexandra CFA during their usual Friday morning walk at the invitation of captain Chris Lynch. He explained details of the Longwood fire and showed a detailed map of the extent of the fire.

Later, on behalf of the Alexandra CFA, Chris accepted a generous donation from the members of the group who thanked him and his team for the outstanding work they did in protecting the town.

On Friday, January 30, the Man Walk group will walk at Yarck, and hope that men of the Yarck community will join them and share their stories.

Walk, talk and support.

For details regarding the Man Walk contact Steve Lynch on 0411 752 542.

Tomorrow can wait

a poem by Jessica Torrance

FROM the scorched silence of Black Saturday

*I send this quiet voice across the smoke,
to you who wake to a sky still wrong-coloured,
to you who stand where home used to breathe.
Breathe first.
That is enough for today.
The mind races ahead to roofs and permits,
to what-was and what-now,
but tomorrow carries its own freight of sorrow -
let it wait at the gate.
Your heart has been cracked wide
by flame and by memory.
Grief wears as many faces as fire:
some howl, some go stone-still,
some bargain with ghosts in the dark.
There is no wrong way to feel this.
Only time, the slow, unhurried kind,
knows how to lay cool hands on the burn.
Be tender with yourself.
You are not failing when the tears come late,
or when laughter feels like betrayal.
You are not weak when the smallest task
feels like lifting a mountain of ash.
Kindness to the one who survived
is the first brick of any new foundation.
Help waits,
in steady hands, in listening ears,
in cups of tea and quiet company,
but only when you reach for it.*

*No shame in waiting.
No shame in needing.
And listen:
you will rebuild.
Not quickly, not whole at first,
but piece by stubborn piece,
the way green shoots split rock
long after the fire has moved on.
Years may pass before the smell of smoke
stops rising unbidden in your throat,
before the wind no longer sounds like warning.
That is not delay; that is deepening.
Every scar you carry now
is a map of lessons carved in courage.
There is still hope,
small and fierce as a ember
that refuses to die in the rain.
Hold it gently.
One day it will warm a new hearth.
You are not alone in this charred season.
We who walked before you
stand at the edge of the burnt ground
and whisper:
You will find your way through.
You already have.
With love from 2009,
to you in 2026.
Be patient with your own becoming.*

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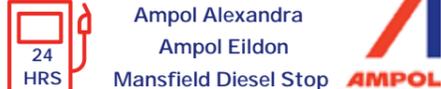
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TRADES ADVERTISING DEADLINE NOON THURSDAY

The Alexandra Standard and The Yea Chronicle are printed by North East Media, Wangaratta.

Print Post Approved - PP 100000292.

DEATH NOTICES

FRANKLIN,
 Lois Beyer
 02/11/1944 - 16/01/2026

81 years.
 Passed peacefully on 16/01/2026.

Dearly loved wife, mother, nan, sister, sister in law, aunty and friend.

Family funeral.

GOSS,
 Elizabeth Cynthia
 17/08/1927 - 14/01/2026

Pass away peacefully at Kellock Lodge on January 14, 2026.

Loving mother to Douglas, Marion, Tony, Gossy (Ray), and Ian.
 Mother in law to Liah, Sandice, Andrea and David (dec).
 Loving grandmother and great grandmother.

Always in our hearts.

GOSS, Elizabeth.
 The ARRR Committee of Management is saddened to learn of the death of Elizabeth, an active member for many years. Our sympathies to her family and friends.



MUSSETT, Faith
 09/08/1935 - 05/01/2026

Adored wife of Frank. Beloved mother of Michelle and Nicole, mother in law to Kerryn. Grandmother to Kaitlin, Lillian, Lulu and Perry, Grandmother in law to Amy. Great grandmother to Lottie, Soren and Atlas. Forever in our hearts.



FUNERAL NOTICES

GOSS,
 Elizabeth Cynthia

The funeral service to celebrate the life of Elizabeth Goss will be held at the Alexandra Golf Club on Tuesday, February 3, 2026 commencing at 11am.



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MEETINGS

ALEXANDRA PASTORAL AND AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION.
 AGM on Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 7pm in the show office at 17-21 William Street, Alexandra. All welcome to attend. Further information can be obtained from the secretary at pna.alexandra@gmail.com

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PUBLIC NOTICES

CREDITORS, next of kin and others having claims against the estate of any of the undermentioned deceased persons are required to send particulars of their claims to STATE TRUSTEES LIMITED ABN 68 064 593 148, of 1 McNab Avenue, Footscray, Victoria 3011, the personal representative, on or before March 27, 2026, after which date State Trustees Limited may convey or distribute the assets, having regard only to the claims of which State Trustees Limited then has notice.

MALECKI, Karin Barbara, also known as Barbara Karin Malecki, late of 15 Hill Ave, MARYSVILLE, VIC 3779, deceased, who died on 26 October 2024.



The Alexandra Tool Library in place thanks to the incredible efforts of volunteers. -S

Alexandra Tool Library provides tools for people in need

A TOOL Library has been set up in Alexandra to provide tools for free to people in need, in order to help with recovery efforts associated with the Longwood bushfires.

A shipping container was delivered to the Lions Club of Alexandra sheds at 9 Lamont Street, Alexandra last Sunday, to house the available donated tools.

Tool Libraries were established after Black Saturday in shipping containers donated to Marysville and Kinglake Lions Clubs to help with recovery efforts. The shipping container in Alexandra, along with its contents, was donated by Kinglake.

For those who can't get into Alexandra, it can be arranged for tools to be delivered to local relief hubs for pickup.

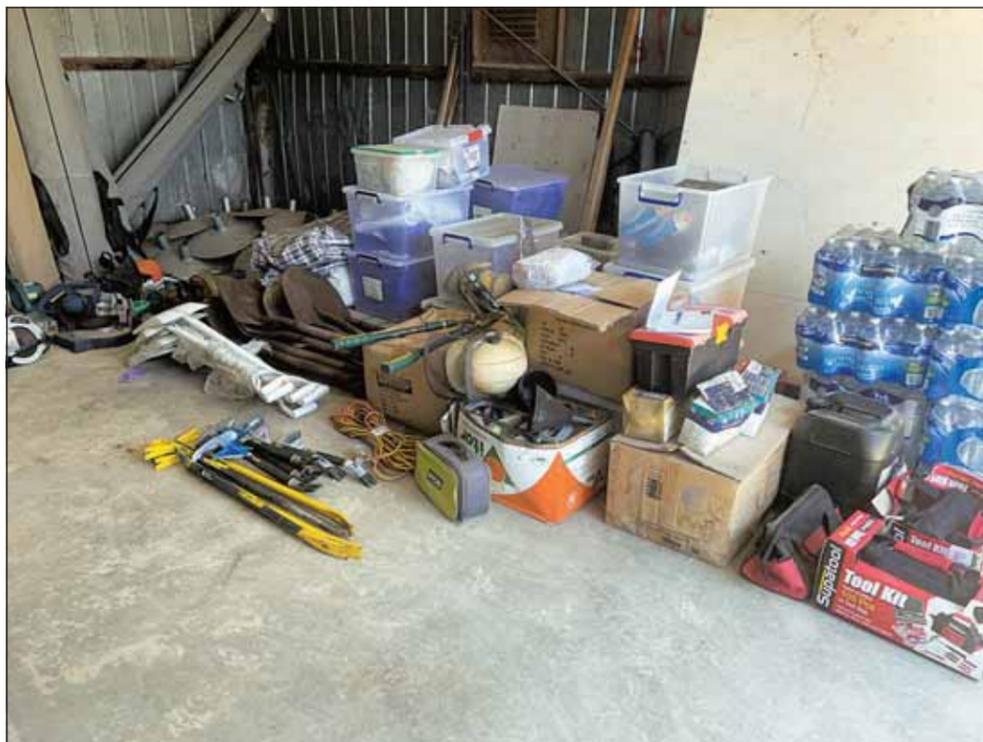
For any enquiries, contact John Beale from the Alexandra Lions Club on 0427 595 318.



Some of the tools available in the Alexandra Tool Library. -S



The sponsors who worked to organise the Tool Library. -S



There is a variety of different tools and equipment available, all donated. -S

Questions asked on CFA vehicle safety

VICTORIAN Premier, Jacinta Allan stated on Sunrise on January 12, "In terms of the safety of the vehicles in which volunteers are heading out into firefronts on, I've spoken to the chief fire officer of the CFA about this very matter, and the CFA has been absolutely clear, all vehicles that are put out into the fire grounds for volunteers, they are all safe and appropriate to be going out into firegrounds."

CFA Media was asked to provide information on how single cab CFA vehicles with volunteer firefighters travelling exposed on the back are considered safe.

They were also asked how many of the new CFA trucks on order will be going to CFA District 12, or more specifically, to Murrindindi Shire?

CFA spokesperson responded, "Emergency Response Vehicles are a key part of our response capability and our focus is always on whether the vehicles are safe, appropriately equipped and fit for purpose, regardless of age."

"All emergency response vehicles within the CFA fleet are maintained by our expert network of mechanical officers and are subject to annual maintenance servicing and an annual fire-worthy inspection by qualified technical staff."

"CFA has crew protection systems on all light, medium, heavy and ultra heavy tankers despite their age. This includes crew protection sprays, blankets, heat shields and fire curtains as well as reserve water supplies. Our members are also well trained to protect themselves if caught in a burnover."

"Volunteer concerns around being exposed to heat and other elements while travelling to and from incidents in the back of older appliances is acknowledged. CFA replaces vehicles as, and when, it can within the budget it has available, to ensure our volunteers have the most up to date vehicle comfort and technology while undertaking their essential work."

"This was enhanced more recently in the 2025/26 Budget with the promised allocation of an additional \$10M to CFA base capital funding, and a doubling to \$22M for brigades to access equipment and plant including new crew cab trucks."

"CFA's manufacturing partners are planning to build, assemble and deliver the 167 trucks during the 2026 and 2027 calendar years."

"Since May 2023 District 12 has received two heavy tankers, one medium tanker, three light tankers, two ultralight tankers, two FCVs (Field Command Vehicles) and a BA Support vehicle."

"Looking ahead, District 12 is scheduled to receive one medium tanker, one pumper and one big fill through CFA's capital program."

"A further medium tanker, three ultralight tankers, two FCVs, one big fill and one BA support vehicle will be delivered through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program."

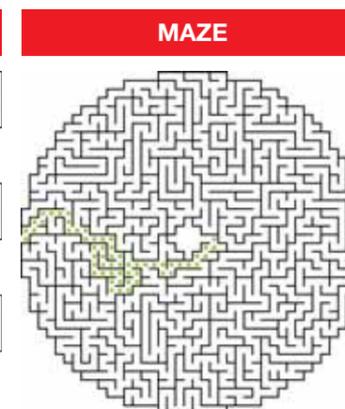
"Details about the brigade allocations will be announced over the coming months."

PUZZLES SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD												
T	A	R	I	D	V	I	S	A	A	A		
O	A	R	A		I		D	E	N			
X		G	Y	M	N	A	S	I	U	M		G
I		U		G		I		I				L
C	H	E	E	S	E	T						L
Y					T	R						U
D	E	I	F		F		T	H	A	N	K	
N					L	O	O	S	E			G
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U					A		A					H
S					M	A	G	N	I	T	U	D
K					I	P						A
Y					S	A	V	E				H

SUDOKU												
4	1	2	8	7	6	5	9	3				
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2	4	6	1	3	8	9	7	5				
8	3	7	6	5	9	2	4	1				
5	9	1	2	4	7	6	3	8				

MATH SQUARE					
5	×	3	+	4	19
+		×		÷	
8	+	1	+	2	11
+		+		-	
6	×	7	+	9	51
19		10		-7	



KIDS - MATH SQUARE					
6	+	1	-	8	-1
+		+		+	
9	-	2	-	3	4
-		+		-	
7	+	5	+	4	16
8		8		7	

CFA funding according to the government and opposition

THERE has been much discussion in the media and beyond about the current state of CFA funding. Following are statements which have been released from Labor and the Liberal Nationals, as well as the Victorian Farmers Federation.

Labor

Minister For Emergency Services, Jaclyn Symes, provided the following statement on CFA funding. She stated, "The CFA is stronger, better funded and better resourced under a Labor Government.

"The CFA's 2024-25 Annual Report makes it clear, in 2024-25 CFA funding reached its highest level in five years.

"Grant funding to the CFA has increased by nearly \$22 million and total income is up by more than \$26 million. The CFA's asset base also grew by about \$106 million.

"That means more funding for volunteers, more equipment on the ground and more investment in the stations, trucks and tools Victorians rely on during emergencies.

"At a time when fire-affected communities are looking for clear information and support, the Liberals are spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories.

"Victorians deserve better, not fear-mongering that undermines confidence in the very people protecting our communities.

"Because for the Liberals, this is all about politics, not people. The leader of the opposition should apologise for her misinformation campaign.

"She should also withdraw from the Barnaby Joyce misinformation convention,

which will claim climate change has nothing to do with fires and floods that are increasing in frequency and intensity."

Liberal Nationals

Nationals leader Danny O'Brien said, "The belated release of the 2024-25 CFA Annual Report confirms what everyone already knew, Labor has cut funding to the CFA.

"Grant funding to the CFA is \$55 million less since 2020 after taking four years of inflation into account... Premier Jacinta Allan and Minister for Emergency Services, Vicki Ward, have continuously misled Victorians over this overdue report and their mismanagement of the CFA.

"[The] annual report reaffirms funding cuts to the CFA in the 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years, despite the Premier repeatedly claiming her government "has only ever increased funding to the CFA". Incredibly, the government is now using the same line item (grant income) in the 2024/25 report to claim a \$22 million increase in funding. Victorians should be clear on the facts.

"The 'funding increase' is just \$10 million more than the CFA received in 2020-21. Just to keep pace with inflation, it should have risen to \$416 million. Funding was topped up by \$20.3 million to cover costs of the Grampians and Little Desert fires (as reported at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings in November). The CFA is now running a \$50 million deficit. Spending on internal IT consultants and contractors rose \$16 million. Funding for PPE

and equipment fell \$8.3 million. Spending on volunteer compensation and insurance fell nearly \$14 million.

"While spending on volunteer firefighters has fallen dramatically, Premier Allan is currently seeking to hire a new spin-doctor for the CFA on a salary of up to \$430,000 a year.

"As a consequence of Labor's waste and reckless spending, Victoria's net debt is growing by \$1.7 million an hour and is expected to reach a record \$192.6 billion by 2028-29."

Victorian Farmers Federation

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) also weighed in. VFF President, Brett Hosking said the numbers tell a damning story that can no longer be ignored.

"The gap between funding and the demands on volunteers is continuing to widen. It's at a point where we're putting people in harm's way," Mr Hosking said.

VFF analysis shows that despite a nominal uplift in the past 12 months, the CFA's real purchasing power has been gutted by nearly 14 per cent since 2020-21. In 2024-25 alone, the CFA recorded a \$51.8 million deficit, the fourth in five years, bringing the cumulative funding shortfall to over \$145 million.

Meanwhile, our volunteers responded to 41,925 incidents last year, the busiest year since the Fire Services Reform. Activity is up 36 per cent over five years while real funding has gone backwards.

"The maths simply doesn't add up. You can't do 36 per cent more work, while real

funding is cut by 14 per cent. The only way that works is by pushing volunteers to breaking point and putting them in harm's way," Mr Hosking explained.

Mr Hosking said the government must learn from past failures and commit to genuine reform.

"We have already seen what happens when governments try to fix emergency services funding in a vacuum. The Emergency Services Volunteer Fund cash grab was a debacle that wasted time, eroded trust, and didn't deliver for the volunteers who actually protect our communities.

"This shouldn't be a political issue. We've always said we're prepared to work constructively with the Government on sustainable, long-term funding for the CFA.

"You'd think we could at least get back to 2020-21 funding levels in real terms. That shouldn't be controversial.

"Our volunteer firefighters don't ask for much. They give their time freely, they put their bodies on the line, and they ask only that they have the equipment, training and support they need to do the job. Right now, the funding is failing them."

Mr Hosking noted the timing of the Annual Report's release was particularly stark.

"We are in the middle of another devastating fire season. CFA volunteers are out there right now, protecting lives and property across regional Victoria.

"Regional Victorians are watching this issue closely, and they won't accept the CFA being systematically starved of resources," Mr Hosking said.

High Country filming

BINGE has announced the new cast to join actress Leah Purcell for the new season of crime drama, *High Country: What Lies Beneath*, with cameras now rolling in Victoria, including Murrindindi Shire.

The new eight-part season welcomes Brendan Cowell, Ryan Corr and Nadine Garner to the cast, joining returning stars Ian McElhinney, Sara Wiseman and Aaron Pedersen.

The hit series received a standout debut that captivated audiences across Australia and overseas, including strong viewership on BBC1 in the UK and Hulu in the US. It was the most-streamed series on Binge in both March and April 2024 following the launch of season one.

Leah Purcell, star and executive producer said, "I'm absolutely thrilled to be back with the team for season two of *High Country*. I can't wait to bring this much-anticipated new chapter to audiences around the world. With fresh storylines cleverly crafted, superb new talent joining the cast, and haunting questions finally answered. What more could you want from a second season?"

Actor Brendan Cowell said, "You never miss a chance to mix it with the great Leah Purcell. And the reach *High Country* has achieved across the world is a credit to the team. The show really knows itself and I can't wait to be a part of the Aussie gothicness."

Season two sees Andie drawn into a case far more dangerous and personal than she ever imagined. It will test her loyalties and challenge everything she thought she knew about herself, her community and the *High Country* she calls home.

Filming is taking place amid the breathtaking Victorian Alps, with locations across Jamieson, Mansfield, Eildon and greater Melbourne capturing the region's dramatic beauty and spirit.

Reminder about bike and scooter safety in public spaces

IT is important to remember that footpaths are a shared space, for both pedestrians and people riding bikes or scooters.

Bikes and scooters can be dangerous, especially if not handled properly, and therefore extra care should be taken when riding on footpaths and in other shared spaces like parks and roads.

These shared spaces are not the place for elaborate tricks or stunts that could result in loss of control and potential injury, both for the person riding and pedestrians.

There are skate parks for attempting tricks and stunts.

Always remember to wear a helmet when riding scooters or bikes in any scenario, and if attempting tricks at a skate park, consider wearing protective padding like knee pads, elbow pads, and wrist pads.

You must wear a helmet when riding a bike or scooter by law. Potential fines for failing to wear a helmet while riding can amount to between \$230 and \$900.

Sexy show at Flowerdale

SYDNEY'S sexiest six packs will be turning up the heat for one night only in their brand new show.

As the premiere Magic Mike-style show in Australia, they have become a nationwide sensation with their thrilling performances and irresistible charm.

For over 20 years, Sydney's Hotshots have been bringing the heat to Australia, and they're cranking it up for an unforgettable show in 2026.

Prepare for two hours of pure excitement featuring jaw-dropping guys with chiselled abs and charming smiles, all backed by their amazing dance moves. This high-energy production is a sultry blend of sizzling dance routines, fabulous costumes and sensational bodies that will leave you wanting more.

The Sydney Hotshots have lit up the stage on popular television shows like *Studio 10*, *Sunrise*, *AGT*, and *Good Morning New Zealand*, along with countless radio and newspaper features. Don't miss out on the fun. This is a night you won't forget.

They're bringing the heat to Flowerdale Hotel on Friday, January 30. Book at eventbrite.com.au

Rotary clubs create 'Back to School' packages

VARIOUS Rotary clubs around Murrindindi, Mansfield and Mitchell Shire have worked together to create 'Back to School' packages for children affected by the Longwood bushfires.

These will include uniforms, books and stationery, setting the children up for a successful return to school. Schools around the shire will be contacting people over the next few days to find out what is required to support students.

The Rotary clubs involved in this initiative include Yea Rotary, Alexandra Rotary, Mansfield Rotary, Seymour Rotary, Kinglake Rotary and Southern Mitchell Rotary Clubs.

Take the sting out of mosquito bites this season

Victorians are being urged to protect themselves from mosquito bites and stay safe in the heat to keep themselves and their families well while enjoying the long weekend.

Ross River virus has been detected in mosquitoes in traps around Geelong and Gippsland in recent weeks. Previously, Japanese encephalitis was detected in a mosquito trap in the Horsham area in early December.

The Victorian Arbovirus Disease Control Program found these results through routine monitoring that helps inform the risk of mosquito-borne diseases and helps to keep the public safe. Based on recent results, it's likely mosquitoes in other coastal areas of Victoria are also carrying Ross River virus.

Chief Health Officer, Dr Caroline McElroy has outlined measures to avoid mosquito bites.

"We've seen an increase in mosquito activity along coastal areas in recent weeks and with detections of Ross River Virus in multiple locations, we're reminding Victorians to do what they can to avoid being bitten," she said.

"Wearing long loose-fitting clothes, using repellent and avoiding the outdoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active can greatly reduce the risk of mosquito-borne disease."

Travellers are advised to pack repellent containing picaridin or DEET before leaving home, ensure accommodation, caravans and tents have intact mosquito screens, use mosquito coils, and camp away from rivers and lakes, where mosquitoes breed.

Symptoms of Ross River virus may include fever, joint pain and swelling, muscle aches, fatigue or rash. Symptoms may not be present in all cases but can last for weeks or months.

Anyone who develops symptoms consistent with Ross River virus infection should seek advice from their GP.

More information about Ross River virus and how to protect yourself from mosquito-borne disease is available on the *Better Health Channel*.



Darryl King and David Anderson. -S

Australia Day flag raising in Yea

YEA held a flag-raising ceremony on Australia Day due to the fires, instead of holding the customary larger event.

Emcee David Anderson welcomed the attendees and said, "Whether you are a descendant of our original inhabitants, whether you are a first or other generation resident of Yea or you are a visitor today, you are all equally welcome.

"Throughout the day, families, friends and communities will gather to commemorate the beginnings of a modern nation that is the envy of many. Perhaps they will also reflect on what it means to be an Australian, our stories, our values, our aspirations, our weaknesses, our past, both the good and the bad. We have achieved much and we can achieve much more united as a nation. Australia is home to many, from the most recently arrived migrant, those born here over the past 238 years since British settlement and all descendants of our first nations people.

"Let's all acknowledge those who were here before January 1788 and have been here for in excess of 60,000 years. Our indigenous population are a part of the oldest continuing civilization on our planet. For all of those 60,000 years, this nation's original inhabitants have had a continuing connection to the land, water,

sky and community. Through oral history and story-telling, their leaders and elders have been the keepers and custodians of the history, traditions, knowledge and culture of the land, creating a living civilization that has been on this island continent for 2,400 generations.

"Some of us may be descendants of our First Nation's people. Some of us may be of convict origin, even descendants of those on the First Fleet. But for most, our ancestors, our families or individuals chose this country to be their preferred country of citizenship and call Australia home.

"The discovery of gold in 1851 created the first wave of non-British migrants: Europeans, Americans, Chinese. The Greeks and Turks came after the Second World War and, later, the Italians. The Vietnamese in the aftermath of the Indo-China conflict and, more recently, migrants from the sub-continent, the Middle East and Africa, all contributing the evolution of the modern Australia.

"With the waves of migrants that have come from across the seas, generations have built a nation we can be proud of, a nation built on pillars of openness, a fair go for all, diversity, equality and respect for others. Regardless of background, we are all Australians. We are one and we are free.

"In acknowledging our first nations people, I also acknowledge all who have come since and what they have done to build the multi-cultural home we call Australia.

"We are a land of endless stories. These stories make us who we are and, woven together, they create the tapestry that is Australia. At first home to our indigenous people, our continent was colonised to become a great nation, an open democracy for almost 125 years. On Australia Day, we recognise the part everyone plays and celebrate each and every wonderful story that, together, tells the story of Australia, our home. Many of the stories relate to our fellow Australians - indigenous Australians, first nation peoples. These stories are not always ones that we are proud of and yet they are part of our Nation's history.

"Today is the day we should all share as our national day," he said.

Rotary President Darryl King also spoke at the event.

After the flag was raised, the attendees sang *Advance Australia Fair*.



The attendees at the event. -S

Dialysis patients face life-threatening challenges during fires

DIALYSIS patients in the Alexandra area faced very significant challenges during the fire emergency. While the main fires were on January 8 and 9, the aftermath left the patients in a very challenging situation. The patient names have been used in this article with permission.

Marie Bristow, who has been advocating for dialysis services to be provided in the Alexandra area, explained, "On Tuesday, January 13, Ian was told that he would be picked up at 6.30am. Belinda was told that she would be picked up at 7.30am on the same day.

"Belinda rang the Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) ambulance and said, how about them going together. They said yes. So they were ready from 6.30am to be picked up. The transport finally got here at 9.45am, three and a quarter hours later.

"The person driving the NEPT ambulance had trouble all the way. They got to Molesworth and the road was closed, so she waited for somebody to come to let her through.

"Then she got to Endicott Lane and was told by the police there she would have to go back the same way she had come because it was too dangerous to go over the spur.

"She picked Belinda and Ian up and went to Yea and was told at Yea the Melba Highway was closed, so she had to go back to Seymour and then back to Box Hill, which took three and a quarter hours. They got there at 1pm. The treatment was up until 5pm."

Marie was still in the Alexandra area. She said, "In the meantime, we lost power and we lost our phone and all communication, emails and everything. I then came in town because this happened. I knew Belinda and Ian would be trying to get onto me about getting transport home. There was no guarantee they were going to be able to get transport home and I said I'll definitely come down and pick you both up. I went to UGFM and spoke to Nomes who was amazing. She had no nothing either. She tried with my phone, she tried with her phone for Wi-Fi. She was doing the radio and she must have been talking to Peter Rice.

"While I was there, a fellow from the hospital came down to say that the hospital had no phones, no internet, nothing.

"Ken was with me. Then when I was going to the shire office, Nomes yelled out to me and said there is a satellite phone that Peter Weeks has organised to take to the hospital. I went to the hospital, met up with Jane who was absolutely wonderful, took me into another room because she knew I was so distressed about how I was going to get them out. I explained to the staff what was happening and they rang Belinda because Belinda was doing treatment... and said that we would definitely be getting down there some way to get them.

"So Jane and I were sitting in another room, and then the nurse came in and said Belinda had been frantically ringing everybody in Alexandra and realised then that the phones were out, but they didn't know how they were

going to get home. So she rang a friend who lived in Coydon, and her and her husband went and picked up Ian and Belinda.

"I spoke to Belinda and I set off and went to Melbourne to pick them up.

"By the time I got them home, it was 7.20pm on Tuesday night. They were absolutely exhausted, they looked terrible and I was so upset, I wanted to actually take them straight to the hospital because I was so worried about them.

"Because of the transport and because of the fires before that, Ian was on day five [five days since his last treatment], making it critical. I had to watch him all weekend... Belinda was day four. Now day six or day seven, they would probably be dead. That's why they say they can't be any more than six days without treatment."

Belinda had also been able to access some special medicine via the renal specialist but Ian hadn't answered his phone. He therefore didn't have access to the same medicine.

Marie added they couldn't go to Seymour the following week due to limited staffing as a result of the fire. There was also a danger in the patients travelling to Seymour. On the Thursday of the fires, Belinda was stuck at Seymour and Marie got a message at 1.10pm, saying that NEPT couldn't take her home. NEPT only had an hour until that staff member was due to knock off, and they told Marie that she couldn't get through because there were fires from Molesworth through to Seymour.

Marie added, "The driver was going under the direction of the NEPT. They said they wouldn't risk these staff, which I fully understand. I did not have a problem with that at all. Belinda was absolutely beside us off because she couldn't see how she was going to get home."

After various discussions, Marie decided that she would go to Melbourne and meet them at Broadford. The controller wanted to know how long it would take Marie to get there and she estimated three hours. The controller decided to leave Belinda at Seymour.

Marie ended up being able to travel via Yea to collect her. "By the time I got her home again, she was absolutely exhausted. It's a health issue... It's a huge anxiety." Both patients have additional health issues.

For the week just gone, with road closures still an issue, Marie met with council and they offered to take the patients to Box Hill on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This week, it's back to NEPT.

Marie added, "They weren't even given the opportunity to go to Melbourne and stay at the hospital, which is probably what they should have done for that week... The hospital up here, they were my lifesaver when I got up there because I was in such a state. Jane came straight out. She said, 'We will pay for a taxi to get them home'... Until then, I didn't know what I was going to do.

She also questioned whether we have enough satellite phones in the area when communications go down.



Kinglake CWA makes pouches for animals suffering burns

by Chrissy Eustace, Kinglake CWA

KINGLAKE endured the Black Saturday fires in 2009 and at the time we were the recipients of much assistance. A small number of us have decided it is more than appropriate to

‘pay it forward’.

Last Saturday, with profits from our prize winning raspberry jam sales, Kinglake CWA funded fabric and Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House provided the venue to

create over 100 rescue pouches to go to the Longwood fire zone.

This is a direct community contact between one of our wildlife groups (Kinglake Kritters) and Dr Robyn Coy of Tarcombe Animal

Shelter. Robyn lost her home and all shelter facilities. Her local volunteers have found numerous burnt animals and some have even come here. For example, last week local carers took in seven koalas all with burnt feet, faces, mouths and fur for essential veterinary aid. So far six have survived.

Rescue pouches which we made last year and the year before were used to handle these babies so they were untouched by human hands. The soft fleece doesn’t abrade injuries and keeps them warm. These new pouches are off to Robyn today.

Kinglake CWA group of seven members, four of whom sew and now one has L plates, were approached to make larger than normal pouches which would cover larger kangaroos and koalas, as compared to our roadkill babies normally gathered. With assistance from several local ladies and one brave man local Bendigo Bank manager Darren, we combined to help wildlife rescuers with pouches which could be washed and reused, instead of tatty towels and sheets etc.

The hurt critters aren’t particular about the colours, and thank goodness aren’t expecting perfection from our sewists. It is an ideal way to train newbies and help people in need.



AFNC and Blaze Aid partner up for bushfire recovery

THE Alexandra Football Netball Club (AFNC) will be hosting Blaze Aid for the foreseeable future at the club grounds, while the charity organisation works with bushfire affected farmers in the local area to repair broken fences.

President of AFNC, Kylie Cairns, and Simon Hardy, a Blaze Aid co-ordinator, discussed what this partnership means for the local area and the Alexandra community.

Kylie said that the football club was asked to play a number of roles after the bushfires went through, but they decided to focus on long-term recovery.

“That’s what I found with the footy club, when the fire first hit a couple of weekends ago, we were bombarded with can you be the resource centre, can you do this, can you do that?” Kylie said.

“Partnering with Blaze Aid, for us, is a better fit, because it’s more long term. That’s what Simon and I have been working and talking about, quite considerably, the long-term aftermath of not just the event that’s happened, but three months, six months down the track. People are still cleaning up. There’s fencing.”

Blaze Aid utilizes volunteers to get out and about in the community, working with registered farmers on restoring fencing on their property to contain livestock. They set up a camp, in this case at the Alexandra Football Netball Club, to act as a base of operations for their volunteers.

“The ones who lose everything are shell shocked and they don’t know where to start. That’s one of the things that Blaze Aid brings, we can go onto their property and talk with them, empathise with them, and get around them. Once they’ve learnt that we’re there to do some fencing for them and we want them to do some things to help us, it kicks their brains into a gear a bit,” Simon said.



Alexandra Football Netball Club President Kylie Cairns with Simon Hardy from Blaze Aid. -AR

“What we do is set up a base camp in an area, this is going to be a big camp, I think. I’ve already got over 100 people registered, their properties. That is a very big number. It just depends on how many volunteers come up, we may have to spill over to other areas. We do have some accommodations for backpackers and that sort of stuff, getting

some of that up here. It will be like a tent and caravan city; it will be busy. It will work very well.

“Our number one priority is working in with the community, being part of the community while we’re here and trying not to disturb the community in any way. This is fantastic with Kylie and the football club, because we know they’ve got events on, but we’ll just kind of meld around them and work in with them to make it happen.”

Kylie and Simon both agreed that the club grounds will act as a bit of a recovery hub, where people can volunteer their time, donate goods, and have a chat.

“We can use the football club as a hub that they can come in. I’ve said to Simon, if we need to have the bar open because he’s seeing it’s busy and people are starting to stick around and talk, we can accommodate and adapt to what the community needs in a better way. Particularly our kitchen,” Kylie said.

“One point I would make, and Kylie has touched on it, this is a drop-in centre. We like people dropping in to talk, and help us, and help us to help them. We get people that come in and register, we get people that come in and donate food and eggs and stuff like that, we get people that come and pick up food scraps for their chooks, all sorts of things like that. It becomes a little community in itself. We stay in the area as long as we’re needed. We’ve had camps open up for 12 months before,” Simon added.

Farmers have to register with Blaze Aid in order to receive volunteer fencing support, and then those registrations are prioritised based on level of farming capacity. Simon made it clear that communication is an important part of this process.

“What we do is we take our list of farmers that are registering with us and we prioritise. Primary producers with boundary fences lost

are our first priority, then after we’ve swung through all of those guys, we then move onto internal fencing and hobby farmers and that sort of thing. What we really need to do first is make sure there is perimeter fencing so there is no wandering stock,” he said.

“Probably the best way to register is going to the website, because there is a form under Get Help where they can just get some quick details in, and with the volume we’re getting at the moment, it’s probably the best way.

“Be patient with us, with such a large number we will be contacting people as we can, but it’s going to take some time for us to be fully operational. Some people in the low priorities are going to have to wait a little while before we can help them. We’re here, they can call us anytime, we’ll chat to them and keep them up to date. Communication is so important.”

As part of the process, most farmers have to provide their own fencing materials, though some donations do exist.

“Generally but not always, primary producers have fence insurance and they pay for their materials that way. Apart from that we rely on donations. A lot of hobby farmers can’t afford materials so donations are key. Sometimes they come, sometimes they don’t. But we always find a way to help everybody. We’ll need pickets, wire, ring-lock. It’s just going to be mammoth,” Simon said.

The Alexandra Blaze Aid camp will be covering the Murrindindi Shire, while a Blaze Aid camp at Euroa, called the Longwood camp, is already working on the northern part of the fire zone.

The timeframe for Blaze Aid remaining in place to assist is undefined, as they will be continuing until the required work is complete and it depends on the number of volunteers ready to help out. Anyone who’s willing to help should get in touch with Blaze Aid.

“We do have a lot of retirees, predominantly retirees, but it’s amazing what they can get done. They are an amazing workforce. We do get people coming up with children for weekends, to teach them about giving back, and I love seeing those people. We do look after backpackers, so they can do their 88 day extensions with us,” Simon said.

“We get them from all walks of life, ex-farmers, businesspeople, they come from everywhere. I myself, I was in IT, always had a nice link to the country and spent a lot of time in the country, and now I give back to the country by doing this.”

When it comes to operating on farms, Blaze Aid is well-equipped for fencing work.

“We have trailers called combat trailers, they’re fully equipped with post rammers, chainsaws, personal protective equipment (PPE), shovels, spades, axes, the works. All the fencing straining gear and all that sort of stuff. We’re very equipped to put up fences,” Simon said.

“What we’re not equipped for is heavy movement of heavy stuff, so huge trees lying over fences then we need help. We can handle small stuff, but when it’s the massive things, it’s pretty hard. We do well with what we’ve got, but we often get offers of help with tractors, excavators, all sorts of equipment.”

To learn more about Blaze Aid and the work they do, to support them or volunteer, or to register as a fire affected farm, visit blazeaid.com.au

Watts to captain SDCA as representative team announced

THE Seymour District Cricket Association (SDCA) has announced the final team for its upcoming representative clash against Emu Valley at Chittick Park on February 8.

The SDCA side will be captained by one of the competition’s greatest players, with Lachlan Watts appointed to lead the team for the one-off match, alongside Coach Cam Armstrong.

Watts has long been recognised as a consistent performer and natural leader within the SDCA, earning the captaincy through both his on-field standards and the respect he commands across the competition.

The selected squad features a strong blend of experience and emerging talent from across the league, reflecting the depth of cricket within the SDCA and the enthusiasm surrounding the return of senior representative cricket.

SDCA President Mitch Itter said the appointment of Watts and the makeup of the squad highlighted the significance of the occasion for the association.

“Lachlan is a highly respected figure within our competition and a natural choice to lead this group,” Itter said.

“He leads by example, competes hard, and has the respect of teammates and opponents alike. We’re confident he’ll do an outstanding job captaining the SDCA.

“This squad represents the best of our competition. There’s a great mix of experience and youth, and it’s exciting to see players from across our clubs coming together to represent the league.

“The return of senior representative cricket is a major milestone for the SDCA, and the level of interest and support from our clubs has been extremely encouraging.

“The players selected should be proud of their achievement, and we’re looking forward to seeing them represent the SDCA with pride against Emu Valley on February 8.”



Seymour District Cricket Association (SDCA) representative team coach Cam Armstrong, and SDCA captain Lachlan Watts. -S

Seymour Club SDCA Representative Squad

Xavier Arandt (Tallarook)
 Dan Bergowicz (Seymour)
 Andrew Butterworth (Yea)
 Charlies Davies (Puckapunyal)
 Lachlan Drummond (Puckapunyal)
 Cam Evans (Seymour)
 Ciaran Fountain (Puckapunyal)
 Leigh Irving (Tallarook)
 Blake Munari-O’Dwyer (Tallarook)
 Josh Rudge (Tallarook)
 Lachlan Watts (Tallarook)
 Kal Winnell (Tallarook)

Push to bring Tones and I to Yea

THE Yea Football Netball Club have recently created a Facebook page, seeking to encourage Tones and I to play a concert at Yea.

The page was the result of Tones and I posting that if people wanted her to come to their region for a concert, they should create a page and get as many follows and likes as possible.

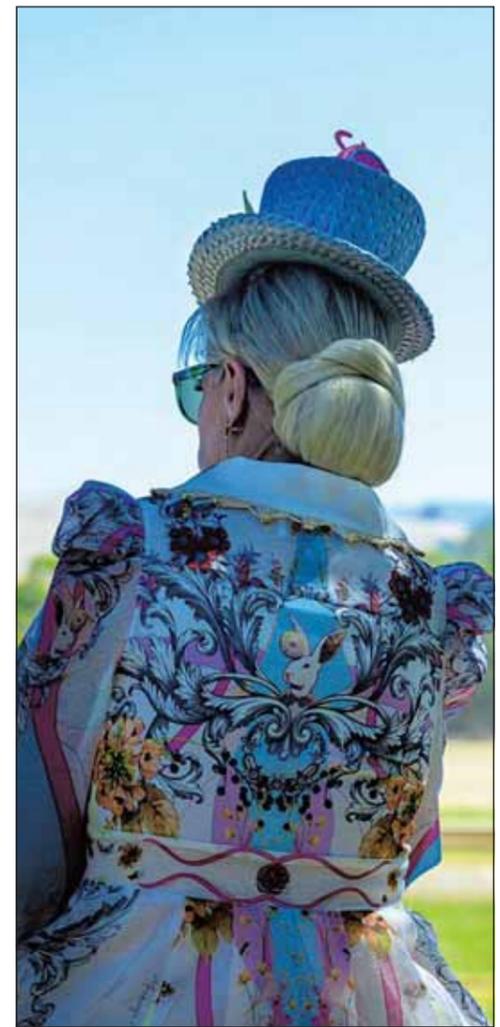
As stated by the club, “Every like, comment and share helps boost our chances, and more importantly, helps us raise much-needed funds for locals affected by the Longwood fires. This is about community, support, and showing just how strong Yea really is. Let’s get behind it and make some noise.”

The outcome of the effort was not yet known by the time this newspaper went to print.

The Chronicle Sport



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Good attendance at Yea Races despite road closures

THE Yea Races were held on Saturday, January 24, with the event providing an opportunity to fundraise for fire-impacted communities.

Club president, Al Tait, said, "It was a great day, considering the circumstances of what's happened in the area in the last two and a half weeks. It was a great day for the community

to come out and enjoy themselves. It was warm, but with Yea, we've got all those nice shady trees and they were full to capacity."

He estimated that over 1000 people attended, which was a good number considering the road closures.

All of the proceeds from the raffle are going to the Yea Community House, which will distribute it. The raffle total will be posted on the Yea Racing social media accounts.

The Nutrien Ag Solutions Cup was won by a Peter Donnelly trained horse, Adare Manor from Benalla. Al said, "He'd come down the outside and knock them all off so that was a good result for Peter."

Al added, "We raced on a good four track for the entirety of the meeting, so credit to our track staff."

"It was a great effort by everyone. Many thanks to our volunteers and our community groups who helped us on the day, and all our committee."

