

Standard

INCORPORATING THE ALEXANDRA TIMES - THE YARCK, GOBUR, TAGGERTY, THORNTON, AND ACHERON EXPRESS

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INSIDE THIS WEEK'S EDITION

Behind the Captain's Rebuild Shed



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Insight into the Alexandra ICC



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Man Walk visits Yarck



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Weekend sport



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Jack at Josephine Cutting, welcoming the truck convoy laden with much needed hay and other fodder into town as they arrive in Alexandra. -S

Jack cheers on his dad's mates

NEED for Feed had lots of children out waving to the trucks and utes on Sunday, January 25.

One very special young man was Jack (pictured). Jack's father, Rick 'Bones' MacKinnon was one of the more regular volunteers in Need for Feed's early days.

Sadly Rick passed away suddenly in 2020, leaving behind the love of his life Kate and son Jack.

Back in 2015, after returning home from a hay run to the Creightons Creek Longwood fires, Rick, wrote this poem in just an hour or so.

"There's a group of top notch people, living in a southern state.

A little place called Victoria, perhaps youve heard of it mate?

We work and toil, like all others, at our daily jobs.

On the weekend's we meet on the road somewhere, to catch Graham and Cob'.

We bring our trucks, Utes and trailers,

We load donated hay, near fresh from out the balers.

Were taking out to stricken farmers,

Whose hearts have been struck at, such is natural disasters.

We don't do it, for money fortune or fame.

Just a dusty smile and handshake, for us that's just the same.

So next time you see our convoy, or our shirts that bear our name,

Stop and say 'G'day, you'll never know what you'll gain.

We will keep it moving, helping is our belief,

For that's what's in our heart's, we are the crew of Need For Feed, Disaster Relief."

Additional support for impacted communities

The Australian and Victorian Governments have announced \$160 million in additional support to help families, businesses and primary producers in communities affected by the devastating January 2026 Victorian bushfires.

Up to \$158 million is funded by both governments under joint Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), while the Victorian Government is investing an extra \$2 million for schools within fire-affected areas to engage additional mental health services.

Local government areas eligible for support include Mansfield Shire, Mitchell Shire, Moira Shire, Murrindindi Shire, Strathbogie Shire and Lake Mountain Alpine Resort.

The funding builds on the more than \$210 million in already announced relief and recovery supports for bushfire-affected Victorians, including emergency relief payments, grants for primary producers, access to emergency accommodation, and support for councils.

Clean-up for homes and businesses

An additional \$112 million will expand the state-coordinated Clean-up Program with Forge Solutions now appointed as lead contractor. Forge Solutions have extensive experience in disaster clean up and will prioritise engaging local contractors to support their work.

Clean-up support will be available for uninsured and underinsured residential homes and structures such as sheds or garages. It will also be available for businesses if uninsured or underinsured structures have been damaged or destroyed by the January 2026 Victorian bushfires. Uninsured and underinsured community assets, like sporting facilities and community halls, will also be able to access the clean-up program if clean-up is not covered by other programs.

Registrations are now open. Call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 or visit Emergency Recovery Victoria website, vic.gov.au/clean-support-january-2026-bushfires

Continued Page 3

Important bushfire relief and recovery resources

Essential bushfire relief and recovery resources are available on my website.

If you need assistance, please contact my office.



**Helen
Haines** MP

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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.



DAY	LOW	HIGH	DAY	LOW	HIGH
Wednesday	14	33	Wednesday	14	34
Thursday	11	29	Thursday	11	28
Friday	11	31	Friday	11	31
Saturday	13	31	Saturday	13	30
Sunday	15	30	Sunday	15	29
Monday	16	30	Monday	16	30
Tuesday	16	31	Tuesday	16	31



THE ALEXANDRA · EILDON · MARYSVILLE

Standard

INCORPORATING THE ALEXANDRA, THREE, THE VANCE, OGBURN, TARDERTON, THORNTON, AND ACHERON ESTATES

We thank you for your continued support

Additional support for impacted communities

Continued from Page 1

Registrations are now open. Call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 or visit Emergency Recovery Victoria website, vic.gov.au/clean-support-january-2026-bushfires

Emergency Recovery Support Program

To help people get the support they need throughout their recovery journey, an additional \$20 million will expand the Emergency Recovery Support Program. The program helps people affected by the bushfires navigate and access the government support programs and services they need. It can also help with things like insurance and legal questions, finding local services and connecting people to essential health and wellbeing support. Dedicated recovery support workers will also be available for people who need extra help navigating their recovery.

The Emergency Recovery Support Program is available by calling the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760.

Temporary accommodation

Further funding is being provided to ensure immediate accommodation supports are available to those who need it, while work is done to provide medium to longer term accommodation options best suited to the recovery needs of individuals, families and communities.

Financial counselling and advisory support for businesses

More than \$1.7 million will go towards supporting business owners affected by the January 2026 bushfires by providing access to tailored business recovery advice and financial counselling. The Business Recovery Advisory Service will be available on the ground and through the Business Victoria website. Business Recovery Advisors will deliver free, confidential one-on-one support to business owners, tailored to their circumstances and supporting their long-term recovery. The Small Business Financial Counselling service will provide free and confidential financial counselling to businesses who are in financial risk or at risk of it due to the bushfires. More information will be available on the Business Victoria website, business.vic.gov.au

Public land and waterway recovery

Funding of \$16.1 million will support immediate repair works to public land and waterways, recognising the devastating impact the bushfires have had on the environment. This includes making roads and bridges safe so they can open as quickly as possible, land management works, as well as pest control and critical mitigation of immediate risks to threatened species and biodiversity. It also includes catchment and waterway restoration activities undertaken with Catchment Management Authorities, such as riparian fencing support for landholders, and immediate works to address water quality risks and remediate riparian areas.

Prolonged Power Outage Payments for businesses

Almost \$1.4 million will ensure businesses are able to access Prolonged Power Outage Payments if they have been without power for seven or more days within a two-week period. Recognising the integral role small businesses play in communities and the impact of prolonged outages, payments of \$3088 per week will be available for up to three weeks. As previously announced, eligible households can continue to apply for payments of \$2380 per week for up to three weeks. Affected businesses can apply for a payment through their electricity distribution business. More information is available at energy.vic.gov.au/about-energy/safety/power-outages

Recovery Water Tank Rebates

Financial assistance will be available for bushfire-affected rural households that are not connected to mains water supply, with new program to help ensure access to safe drinking water. Eligible households will receive a rebate of up to \$1500 for cleaning and decontaminating rain water tanks, roofs and gutters that are impacted by the fires. Residents who have already paid for cleaning are also eligible for reimbursement.

Mental health support

More than \$6.9 million will deliver additional mental health and wellbeing support for those in bushfire-affected communities. \$4.9 million will expand the reach of existing Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals into areas affected by the bushfires, providing free treatment, care and

support for adults. A list of Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals can be found at betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-locals

The mental health and wellbeing of young people can suffer significantly after a disaster due to trauma, loss, and disruption. A \$2 million investment by the Victorian Government will ensure students in identified government schools affected by the fires can access additional mental health support.

How to help

The Victorian Emergency Relief and Recovery Foundation (VERRF) has launched the January 2026 Victorian Bushfire Appeal. Victorians can provide financial support directly to communities impacted by the fires by visiting vic.gov.au/2026-Victorian-Bushfire-Appeal

Goods and services can also be donated through the charity GIVIT by visiting givit.org.au

AV donations to support fire-affected wildlife

AMBULANCE Victoria (AV) staff and volunteers have banded together over the last few weeks to provide emergency care to fire-affected communities across Victoria, with recent efforts going towards supporting the recovery of injured wildlife.

AV has donated medical supplies that are no longer used for patient care, but are still safe and appropriate for animal treatment, to Nigel's Animal Rescue to assist with caring for animals affected by the fires.

Working on the frontline, AV Regional Improvement Lead Jo Algie saw firsthand the devastation caused by the recent bushfires and wanted to do all she could to help those in need.

"It's a difficult time for so many people across our state who have lost so much, and my heart goes out to all of them," she said.

"After hearing about wildlife shelters and organisations who were overrun with animals in need, I thought it would be a great way to keep the products we can no longer use out of landfill.

"Unfortunately, some of our medical supplies have a short shelf life for patients, despite being unopened and in perfect condition.

"I made a call out to other AV staff and volunteers and was overwhelmed with everyone's generosity; the camaraderie has been unbelievable."

Similar donations have been made by AV's regional branches such as Wodonga and Shepparton, with supplies going to local wildlife organisations in those areas.

Giving new life to products isn't a new thing for AV, with items such as de-bagged uniforms, shoes and medical supplies being donated to various organisations in the past year.

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Council visiting fire-affected properties to assess damage

MURRINDINDI Shire Council is advising community members that council officers will be attending fire-affected properties over the coming days and weeks to carry out detailed, on-site assessments of damage caused by the January 2026 bushfires.

These assessments will provide a clearer and more accurate understanding of the bushfire impact to guide recovery efforts and connect property owners and community members with the support and services they need. Impacted individuals will be able to use this information and guidance in any claims for insurance, government assistance, recovery work or rebuilding.

Properties with damaged or destroyed homes, buildings or infrastructure will be the highest priority as part of a phased approach as roads are officially opened.

Council’s assessment teams may include a Building Surveyor, Environmental Health Officer, Arborist, Personal Support Officer and Administration Officer.

All staff will have identification with them, and where possible, a call to the property

owner or occupant will be made prior to attending on site.

If the owner has not been able to be contacted, a card will be left advising how to contact council to discuss the outcomes of the visit.

Teams include staff from Murrindindi Shire Council as well as officers from partner councils.

Following any emergency, council officers conduct these inspections, known as a Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA). An SIA is a more detailed inspection carried out after the initial rapid assessment conducted by emergency services during the fire response.

While emergency services focus on immediate safety and access, the SIA looks more closely at structural integrity, environmental risks, essential service impacts, and broader health and safety considerations.

During a visit, the team can provide information and guidance on building safety and structural damage, wastewater and drinking water systems, hazardous materials (including asbestos, chemicals, fuel or gas),

dangerous or fire-affected trees, personal and wellbeing support, and available recovery services and grants.

Officers will also take photographs and collect information to assist with recovery planning and support services.

Importantly, teams will only travel to areas where roads and properties are deemed safe to access by arborists and engineers.

Murrindindi Shire Mayor, Cr Damien Gallagher said the detailed assessments are an important step in supporting fire-affected communities.

“Our community has shown remarkable strength through this challenging period. These detailed assessments will help ensure property owners have clear information about the impacts on their properties and can access the support they need. Council is committed to walking alongside our community throughout the recovery journey.

“I would like to remind our residents and property owners to only rely on certified, trusted and identified contractors or trades people to visit their impacted properties. Don’t hesitate to ask for formal identification.”

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.

Support local heroes at the Murrindindi CFA Fundraiser Gala

AN unforgettable evening to support and show appreciation to the brave men and women of the local Murrindindi Shire CFA brigades will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2026, from 5.30pm at the Alexandra Football Netball Club.

Attendees will receive: Canapés on arrival; two main meal options to fuel the night; live entertainment all evening; raffles and silent auctions for extra fun and prizes; full bar and beverages available for purchase.

Tickets are just \$60 per person, so grab yours now via the link below and secure your spot. Don’t miss this chance to enjoy a great night out while helping the firefighters.

CFA members should reach out to Dindi Dance to receive a discount code to get into the event free, and people who donated will receive a 50 per cent off discount code.

Tickets are available at dindidance.com.au/cfadinner

Over \$200 million in bushfire insurance losses, ICA states

INSURED losses as a result of the devastating bushfires that have been burning through parts of Victoria since January 7 are estimated to have reached more than \$200 million across 3123 claims, the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) said last Wednesday.

This claims count includes property, motor, commercial and business interruption claims, with an estimated 30 per cent of property claims estimated to be total losses.

Insurers are prioritising claims from Victorians impacted by the bushfires. Claims are expected to continue to be lodged as access is restored and home and business owners return.

To date, insurers have had a presence in Castlemaine, Harcourt, Natimuk, Seymour, Skipton and Yea to support impacted policyholders through the claims and recovery process and will look to move into other areas once it is safe to do so.

For those who have damage and are yet to make a claim, the ICA has the following tips: Do not be concerned if you can’t find your insurance papers. Insurers have electronic records and need only your name, address and date of birth; if your home is unsafe, notify your local authorities and check with

your insurer about whether you can claim temporary housing expenses; take photos or video of damage to your property and contents, including possessions, to support your claim; speak to your insurer before undertaking any clean-up activities. This includes before you attempt or authorise any building work, including emergency repairs, noting unauthorised work may not be covered by your policy.

ICA CEO Andrew Hall said: “While insurers are continuing their strong focus on Victoria, safety is the upmost priority. These bushfires very much remain an ongoing event and I encourage Victorians to follow the advice of emergency services.

“Being here on the ground, you can understand the true scale and impact of these fires, and the devastation it has caused.

“Insurers are working hard to support impacted customers and are already making plans to revisit Victoria for face-to-face consultations in coming weeks.

“For anyone who has damage and is yet to make a claim, I encourage them to get in touch with their insurer to commence the claims process, even if the full extent of the damage remains unknown.”

Apply for the Prolonged Power Outage Payment

THE Victorian and Australian Governments are providing financial relief to households that have been without power for seven cumulative days following the heatwave, bushfire and wind events that occurred in Victoria from January 7 to 10.

AusNet are supporting the delivery of this relief payment to eligible customers in their electricity distribution network.

Subject to specific eligibility criteria, those without power for seven days after January 7 will be eligible for \$2380 per week for up to three weeks.

AusNet will distribute the payment to eligible customers on the government's behalf.

Payments are for each cumulative seven-day period per electricity account holder, up to a maximum of three payments.

The overall time without power does not need to be a continuous seven-day period, as long as the days without power add up to seven days.

This means for eligible residential customers, if you are without power for: Seven cumulative days, you get \$2380 in total; 14 cumulative days, you get \$4760 in total; 21 cumulative days, you get \$7140 in total.

To be eligible for the Prolonged Power Outage Payment, customers must: Have a residential electricity account with a national meter identification number (NMI) within the AusNet electricity distribution network; be electricity account holder of a property that lost power due to the severe weather events in Victoria between January 7 and January 10, 2026 and was without power for 7 cumulative days; not have already received a Prolonged Power Outage Payment for the same electricity account; have applied via AusNet's online form, no later than 11.59pm (AEDT) on March 31, 2026.

Apply online

To apply for the payment online, please complete the form at ausnetservices.com.au/outages/claims/prolonged-power-outage-payment/apply

To complete this application, you will need to provide: The full name of the electricity account holder, this will be the person applying for the payment; National Metering Identifier (NMI), this is the 10 or 11-digit number that you can find on your power bill. The NMI must match the electricity account for a property that was without power for seven cumulative days due to the severe weather event between January 7 and 10, 2026; meter number, this can be found on your bill or electricity meter contact number and bank details to receive the payment which must match the electricity account holder's details.

Once eligibility is confirmed, it will take three to five business days for payment to be made.

Apply in person or over the phone

Applying online is the fastest option available, however, AusNet understand that not everyone feels comfortable sharing their details online.

You can apply for the Prolonged Power Outage Payment over the phone by calling AusNet's Bushfire Support Line on 1300 561 171, 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

Or you can go to Highlands Hall, 1603 Ghin Ghin Road, Highlands from 11am to 2pm where the AusNet team can help you apply in person.

The Prolonged Power Outage Payment application for residential customers will be open until 11.59pm on March 31.

Unfortunately, AusNet won't be able to process applications after this date. For claims related to food spoilage, please visit ausnetservices.com.au/outages/claims

Deadline on EOIs for commercial developments at Lake Eildon extended

GOULBURN-Murray Water (GMW) has extended the deadline on receiving expressions of interest (EOI) for commercial developments at Lake Eildon.

The closing date for EOIs was initially set for 5pm, January 30 but has now been extended to 5pm on February 27. GMW General Manager Water Storage Services Jon McKeown said it was important to extend the deadline due to recent bushfires in the region.

"We know this has been a challenging time for many communities, businesses and individual operators with the Victorian bushfires," he said.

"Given the fires remain an active situation, we have extended the closing deadline for the receipt of EOIs to enable interested parties to prepare and lodge submissions.

"The extension applies to all respondents to ensure participation in the EOI process is fair and equitable."

GMW is seeking EOIs that align with existing land uses, the surrounding environment and the strategic objectives of the Activating Lake Eildon Masterplan and includes up to 16 parcels of land around the lake.

The parcels of land offer developers, investors and commercial operators opportunities to establish long-term ventures that may include: supporting biodiversity, recreation, renewable energy, telecommunications, tourism and workforce accommodation.

EOIs can be submitted for individual sites, combinations, or the entire portfolio,

allowing flexibility to suit a range of commercial concepts.

The EOI initiative aligns with federal, state, and local priorities, aiming to enhance natural assets and support sustainable development in partnership with local communities.

All EOIs will be evaluated on price, organisational capability, business plan, community benefit, and experience.

Any successful developments will be required to align with planning legislation including cultural heritage and environmental expectations.

Interested parties must register via GMW's eProcure portal, app.eprocure.com.au/gmwater/home/public

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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.

Joshua Crute: The man behind The Captain’s Rebuild Shed

JOSHUA Crute is the man behind The Captain’s Rebuild Shed, a resourced created in the wake of the recent fires, aimed at providing free tools and other items to help people get back on their feet.

He’s only been living in Alexandra for two years, but is familiar with country life, having grown up in a small country town called The Rock, between Albury and Wagga Wagga. His father grew up on a farm in Horsham.

Joshua commented, “I learned from him at a very young age the care-for-community spirit. If you don’t do something to help your fellow neighbour, then you’re not a neighbour.

“I learned from my neighbour, Joy, who was across the road at The Rock. She is heavily involved in our local community back at the Rock. She’s been the secretary of the show society for 40 plus years. She’s a lifetime member of the Red Cross, Rotary, Lions, CWA, the list continues. She’s heavily involved in the community, and growing up around her, I learned that it doesn’t matter what you do, if you can do something, you should do it.”

Joshua’s background includes working in prisons, security and private investigations. He said, “I used to see the other side of the fence and I got sick of looking at the other side of the fence. I decided that it was time to live up to the people that had been training me going back, so I joined our local fire brigade. I became an SES member here in Victoria. did all these little bits and pieces.

“Ten years ago I had a car accident and I’ve got a rebuilt neck, a spinal cord stimulator. There’s a lot of things that I’m not allowed to do anymore, one of them being physically active, otherwise I’d be on the back of a fire truck with the men and women out there doing it today. But what I can do is organise. One thing I can do is donate time and do stuff that some people may not have the time to do because they work full time, or they do lots of stuff.

“I’m a comedian by trade these days, so I try and bring a little bit of humour to things. I



Joshua Crute. -S

try and make someone’s day a little bit better any way I can,” he said.

As a comedian, he does gigs in Melbourne, and also does a lot of emceeing for local shows, including the Alexandra Show and Lilydale Show. He also goes back to The Rock to emcee at their show.

He has wife, Kim, and daughter, Ava, “Who’s just as equally as talented as their mother,” Joshua said. “We moved to the back into the country to teach her that the country way of living is all about community. She’s literally had the baptism of fire on how dangerous it can become in the Australian country life, but equally she’s seen how the community has rallied around people. It went from ‘we don’t want to live here anymore’ to ‘we can’t leave here now. We’re here now, this is our community.’

Both Joshua and Kim lived through Black Saturday. He said of Kim, “She’s used to being evacuated and stuff, and she swore she was never going to do it again. After she had to be evacuated, when the fires came,

that was when she was like, ‘do we really want to do this?’ And now it’s like, ‘we can’t leave. We just can’t leave. This is our community. We fought for this community. This is ours now. Even though we’re only babies in the community.’

Joshua can be easily spotted in the street of Alexandra, with his nickname, ‘Captain’ written across the top of his car windscreen.

In terms of The Captain’s Shed, he said, “I just like helping someone. Out of all the stuff that’s in here today, if one person picks up a tool and walks away, that’s fine. It’s got to help someone. If never get anything else out of here and I’ll still be happy.”

People are welcome to wander in and take a look. The shed is along the small path next to the Menzies pop up clothes shop, The Recovery Wardrobe, at 75 Grant Street, Alexandra.

He wanted to thank Julie from Alexandra Signs for creating the signs for the shed for free.

Joshua said, “At the moment we’ve got a whole bunch of hand tools. Different forms of screwdrivers, from electrical screwdrivers to woodworking, etcetera, multiple hand grip tools like spanners and monkey wrenches, G-clamps and saws.

“I’ve also got some toolboxes. I’ve got some power tools that are coming in, and there’s a lovely guy that’s going to let me use his electric tester so I can make sure all the tools are tested and tagged before they get out of the drawer. We’ve got multiple different forms of galvanised nails and fencing nails, straps and tapes and joiners and bolts and screws and you name it. Shovels. We’ve got crowbars, we’ve got pry bars, we’ve got camping gear, everything and anything.”

He’s also expecting some fencing items to come in soon, and would welcome more if people have some available. “Everything from pole diggers through to the poles and some fencing and cyclone fencing, chicken wire, standard wire, wire pullers, the whole kit and caboodle. That’s what we’re working on at the moment,” he said.

He hopes that a supplier or a fencer might get in contact with him. “I’ll definitely make sure it gets to the right people,” he said.

All donations are very welcome, and he strongly encouraged fire-impacted people to come in if they need anything. Everything is free.

Joshua said, “I’ve got this old saying, it’s better to be looking at it than looking for it. I’ll take anything and anything to do with tools, gardening equipment, farming equipment. If you’ve got an old tractor that you want to roll in here, roll it in here and I’ll take it and fix it for you.

He added, “I’m trying to get hold of a farmer. I met him at the doctor’s surgery the week after the fires. He lost everything. And he said, I’m looking for a size 14 boot, help me out with that. I have a size 14 boot right there for him. I haven’t been able to find him. So if you’re reading, come and get your boots.”

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**HOW WELL
DO YOU KNOW FIRE?**



THE Longwood fire started on the afternoon of Wednesday, January 7, with strong and gusty winds on the following days spreading the fire widely across the region. It burnt 142,000 hectares and had a perimeter of 330 kilometres.

Dave Bowdern, Incident Controller with Forest Fire Management (FFMVic), said, “When the Longwood fire started on Wednesday, we at Alexandra Incident Control Centre (ICC) were to take on any fires within the region apart from the Walwa fire that was already underway.”

“On the Wednesday, other fires started, one of which was the Longwood Fire, which the Alexandra ICC took control of within a couple of hours after it ignited.”

While traditionally, FFM tends to focus more on forest fires, whereas farmland is more CFA, this was a different scenario. Dave explained, “The incident control centre is tenure-blind, in this particular case, for as much as it may have been filled with probably half CFA, half FFM. In times like that, i.e. with the levels of preparedness that we put in place, the ICC are just in charge of a geographical area and any fires within that area because we have an incident control team sort of ready to go. It tends to be tenure blind as it was on that day.”

The fire escalated quickly from its ignition point, and Dave added, “It was also in really difficult terrain and difficult topography. We have fought fires roughly in that area if I hark back to the Creightons Creek fire and the like. There were untraditional weather conditions with respect to the wind and also the way the fire was behaving for the days prior to the Friday when it really took off. The untraditional winds were from the south-east.

“We were also finding that clearly any of the fuel in this particular case, like the grass and also the bush to some degree, was fully available. So that meant that any slight influence, whether it be from the weather or the topography, the shape of the land, the fire was just hungry and took the course of action that it did, just based on the winds and also the winds funnelling through the tricky topography up there in those parts of the hills. It was quite difficult to predict, although we had some good predictions, some of those predictions didn’t necessarily come to fruition, although we were putting out warnings and we did have warnings and tried to get those warnings quite wide and varied in order to sort of cater for some of that unpredictability,” he said.

“In the main, the predictions were roughly right, but we did see some parts of the fire that were unexpectedly moving in directions that we weren’t necessarily prepared for, but it was quite surprising sometimes. I recall, I think it was one of the nights prior, it had obviously moved from the Hume Highway, was moving towards the south, but I on one particular night I remember coming back into the Incident Control Centre the next morning and it had come back over the Hume Highway, which was something that we had in place as a plan, that it could happen, but I was a little bit surprised to see it. It had jumped back over the Hume Highway that night just due to some activity early in the morning.”

Much of the area where the fire was initially being fought has very steep, rounded hills and fairly granitic. Dave was asked about how fire travels in such country.

He said that the fire was “Definitely wind-based. The nasty fires, if you will, tend to be wind driven... The winds back on those days prior to the Friday, and obviously the Friday, were funnelling and also moving through that terrain, following routes, it might have been following gullies, might have been coming over the top of the hill and creating eddies and then basically moving the fire in the different directions as it consumed or as it wanted to consume the different vegetation types or the easy fuels. That country is quite tricky too because it can be quite smooth. It’s like a smooth piece of paper, it means the wind will travel quite quickly over it, particularly if it’s grass, and rounded hills and large boulders and the like create little funnelling effects, which means the wind might squeeze up and then travel quicker like it would through a small open window in your house as opposed to a large open window. Those sort of effects means the fire can travel in and around that country pretty rapidly.”



Dave Bowdern. -AR

When asked about the increasing level of concern at the Alexandra ICC, Dave said, “Right from the outset, even prior to the fire starting, the fact that we have an incident control centre, what we call pre-formed, in place, that will give you the indication of how seriously we were taking it.

“We were quite concerned prior and then obviously when that fire started, the concern within the Control Centre with the team was high, particularly because we knew that in the following week, there was weather that was going to come that would be creating really difficult firefighting or fire suppression conditions, that being obviously the Friday, but even the preceding day. It’s always difficult when you have fire already in the landscape and then you have what you know to be an unwieldy day ahead. We were concerned and obviously trying to do everything we possibly could to suppress the fire, using large amounts of aircraft, our on-ground firefighting force with the CFA or FFMVIC or later on some of our cohort from New South Wales and other parts of the country.”

When asked about who has the responsibility for calling in aircraft to fight the fires, Dave explained, “Typically what happens is we request aircraft as the ICC and there is a function within that we call the Incident Management Team at the ICC in Alexandra, and one of those functions is the Operations section. Often you’ll see them with red tabards on, and Operations ultimately request what resources are needed. So we request the aircraft and in this particular case, given that there was also the Walwa fire further north, which had a few aircraft assigned to it, we were able to have some aircraft assigned to our fire, which did include two large air tankers and a plethora of helicopters that help us firebomb, helicopters that we call Helitacks. We were able to put a fair few aircraft into that fire in the preceding days to the Friday.

The fire kept increasing in size and on Friday the situation became even more challenging. Dave said, “On Thursday night, knowing full well what was coming the Friday, it was planning preparation and then we still had the firefight on the ground. It’s really tricky to be able to be planning, although we were

confident that we had a good prediction on the spread, knowing that the Friday would probably bring a more traditional weather pattern that we were able to predict it. We were prepared for that. So the day prior, not only have we got the firefight going on, which we have to concentrate on, but then our planning unit and the like are planning and predicting where it will head. Then we’re able to do a number of things from warnings right through to preparation of townships, etcetera, for example, or preparation of assets that we know might come under threat from the fire the following day.

“As far as that Friday morning, I transferred control on that Friday about midday, but that whole morning was just the finalisation of preparation for the fire that was moving through the landscape, probably from Merton through to Alexandra in that big run that it took... It was very much trying to give the community ample warning and give them ample time to be able to adhere to those warnings.”

Asked about the predictions for Alexandra and whether there was a concern that it would be badly hit or a belief that it would be held back, Dave said, “There’s a belief that Alexandra, to some degree, is defensible. Our predictions were probably putting Alexandra maybe just towards the tail end of the run. But make no mistake, Alexandra was under threat. We expect that as the fronts move through into Alexandra, it’s a defensible town, providing that it has the resources there to help defend it, notwithstanding that we don’t think that there may well be losses either on the fringe or from maybe some ember attack that might come into the town or for example, into Mackenzie’s Reserve above the town there. But at that stage Alexandra was in the predicted run of the fire.

Asked whether Yea was in the similar predicted run, Dave said, “Yes, Yea was on the fringe, or within the potential of the predicted run, on what we call the flank of the fire. So one of the sides, if you will. Yea was a prediction where we go, yes, may or maybe. The warnings and advice that we put into the community there was to give them the warnings and advice that we want people to adhere to where possible.”

It seems that around two thirds to three quarters of the people in the warning zone left the area prior to the fire’s impact.

Dave said, “I was pleased to see that some people did make that decision to vacate and do it a little bit early. Obviously there’s some people who might have left it to a little bit later.”

When the fire front reached Alexandra during the late afternoon on Friday, the fire came very close to the ICC. Dave said, “Yes, it did. I transferred control prior to it hitting that later that day and that evening. But we had a defensible control centre with the resources that we had within that control centre and also some of the resources that were moving around town, being the strike teams that were protecting the town at that stage and doing an excellent job.”

He estimated that the fire came within 100 or 200 metres of the building along Binns Mcraes Road.

Dave was asked whether it is difficult to switch from all stations, being across everything and being focused and totally engaged, to handing over control.

He said, “We had in place the transfer of control to the deputy incident controller, who also has the ability to incident control in this case. That was set in place. Then we had another team that came in as well. It was the Night IMT. They were in place during the transfer of control. When I transferred control as the incident controller of the team, then I came out to my property and to defend our house.”

He was then asked what else he would like the community to know about what happened.

He said, “I’m extremely proud of the community, both pre the Friday, on the Friday and probably just as much so, post the incident. I was out the other night and heard someone saying the same thing at a community gathering at Grant Street Grocer and when you’re sitting there and you can sit back and go, ‘Wow, what a great community we live in’. It’s really good. It’s a great thing and it’s very humbling.

“As part of the incident management team, to some degree as the incident controller, I’m just the conductor, the team that we had, both prior and on the day and post, the teams that we have in place... put in a phenomenal effort. I’m not just talking about the incident control team or the incident management team we had at Alexandra, but the CFA volunteers, which I take my hat off to, absolutely solidly working and hearing the stories of incredible work that’s being done out there. Likewise, to what I call Team Green, the Forest Fire Management team, of which I am part of, is second to none.

“In this area here, we work extremely well together, CFA and Forest Fire Management, we have great relationships. I would like to think that this just forges those relationships more, which matter into the future. I’m extremely humbled. Like everyone, you know, I sit back and I reflect on things that could have been maybe done a little bit smoother, a little bit more efficiency. I look at some of the things that we got wins on. And also, just very proud of our community.

“As I look around, even where I sit here, I look around to, what is destruction. I take a bit of a breath and sort of think, it’s hard, it’s really hard sometimes.

He agreed with the saying that hindsight is always 20/20, and that in the moment, people are making the best decisions they can at the time.

“Yeah, my word. And as I’m sure everyone can appreciate, we have a saying, ‘the fog of war’. Fires when they’re alight, when they were like what they are, that we experienced both prior and on the day, there’s lots of chaos just given the nature of fire and how it moves, how quickly it moves and how we have to adapt and overcome and change our plans and our strategies. It is very tricky, but certainly the team from the people at the coalface holding the hoses right through to the team in the incident management team did the best that they could. Certainly, they did a brilliant job. I’m very proud of them.”



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Alexandra Newsagency changing hands after 16 years

AFTER 16 years, the Alexandra Newsagency and Lotto is changing hands, with owners Graeme and Jenny stepping back and handing the reigns to the capable ownership of Sam and Shiva.

“It certainly is [a big change], after 16 years,” Graeme said, when asked about selling the business.

“I won’t interfere with the guys, they’re both clever people so they’ll do really well I think. They’re very keen to be part of the community. This is an exciting time for Shiva and Sam and I wish them all the best. And Shiva barracks for Collingwood, so I’m sure he’s going to fit into the community really well.” Sam barracks for Richmond.

Asked about what their plans are moving forward, now that they don’t have to worry about clocking into the newsagency every morning, Graeme and Jenny were focussed on their grandchildren.

“Not quite sure, no real future plans at this stage. We’ve got five grandchildren and two more on the way, so we’ve got plenty of options,” Graeme said.

“We’re definitely not leaving the area, we love Alexandra. We might be able to put a bit back into the community, one way or another.”

Jenny added, “We’ve got two new grandbabies arriving, one in Bairnsdale, one out here. Giving my house a little bit of TLC. And not having to be somewhere on the dot. But we’ll still be around town, and we’ll never leave these guys in the lurch.

“We will miss our customers, we’ve been here for 16 and a half years. We’ve employed so many. We’ve got Blake working for us, and I remember serving his mum when he was in her belly, and now he’s working for us. Generations.”

Graeme and Jenny said that they will miss chatting with their customers the most.

“I think, look, everyone says it’s long hours and all that, but we don’t actually work that long of hours. I probably think the community, and talking to everyone all the time, and you know, I enjoy that,” Graeme said.

“Sunday mornings, I’ve only got a few jobs, can’t get them done because I’m talking to everyone, you know, about football, racehorses, whatever’s going on around the place. So I’ll definitely miss that catch up. I don’t know how it will feel, to be honest.”

“I’ll definitely miss the customers and our chats. That’s what I’ll miss the most,” Jenny finished. “I’ll still be coming and buying my winning tattslo to tickets.”

Sam and Shiva both have backgrounds in retail, and are moving up from Melbourne to take on the Alexandra Newsagency and Lotto.

“I was in retail for the last 15 years, but I’ve never been in newsagencies or Tattslo to before. I was working with Coles supermarket, I was a cost manager in Richmond,” Sam said.

“Then I moved to a company called Euro Garages, it’s a petrol station. I started there as a store manager, then I became a business manager. I was running 14 sites. I live in Clyde North, and I used to run the west side.

“Now the family is growing, I’ve got two little boys now at home. One is a six year old, and the other one is a two month old baby. So we thought of settling down and buying a newsagency and a Tattslo to because a couple of my cousins are already into the business.

“And they said it’s good, it’s small, if you can grab a small family-owned business, then you’ll be good. So we were thinking of looking for the business and we got very good feedback about Alexandra.”

Shiva also described his background in retail and spoke about teaming up with his cousin Sam to operate the newsagency.

“I’ve got five years of retail experience, in Euro Garages. I started as a team member, then I stepped up as a store manager, and then my cousin Sam, he looked at the business and I came along with him,” Shiva said.

“The community is good, I’m connecting with the people. I’m a bachelor, and that’s it, pretty much.

“I’ll be here seven days, for my initial days, then later we’ll look into how it works.”

Sam added, “The home and everything is sorted, so we’re going to move in next week



Graeme, Jenny, Sam and Shiva. -AR

probably, so once we settle in then he’s close by, so he can come and look at the accounts and everything.

“People are lovely here. We’re meeting all the new people, then we thought of settling down, so we rented a property here. Once we settle in probably we’ve got to move the family and I wish maybe the town will accept us.”

Talking about the future of the newsagency, Sam and Shiva stated that there won’t be any changes to staffing arrangements and that the most important aspect for them right now is community.

“The staff are going to stay with us, so right now we don’t have anything in mind that we’re going to change, because it works both ways. We’ve got to support the people and the community, and the community is going to support us, so nothing is changing,” Sam said.

“You’re probably just going to see some young faces, a couple of young faces, but all the team will continue what they’re doing, unless sometime they want to move on. We have a lot of university kids and school kids working here and if they have a good opportunity and if they want to pursue a career in their own fields, we’ll give them a good reference and they can fly.”

The new owners acknowledged that they are moving into Alexandra at a tumultuous time, with the recent fires.

“We came here probably two or three weeks before just to understand and settle down. Right now, we’re not travelling to Melbourne, we want to stay here, so we are staying in the Corner Hotel,” Sam said.

“We’ve found a place now, so in the evenings we’re just going for a walk, talking to the local businesses, buying some food and everything there, talking to them and understanding how the things work, because we want to settle down.

“A lot of people are advising us, asking ‘are you going in at a difficult time? Are you sure you want to go there? The fires are happening.’ Things will get settled down. These types of things, they won’t come every time, but we have to face it.

“If you live in the community, you have to accept everything. We can’t offer much from our end because we haven’t moved in... People are donating everything, and we want to do as much as we can as well.

“Everything is lined up, we’re just opening all the accounts. We’ve got 25 accounts to open up. That will keep us busy,” he concluded.

Lilydale CFA delivers nearly three ton of animal food

LAST WEEK members from Lilydale CFA Fire Brigade delivered around three ton of animal food to Embling Rural in Alexandra for distribution to fire impacted communities. After a brief stop at Buxton Fire Station, the Lilydale FCV towing a heavy duty trailer headed up to Alexandra followed by three Buxton members.

A wide range of products for all sorts of domestic and working animals was unloaded onto pallets for distribution to the Alexandra Rodeo compound, Fawcett (Koriella) Hall, Yarck Hall, Terip Terip Fire Station, and Ruffy Fire Station. A range of products more suited to domestic pets will be sent over to the Murrindindi Community Food Share program.

The Buxton Captain, in his role as one of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) State Councillors for District 12, connected Lilydale’s Captain, Warren Davis, with Ayden Embling and mustered some troops to help unload at Alexandra.

Lieutenant Maddison Davis and Lieutenant Todd Fenwick drove the donated animal food up, having loaded to trailer with other members, from Lilydale. They couldn’t get everything in the FCV and trailer, for fear of overloading the vehicle, and plans are in place for Buxton members to collect a further load next week. Lilydale kicked off the appeal for donated animal food last week and their station became the collaboration point with some people using Uber and couriers to drop off donation from wide and far.

Ayden and Andrew Embling thanked the Lilydale team on behalf of the local community and will deliver the pallets to the five communities today. Andrew was appreciative of the small cache of tools as he had already received requests for shovels and the like.

Ayden suggested that suitable feed from future loads should also be made available to local animal rescue groups such as Narbeview Wildlife Shelter Incorporated.



The Lilydale CFA Fire Brigade donation. -S



The Lilydale CFA vehicle with a trailer-load of donations outside Embling Rural. -S



Departing Buxton’s CFA shed to make the deliveries. -S

Two beautiful trees provide poignant images



Jo Robinson took these photos on the day after the fires on their Alexandra property. Her first glance at this area was two pieces of a beautiful tree holding hands and clutching to a last hope. -photos by Jo Robinson



She said, “The next day we returned. One piece had fallen. It affected me hugely. I was hoping you might be able to print them as a reminder of our precious trees.”

Koriella Fire Brigade saves Fawcett Hall during Longwood bushfires

IN the midst of the Longwood bushfire crisis, Koriella Fire Brigade Captain Scott Reeves was able to lead his team in a successful effort to save the 143 year old Fawcett Hall, established in 1882. The hall is a vital part of community connectedness in the Fawcett and Koriella communities, as has provided a hub for recovery in the area post-fire.

Scott explained, “We were there the day before, over at Gobur. We saved a house there as part of the strike team. Then the Friday happened, and we went fine. We fought it all day. We went out at seven in the morning, got turned out with a crew of four,” Scott said.

“It got nasty when it got to saving the highway and stopping it from crossing the highway from Yarck to here. We couldn’t save it, the wind was just shocking.

“We went down to Yarck to fill up, just out of water, and saw two strike teams sitting there. I just turned around to my crew, Pat, and said we’re going home, so to here [Fawcett]. As captain, I made that decision, because there’s plenty of people round there, they weren’t left in the short,” he said.

“We came back, then I got told to go back to Yarck. I said no, the township’s going to get done. ‘No, go back to Yarck.’ And this is when the CFA was starting to pull the pin. I just turned around, went to Yarck, and I said what do you want us for? They said ‘Oh, because we’re all going to Alexandra.’”

After going with the Alexandra group back to defend the township of Alexandra, Scott sought

permission to return to Koriella and fight for his community, as the fire would be going through there before getting to Alexandra.

“We went into Alexandra and just told the ACFO and the group officer, we’re going home. They were good, they said ‘yep, no problems,’” he said.

“So it’s just our tanker, the 2000, old 33 year old tanker with four of us on it coming up the highway, trying to put it out, and by that stage, [the fire] was in the creek line just over there. We went up the road trying to tell people. There’s four people still up in the street. Sirens on the highway.

“One guy came out, said ‘my house is on fire across the creek.’ I said mate, I’m not coming off the highway, it’s just me. If I get stuck across the creek, that’s the end of it. So I said sorry. I think he understood.

“We kept going up and down the road and by the time we came back, the fire was in the creek line here, and I said, we need to save the community hall. We pulled up, we jumped in the back, stopped that, and it was going into Ian’s backyard, you can see the burnt bit there where we stopped that. As we’re coming out, the bridge is on fire, let’s hit the bridge. It was just busy,” Scott said.

“I got a bit of grief from a couple of people that are still running around today, that we didn’t stop his trees from burning. Pat said in the 2009 fire, we had the same thing, the captain copped it all with stuff like this, so don’t worry about it.

“I had to send two of my younger crew home because they were really fatigued, been going the day before and on that day... So it’s just me and Pat, and we’re looking at each other and we went over to the station about 5pm and we were knacked from throwing the water. It was just, let’s have a break Pat. It’s a tiring one.

“Then I got over on the CB rail, UHF radio, Cinnamon, next door to me, saying ‘Scotty, your generator shed’s on fire.’ So come on Pat, let’s go, and I got there, just as it’s on fire, but didn’t save it. So me and Pat and Cinnamon at that stage put that out, it’s just gone. We had the insurance inspectors out there today, it’s gone.

“So we said, well, we can’t do any more, let’s go home. Then we came back and put the bridge out again. Three times we tried on that day to put that thing out, so by 9pm we were done. Pat and I just couldn’t do any more.”

There were plenty more days of action to follow, dealing with spot fires and smouldering.

“The next day we kept going out, trees on fire,” Scott said.

Managing the health and wellbeing of the brigade was, and is, another top priority.

“The crew’s going well. Just out of the firefighters, we’ve got probably only two I haven’t seen.” Both have health issues. He added, “I had a couple of young guys I haven’t seen for 12 months come back on. They’re firing, I asked them yesterday, you good to go still? They said ‘yeah!’



Scott Reeves with a volunteer from Operation Veteran Assist. -AR

“They offered other tankers to come and I said, look, I don’t think our community wants to see Bayswater North here. They don’t want to see Timbuktu here. They want to see the Koriella truck out there, knowing that our community is working together.

“It’s not about any of us, it’s not about me. I couldn’t have done anything if I didn’t have my crew. So thank you for everyone that’s saying thank you and all that sort of stuff, but it’s the whole brigade that’s put in the effort... I couldn’t have done it and I probably wouldn’t have done it if it was just me, because I’ve got my own stuff to do.”

Scott said that they were offered the help of a tanker so they could stand down, but Scott refused the offer.

“I said to ACFO we’re not coming out on Sunday, but we are available if you need us. I’m standing there, and he says ‘great idea, I wish the other groups would do that.’ And guess what happened on Monday? They were all doing stand-down days, like yeah, trendsetters.”

There is also an ultralight currently on loan to the Koriella

Fire Brigade, to help with ongoing operations as a result of the Longwood bushfires.

“I’ll finish up on this, from that day and preceding days, I went back to CFA and said to the commander, I said, ‘mate, I’m not just asking, sorry, I’m going to tell you, I want an ultralight here.’ I’ve got one truck, that’s all I’ve got, and if that truck’s out, there’s nothing left. This community deserves that ultralight that I’ve been banging on about for how long?” Scott said.

“Two days later, well an ultralight’s in our shed. Not to keep, not to keep, but that’s fine. And then he said, ‘you’ve only got it for three days.’ I rang up Wallan, they’re fantastic, they said ‘nah, you need it more than us, you just hold on to it until you’re finished with it.’ I said right, 2028 would be fine? So they’ve been great, everyone out there’s been great.”

Scott explained that things are starting to settle down from the CFA side of the fire operation.

“We’re all good, things are quieting down now. I’ve actually had a couple of nights where there was nothing. I’m rolling around, it’s too quiet,” he concluded.

The ‘Cute Ute Crew’ from the Hay Runners roll in



A large group of drivers from Hay Runners Australia. -S



Darryl and Andy from Yea Rotary at the barbecue, ready to feed the Hay Runners. -S



A happy group of Hay Runners. -S



One of the ‘Cute Ute Crew’ from the Hay Runners. -Dale McKeon, Plymouth Dale Photography



The Hay Runners rolling through. -Dale McKeon, Plymouth Dale Photography

Rotary provides lunch for Hay Runners

ON Saturday, January 31, the Rotary Clubs of Yea and Kinglake Ranges joined forces to feed over 120 people at the Yea Recreation Reserve.

The group was part of Hay Runners Australia. They had started out at Silvan to collect at least 180 large bales, where they were fed an egg and bacon breakfast by the Lions Club of Croydon.

The convoy, mostly utes and four wheel drives, then moved onto Yea, where they were dispersed to Highlands, Yarck, and other places in the district to deliver their precious cargo of hay. Some had driven from Gippsland, Colac, Wallan as well as outer

north eastern Melbourne suburbs to be part of the convey.

The lunch, which the members of the convoy enjoyed after making their precious deliveries, was a simple barbecue with some cake and biscuits. Everyone was very grateful. The two clubs between them served about 150 hamburgers, 120 sausages, 10 kilograms of onions and lots of bread, salad, cookies and fruit cake.

It was wonderful to see such a great bunch of people willing to give up their Saturday to help so many in our community. Thank you to all those involved.



Donna Bloomfield from Yea Rotary serving hungry Hay Runners. -S

FREE Health Checks for the Farming Community

Skin Checks

- ✓ Check
- ✓ Freeze
- ✓ Incisions
- ✓ Pathology

YEA SALEYARDS

Friday 6 February 2026

- Bushfire Relief & Recovery Assistance
- Mental Health Support

Further information on Yea Saleyards website and Facebook page

P. BYRNES.

VFF hay convoy arrives in Yea

ON the afternoon of Saturday, January 31, a convoy of approximately 50 hay trucks made its way into Yea, travelling from Seymour to the Yea Saleyards.

This convoy was part of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Emergency Fodder Support Program, delivering vital fodder to farmers impacted by the recent bushfires, in locations including Highlands, Yarck, Gobur, Ruffy and surrounding areas

They were waved and cheered along the route, showing the drivers and volunteers how much their efforts mean to the community.

They no sooner parked than they were matched up to a farmer, and drove straight back out of the gate to deliver the hay direct to farm. Each truckie was handed a slab of bottled water as they drove back out of the saleyards.



Any farmer would be overjoyed to see a load of hay like this drive onto their farm, courtesy of the VFF Emergency Fodder Support program. -S



Every truckie from the VFF hay convoy was given a slab of bottled water as they drove out of the gate of the Yea Saleyards. -S

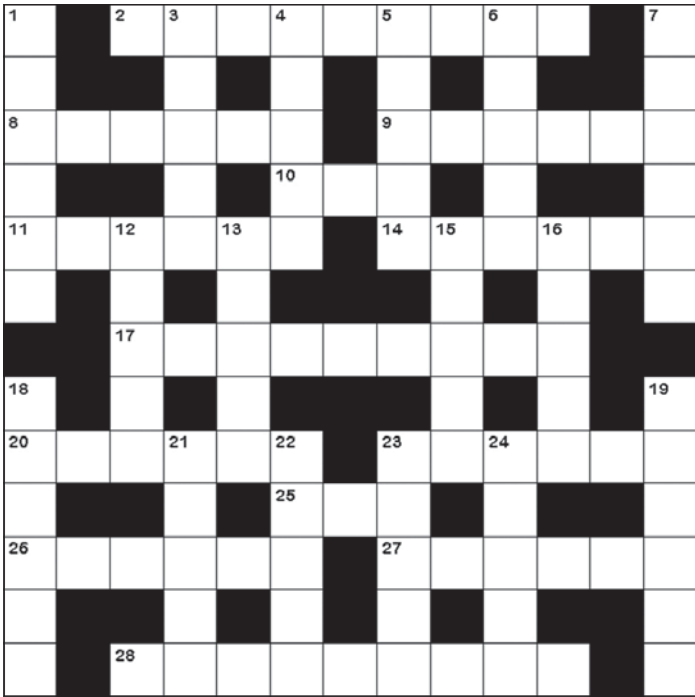
PUZZLES

SOLUTIONS
Page 15

Crossword

ACROSS

- 2. Exclude from any further participation.
- 8. A wise and trusted guide and advisor.
- 9. A state of extreme confusion and disorder.
- 10. Not in good physical or mental health.
- 11. Something that is a source of danger.
- 14. Join the military.
- 17. Having a chaotic or restless character.
- 20. Established beyond a doubt.
- 23. An investigation seeking answers.
- 25. The mass of eggs in a female fish's ovary.
- 26. Cast a momentary look at something.
- 27. Separate and send off in different directions.
- 28. Bring something to an end.



DOWN

- 1. Far away in place or time.
 - 3. Able to move and bend with ease.
 - 4. The quality of deserving praise or approval.
 - 5. A titled peer of the realm.
 - 6. An exceptionally large ocean wave.
 - 7. Red pulpy fruit eaten as a vegetable.
- 12. Relation in degree between two similar things.
 - 13. Come to an understanding on things.
 - 15. A daughter of your brother or sister.
 - 16. Place in a grave or tomb.
 - 18. A plug for a bunghole in a cask.
- 19. A ship engaged in whale fishing.
 - 21. The scene of any event or action.
 - 22. Mental images occurring during sleep.
 - 23. A common family car.
 - 24. Anything of material value or usefulness.

Word Search

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

Outdoors

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-------------|
| BARBEQUE | HOLIDAYS | TOTEMTENNIS |
| BEACH | PICNIC | TREES |
| CHILDREN | SUNSHINE | VOLLEYBALL |
| FAMILY | SWIMMING | WEEKENDS |

Math Square

	×		-		20
-		+		÷	
9	-		÷		6
÷		+		×	
3	×		-		14
1		18		4	

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.

Cryptogram

Outdoors

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
25				19				

J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R

S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
23	22						

A

T

10

17

25

26

8

22

15

T

E

T

22

8

7

19

6

8

22

20

A

A

3

25

7

8

26

15

25

11

1

E

S

3

12

8

19

11

1

23

Sudoku

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

Difficulty: Medium

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.

KID'S PUZZLES

Colouring Page



Word Search - Words starting with "A"

- ABLE
- ABOUT
- ABOVE
- ACTOR
- ACTRESS
- AGAIN
- ALLIGATOR
- ALLOWED
- ALPHABET
- ANGRY
- ANIMAL
- ANSWER
- APPLE
- ARROW

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

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.

	-		-		-3
-		-		+	
	-		-	9	-14
+		+		-	
	-		-	7	-2
7		-2		4	

Jokes

Q: Why can't a leopard hide?

A: Because he is always spotted.

Q: What do you get if you cross a dinosaur with a pig?

A: Jurassic pork

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Victorian Honour Roll of Women

THE Victorian Government is recognising women who have made outstanding and lasting contributions to Victoria through the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

Minister for Women Mary-Anne Thomas recently opened nominations for the 2026 Victorian Honour Roll of Women, calling on Victorians to nominate someone inspirational to join the Roll.

Victorians are encouraged to nominate women from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and age groups for the five categories, History Heroine, Local Champion, Change Agent, Emerging Leader and Trailblazer.

The Honour Roll celebrates their achievements across fields such as social justice, health, science, research, arts, environment, law, media and education.

Last year's 24 Honour Roll inductees included Professor Kelly-Anne Phillips, a powerful leader and advocate for women in medical research as the first woman to become a Professor of Oncology in Victoria. She has dedicated her career to advancing breast cancer research and improving women's health.

Family violence awareness advocates were also well represented including internationally recognised academic and Chair of Respect Victoria Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon and advocate Lutfiye Kavci, an inspiring family violence survivor who

turned her own horrific experience into creating positive change for others.

By celebrating women's achievements and recognising their contributions, the Victorian Government is proud to play a vital role in increasing the representation of women by promoting them as key role models and leaders to build a more gender equal society and inspire the next generation.

The late Hon Joan Kirner AC, Victoria's first female Premier, created the Honour Roll to formally acknowledge women for their achievements and to encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

More than 770 women have been inducted since the Honour Roll of Women began in 2001.

Minister for Women Mary-Anne Thomas said, "Women right across Victoria are changing lives every day, whether it is in the research lab, in the legal system or advocating for change in a range of fields, this a chance to highlight incredible women from all walks of life."

"If you know a history heroine, emerging leader, local champion, trailblazer or change agent who deserves to be recognised among these remarkable women, nominate them now."

Nominations are now open and close on Friday, March 20. To find out more and nominate yourself or someone you know, visit vic.gov.au/honour-roll-women

Rates arrangements following January Bushfires

MURRINDINDI Shire Council recognises that for affected community members who have lost homes, sheds, stock, livelihoods or irreplaceable personal belongings, the path ahead may feel overwhelming, and that council rates will be the last thing on their mind right now.

Council said they are committed to supporting fire-affected property owners and renters as they begin the process of recovery and rebuilding. To provide clarity and reduce immediate pressure, council has confirmed the following rates arrangements for the 2025-26 year.

Tailored arrangements will apply for properties within the fire footprint.

For properties where a home or major outbuildings were destroyed or significantly damaged

All impacted properties will have detailed on-site assessments undertaken to confirm the extent of damage. The information from the assessment will then be used to help inform a revaluation of the property. This is expected to take several months to complete. An adjusted (supplementary) rates notice will then be issued, reflecting the change in property value from January 8 to June 30. No rates payment is required from affected ratepayers until after they receive the revised supplementary notice.

For properties inside the fire footprint that did not sustain property loss

The due date for full rates payment or the third instalment for people paying by

instalment will be extended to March 31.

For properties outside the fire-affected footprint, there will be no change to the standard due dates. Full payment remains due on February 15. The third instalment for those paying in instalments remains due on February 28.

Contact council to make alternative arrangements

Rate payers, whether fire-affected or not, who are having difficulty meeting their payment timeframes are encouraged to contact council to discuss alternative payment arrangements.

Murrindindi Shire Mayor, Cr Damien Gallagher, said council's approach reflects both compassion for those who have suffered devastating loss and the need to maintain stable services for the broader municipality.

"For those who have lost everything, rates simply cannot be your priority, nor should they be. Our focus is on your safety, your wellbeing and supporting you through the process of rebuilding.

"At the same time, we need to keep the rest of the shire moving. Maintaining normal payment timeframes for properties outside the fire-affected areas ensures we can continue delivering the essential services our whole community relies on.

"We thank our community for their understanding as we support those most deeply impacted by the January fires."

PUZZLES SOLUTIONS

CRYPTOGRAM

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
25	24	4	1	19	3	5	20	8	2	21	26	7
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
11	9	18	10	12	23	22	17	14	6	16	15	13

QUALITY TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

CROSSWORD

R	E	L	I	M	I	N	A	T	E	T
E		I	E		O	I				O
M	E	N	T	O	R	B	E	D	L	A
O		H		I	L	L	A			A
T	H	R	E	A	T		E	N	L	I
E		A	G			I	N			O
S		T	U	R	B	U	L	E	N	T
P	R	O	V	E	D		S	E	A	R
I		E		R	O	E	S			A
G	L	A	N	C	E		D	I	S	P
O		U		A		A	E			E
T		T	E	R	M	I	N	A	T	E

MATH SQUARES

4	x	7	-	8	20
-		+		÷	
9	-	6	÷	2	6
÷		+		x	
3	x	5	-	1	14
1		18		4	

SUDOKU

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

KIDS - MATH SQUARES

4	-	5	-	2	-3
-		-		+	
3	-	8	-	9	-14
+		+		-	
6	-	1	-	7	-2
7		-2		4	

Classifieds

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DEATH NOTICES

FOR SALE

FOR HIRE

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I lost a friend. Elizabeth Goss passed away. It was her time and she was, more than, at peace with it but I'm bereft. I'm new to Alex, and her intelligence, conversation and community was very much appreciated. We didn't agree on some things but it was amicable and we could speak our mind with each other. Of course, I didn't know her well but her ability to tell a great story, of her childhood, her loves, her passions was like being there. I'll miss her very much. I'm so sad she's gone. Kindness and compassion to her family, Gossy, Sandice, Marion and all the little ones. Valerie Pallaro



GOSS, Elizabeth.

She was the past Secretary for Taggerty CFA. Condolences to her family from Taggerty CFA.



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**TRADES ADVERTISING
DEADLINE NOON
THURSDAY**

Catastrophic fires highlight coordinated fire management Is essential

TIMBER Towns Victoria believes that the state must embrace a coordinated, science-based approach to fire management in the wake of the state's largest major bushfires in years, which saw more than 400,000 hectares of forest and agricultural land burnt, destroying hundreds of structures, and claiming life during catastrophic fire conditions. Timber Towns represents eleven municipal councils across the state's north, east and west.

Timber Towns President Cr Karen Stephens said the fires reinforced what forest scientists have long understood, that prescribed burning and the strategic use of 'good fire' must play a central role in reducing landscape-scale risk.

"A coordinated proactive fire management approach, guided by scientific evidence, needs to be prioritised as a key method of reducing the future risk of catastrophic fires of this intensity," Cr Stephens said.

At the height of the emergency, Victoria faced several major fires simultaneously, with data from emergency authorities showing more than 100 separate burnt areas since January 5. The Longwood and Walwa fires alone each exceeded 100,000 hectares, while many smaller ignitions were contained quickly.

Cr Stephens points to Forestry Australia's Forest Fire Management Position Statement, released in June, 2023, which stressed that fire is an inherent part of the Australian landscape and cannot be eliminated without consequences.

"It stresses that effective fire management must be grounded in decades of research, Traditional Owner knowledge, and coordinated action across all land tenures, public and private," she said.

The statement, prepared by a number of Australia's top forestry

professionals and scientists, argues that prevention, and not just emergency response, must be prioritised, with year-round vegetation management, risk-appropriate land-use planning, and the strategic use of prescribed burning, cultural burning and mechanical fuel reduction forming the backbone of resilient landscapes. In addition, it also highlights the importance of rapid detection, with shorter detection-to-response times significantly increasing the likelihood of containing new ignitions.

These principles have been thrown into sharp relief as the scale of the current disaster becomes clearer. The Mt Lawson-Walwa and Longwood fires have destroyed extensive areas of pine plantations, delivering the industry's most significant plantation losses in years and placing pressure on regional communities, agriculture and the forestry supply chain.

According to the Victorian Forest Products Association (VFPA), plantation losses have been substantial.

VFPA Chief Executive Officer Andrew White said the fires had damaged "critical parts of Victoria's housing supply chain", noting that softwood plantations underpin the manufacture of paper, packaging, framing, trusses and other essential building products.

"Our plantation sector is resilient and well-established, and industry is working closely across the supply chain to manage the impacts of the fires while continuing to support housing delivery," Mr White said.

He nonetheless commended the extraordinary efforts of emergency services, particularly Forest Fire Management Victoria, the CFA and Forest Industry Brigades, which he described as "an integral part of Victoria's fire response capability,

bringing local knowledge, specialised equipment and experience in plantation fire behaviour".

Cr Stephens highlighted the dedication of the emergency response services.

"We acknowledge and commend the outstanding efforts of fire fighters and all the emergency services personnel who have worked tirelessly to protect lives, landscapes and livelihoods," Cr Stephens said.

Timber Towns Victoria highlights the importance of the forestry sector which underpins local jobs, regional economies and essential building and fibre products.

"Now is the time for the Victorian Government to act in prioritising proactive fire management, strengthen support for the forestry sector and commit to reforms that reduce risk, build resilience, and ensure communities are better protected in the future.

"This fire season must be a turning point. We call on government to listen, learn and lead."

Gerry Ryan AO

JAYCO owner, Gerard (Gerry) Ryan OAM was recognised as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in the General Division in the recent Australia Day awards, for distinguished service to sports governance, to the tourism and hospitality industry, to business, and to the community through philanthropic contributions.

Gerry is well known for his philanthropic activities, including most recently providing support for the Murrindindi Mobile Health Van.

He is also heavily involved in cycling, including being president of AusCycling in 2023 and Cycling Australia from 2013 to 2014. He's the team owner and chair of the GreenEDGE cycling team.

He's also a board member and shareholder of Melbourne Storm, and is highly supportive of women's basketball.

He's been chair of the Melbourne Cup Foundation since 2020 and breed racehorses. His horses won the Melbourne Cup in 2010, 2017 and 2020.

Gerry is also chair of a Global Creatures, Creature Technology Company and Gumbuya World.

He was deputy chair of Visit Victoria from 2020 to 2023, and is owner of Hubert Estate, and co-owner of Mitchelton Winery and Nagambie Lakes Leisure Park.

He philanthropically supports Alfred Health, Murdoch Children's Research Centre, The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, Starlight Children's Foundation, My Room Children's Cancer Charity, The Alma Doepel, SIEF Ross Metcalf STEM + Business Fellowship at Monash University, Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, Dementia Australia, Music For Melbourne, Sacred Heart Mission and Australian Sports Foundation.

He is also the founder and chair of Jayco Australia.

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 McElnay 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 case 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*.

Man Walk visits Yarck for special outing

THE Alexandra Man Walk made their way out to Yarck on Friday, January 30, to meet up with and support the men of this heavily fire-affected community.

Many of the blokes from Alexandra travelled out to Yarck on the Murrindindi Shire Council community bus, where they met other walkers from the surrounding area at the Yarck Hall. Between 30 and 40 men attended the event, despite the warm weather.

They set off walking around 7.30am, making their way past the Giddy Goat Café and up into the back streets of Yarck, where parts of the ground were heavily scorched.

The men chatted and mingled as they walked up the slope to a spot where they could see across the valley to the orchards of Koala Cherries and the fire devastated hillsides. Here they paused to talk and catch their breath before heading back down the slope in rapidly warming conditions.

Upon their return to the Yarck Hall, they gathered inside to enjoy a morning tea of scones and peaches and tea and coffee, and to cultivate further conversations.

Mental health is important at the best of times, but it is especially important during challenging circumstances. That's why it is so good to see men gathering to get some exercise and have a chat with other blokes from the community.

Walk, talk and support.

For details regarding the Man Walk, which takes place every Friday at 7am in Alexandra, contact Steve Lynch on 0411 752 542.



The attendees of last Friday's Man Walk in Yarck. -BD



An incline walk through the fire-affected parts of Yarck. -BD



The act of walking didn't stop the men from chatting. -BD



Making their way back down the hill, it was hot on the return trip. -BD



Black roadside and black hills beyond, but the men were standing strong. -BD



The sun was just above the hilltops when the walkers set out from the Yarck Hall. -BD



Greenery is a rare but welcome sight in the territory where the fire passed through. -BD



Attendees paused halfway through their walk to have a chat and catch their breath while looking across the valley at blackened hills. -BD



One attendee pointing out across the hill to where the fire had affected properties in Yarck. -BD

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](https://www.sunsmart.com.au) to learn more or download the free SunSmart Global UV App for sun protection times in your location.

School bus challenges post-fire

A LARGE number of roads remain closed in Murrindindi Shire due to the risk of falling trees.

Students along one such road recently waited for the school but no bus arrived. This is understandable due to the risk, however the Department of Education was asked how such changes are communicated to parents.

A Department of Education spokesperson said, “We thank school staff and leaders for their work in making every effort possible in very challenging circumstances to ensure as many schools as possible are open and ready for students as the new school year begins.

“In line with the Department’s emergency management planning, schools directly communicate to families about any ongoing road closures and impacts on school bus routes.”

On Friday morning, the Merton to Alexandra school bus was delayed by 20 minutes due to a fallen tree blocking the road.

The Department of Education maintains a list of school and early childhood service closures at [vic.gov.au/early-childhood-school-closures](https://www.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-school-closures)

Highways re-open but many smaller roads remain closed

THE Incident Control Centre re-opened the Goulburn Valley Highway and Maroondah Highway to all motorists on Thursday, January 29. The re-opening was able to occur as a large amount of work had been done in the past three weeks, clearing dangerous trees and checking road conditions.

While the highway re-opening is a relief to many, most of the smaller roads in fire-impacted areas remain closed to non-residents.

Murrindindi Shire Council has urged residents and organisations providing relief and recovery services to take extreme care when travelling in and around fire-affected areas, with road conditions remaining hazardous.

Council stated, “More than 450 kilometres of local roads remain legally closed and are accessible only to authorised emergency and response services. These closures apply to all members of the public, including residents, property owners and visitors, due to significant and ongoing safety risks.

“Residents seeking to return to damaged or destroyed properties should not enter closed roads unless formally authorised, as these roads have not been deemed safe for travel, and access is not permitted under current emergency restrictions.

“Visitors are welcome to the wider region; however, they must not attempt to access closed local roads in the Longwood

by Land Management Extension Officer Clem Sturmfels

FOLLOWING the devastating bushfires earlier this month across Victoria, fire-affected landholders, especially those in hilly and mountainous areas should prepare for potential flash flooding, soil erosion and landslides in the event of a thunderstorm.

After a severe bushfire, flooding, soil erosion and sediment is inevitable in these terrains, which can affect a range of farm assets including tracks, fences, stream crossings, dams, water supplies, buildings and livestock.

The combination of bare ground, water repellent soils, steep slopes and high intensity rainfall can result in the movement of large quantities of ash, sand, gravel and woody debris.

Woody debris can block dam spillways and stream crossings; flood water can wash away tracks and fences while sediment can pollute or fill dams.

Previous fires in mountainous terrain have shown that floodwater levels can

be significantly higher than in unburnt landscapes, so landholders should consider implementing measures to protect their farm assets and water supply.

Constructing sediment traps and levee banks can help protect farm assets from flood debris and work by reducing the velocity of water flow and prevent sediment from being swept into farm dams or streams.

Sediment traps can be installed using wire netting, straw bales, or silt fencing material and should be set up as soon as possible after a fire to prepare properties ahead of potential thunderstorms.

Proper design and placement are essential for successful results.

Small levee banks can sometimes help protect critical areas from flooding. Levee banks can be made from earth, sandbags, weed free straw bales or corrugated iron sheets and should be well compacted, watertight and have plenty of fall so they don’t become blocked with sediment.

Straw bales and corrugated iron need to be trenched into the ground, tightly

butted together and be well supported with steel posts.

A string of closely spaced steel posts in the drainage line above culverts and stream crossings can also be used to trap debris and reduce potential damage.

Wherever possible, livestock should be moved away from low lying and flood prone areas.

Landholders should also divert their down pipes and cover tank inlets to protect drinking water supplies from roofs contaminated with ash, soil, manure, leaves or firefighting chemicals.

For more information and a video on how to build a sediment fence to protect your dam visit [agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/water/managing-dams/Building-a-sediment-fence-to-protect-your-dam](https://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/water/managing-dams/Building-a-sediment-fence-to-protect-your-dam)

For more information on land and water management after a bushfire, visit [go.vic.gov.au/454Hpdz](https://www.go.vic.gov.au/454Hpdz) or call Agriculture Victoria’s Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Checklist to prepare employers for changed super payments this year

THE Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has released a new checklist, giving employers a clear roadmap to prepare for Payday Super.

Deputy Commissioner Emma Rosenzweig urged employers to make it their new year’s resolution to get ready for Payday Super.

The new year brings a big change to the super system, with Payday Super taking effect from July 1.

“Put simply, Payday Super is about employers paying super each payday, and it’s important to get it right,” Ms Rosenzweig said.

“We’ve released a Payday Super checklist, a simple guide for employers to understand what to do, when to do it and how to stay

compliant, to support a smooth transition come July 1.”

These resources will help employers to: Understand the new requirements; plan their transition; prepare their business; switch to paying super each payday.

If you use the ATO’s Small Business Superannuation Clearing House (SBSCH) to pay your employee’s super, this service is closing on July 1, 2026.

Most employers who currently use the SBSCH already have super payment functionality in their current payroll software, and the ATO have released a separate checklist on how to transition from the SBSCH.

monitor VicEmergency and check VicTraffic prior to travel.

“There are many crews working across the road network, including arborists, specialist tree contractors, bridge assessors, engineers and construction workers. These complex assessments take time, and the community’s patience is greatly appreciated.

“Driving conditions after dark are extremely dangerous and should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Fire has destroyed critical road safety infrastructure including reflectors, barriers, signage and line marking, making navigation difficult, particularly at night.

“Payday Super is a once in a generation change, and we’re making sure employers have all the resources they need to get ready,” Ms Rosenzweig said.

“Don’t wait until the last minute to prepare. Many employers already pay super more often than quarterly, and there is nothing stopping you preparing now to be able to pay super contributions more frequently from July 1, 2026.”

Explore the full range of Payday Super resources at [ato.gov.au/paydayresources](https://www.ato.gov.au/paydayresources)

Keep up to date with the progress of Payday Super at [ato.gov.au/paydaysuper](https://www.ato.gov.au/paydaysuper)

“There is also a significant risk of livestock and native wildlife moving freely across roads due to damaged or destroyed fencing. These hazards may be difficult to see, especially in low light.

“Road conditions can change at any time. A road may reopen and then close again if additional trees fall or further damage is identified. There will be a high volume of heavy machinery and crews on local roads as fallen trees and debris are removed. Drivers are asked to remain alert and patient, and not to overtake unless it is safe to do so.

“Council will continue to provide updates as inspections and clean-up efforts progress.”

Alexandra Bowls Club begins new year games

by Marie Evans

THE Alexandra Bowls Club members extend their thanks to all those who fought the catastrophic fires and who continue to monitor and attend outbreaks. Their gratitude is also extended to the groups, individuals and organisations that were then and are now, on the ground offering assistance to the many impacted people.

Bowls was scheduled to resume after the Christmas break for Alexandra's Midweek side on January 13. All games across the region were cancelled and all points were

shared. Their next round against Tatura Hilltop on January 20 was also cancelled.

Given the temperature was expected to be 43 degrees at Dookie coupled with road restrictions the Goulburn Valley Match committee determined that Alexandra did not have to travel and points would be shared. The first game to be played for 2026 is away to East Shepparton February 3.

Saturday Pennant was due to begin on January 17 but all divisions in Goulburn Valley Playing area had their games cancelled. The games on January 24 were also cancelled

for both Alexandra and Eildon. Games for January 31 were able to be played despite temperatures being predicted to be 42 in Shepparton.

The GV Match Committee decided that all games would beat the Heat Out rule of 38 degrees if the games began at 9.15am. So, at 7am Division Three traveled to Shepparton Golf Bowls Club.

There were many unavailable players and some Division Five players enjoyed the opportunity and experience playing in Division Three. A long hot day did not end

in a good result for the side and Shepparton Golf won 93 to 50. Greg Gilmore (Skip), Andy Tobias, Steve Kirby and Lauren Gilchrist had the closest game. It was two all on end four.

Alexandra trailed three to 10 on end 10 but had the game drawn 11 all on end 14. They won the next end to lead 12 to 11. Golf proceeded to win the next three ends and were 20 to 12 up on end 18. Alexandra won two out of the last three ends to lose 15 to 22. Notable was the interesting line marking where the rink's ends didn't line up by about 20 centimetres.

Doug Cooper (Skip), Ben Gilchrist, John Blamey and Peter Collyer began well and led six to five on end eight. Golf had the lead nine to six by end 10. It was nine all on end 12. Alexandra trailed by one shot on end 17 but a seven shot loss on end 18 all but sealed the game for Golf. Alexandra won two out of the last three ends to lose 13 to 21.

David Nicklos (Skip), Scott Ferrier, Craig Parkinson and Bob Mayfield had the worst of starts and trailed five to 13 on end 10 and five to 20 by end 13. However, the latter ends provided a much closer competition with Alexandra winning five out of the last eight ends to lose 11 to 25.

Ian Harper (Skip), Graeme Matthews, Ken Argent and Malcolm Gill had a game to forget. They trailed four to 25 on end 19 but won the last two ends, including a six shot pick up to lose 11 to 25.

Next round Alexandra plays at home against Mooropna Golf who are third on the ladder. This will be the first game Alexandra has played at home since November 15. The last home game was a wash out against Eildon on December 6.

Division Five did not play their game last Saturday or any of the previous 2026 rounds and shared the points with Rushworth. They play away to Seymour next week in the penultimate game of the season.

The Pairs Club Championship games will be played next Sunday at 9.30am between Greg Gilmore and Larry Scott versus Ian Harper and Graeme Matthews. The Men's Singles the Sunday after between Ian Harper and Ken Argent.

SDCA match results

VARIOUS Seymour District Cricket Association (SDCA) matches took place last week, with teams from Murrindindi Shire going up against Avenel and Pyalong.

A Grade

Alexandra 5/98 (S Whitehead 36, V Hewage 22 not out) defeated by Avenel 6/108 (C Thomson 52 not out, H Black 22 not out, V Hewage 4/12).

Avenel opted to bat first in their clash with Alexandra at Leckie Park and got off to a solid start through a 51 run opening stand between Travis Stefanos and Chayse Thomson.

Thomson carried his bat through the innings to finish 52 not out off 57 balls and was supported well by Hudson Black with 22 not out. Vinu Hewage was the standout bowler for the Redbacks, taking 4/12, helping restrict Avenel to 6/108.

Alexandra was off to a positive start through Scott Whitehead (36) and Nathan Waugh (16) but were unable to gain enough momentum to get on top of Avenel who got over the line by 10 runs.

B Grade

Alexandra 61 (L Ronalds 18, A Thomson 3/11, A Butler 2/9) defeated by Avenel 9/86 (G Leunig 27, T Stefanos 17, L Crane 2/2, L Ronalds 2/25).

GMCU under 16s

Yea Tigers 92 (J Hill 4/9, T Caddie 4/18) defeated by Pyalong 8/164 (J Hill 43, C Altas 31).



The Mini Master winner Jody Doran with Cathie from FoodWorks. -S



The B Grade ladies runner up Margaret Blair with Cathie from FoodWorks. -S

Murrindindi Masters at Marysville Golf Club

by Lesley Rundle

LAST Saturday Marysville Golf Club members hosted the second round of the FoodWorks Murrindindi Masters with 93 players braving the heat to play a stableford round on the beautifully prepared course.

A number of players found weather conditions and the course challenging with discussions around the lunch tables after play comparing how many golf balls players had lost.

A number of Marysville members were on the winners list with the ladies doing particularly well. Congratulations to Jody Doran (14) for being declared the Marysville Mini Master with 37 points.

Heather Jenkins (20) was the winner of the A Grade with 33 points on a countback from Michele Mansfield (26) and Margaret Blair (35) was the B Grade runner up with 29 points.

Marysville member Ming Kuan (16) with 36 points was the B Grade runner up.

Members congratulate all the Marysville winners and the winners from other clubs in particular Greg Clements (21) from Yea for winning the Men's Mini Masters title with an excellent 39 points.

Special thanks to Cathie Harper from FoodWorks for supporting this event and for presenting the very generous trophies to all the winners. Thanks also to all those who supported the club by playing in the competition. Events such as these take a large team of people to organise and all members who assisted with the organisation were thanked by President Steve Coker.

The four clubs will next meet at Eildon on February 14 for the third round of the Murrindindi Masters and the rescheduled final round will be held at Yea on February 28.

Next Saturday the golfers will play a four ball best ball game for the Liesfield Trophy. This event is in memory of Matthew and

James Liesfield and their mother Elizabeth who sadly lost their lives in the 2009 Black Saturday fires. Members are thrilled that Matthew and James' uncle and aunt will be traveling from Warrnambool to join members on this special Memorial Day.

On Tuesday, March 17, a series of golf clinics will be held at the club. Men and women of all abilities will be coached by Professional Golf Association coach Travis Harrison. Clinic options are a two-hour small group session for new and returning golfers, a two-hour small group intermediate session for those who play on a semi regular basis and 30-minute private individual lessons.

Please read the flyer on the Marysville Golf Club website with information regarding times, cost and booking procedure. Bookings are essential and close on Tuesday, February 17. Contact Heather Jenkins on 0429 146 763 or heatherjenkins2008@hotmail.com for further details.



B Grade men's runner up Ming Kuan with Cathie from FoodWorks. -S



A Grade winner Heather Jenkins with Cathie from FoodWorks. -S

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Funds raised to send Levi to race in New Zealand

WHAT began as a casual idea over a beer quickly grew into a full-scale fundraising auction, brought to life by the lively and quick-witted Peter Molloy. His fast-paced humour and infectious energy turned the evening into a standout event that organisers will be talking about for years.

Backed by an Individual Sponsorship Grant from Murrindindi Shire, along with generous contributions from the Rotary Club of Alexandra, Lions Club Eildon, and a long list of supportive locals, organisers of the charity auction at the Snobs Creek Bar and Grill were hoping to raise enough to help young athlete Levi travel to the North Island Colgate Games in New Zealand and represent Murrindindi Little Athletics Centre and Little Athletics Victoria.

By the time the final bid was called, the community had delivered far more than anyone anticipated.

The auction's success ensured: Full funding for Levi's trip to the Colgate Games; new running spikes and Melbourne-based training costs covered; leftover funds donated to the Foundation Murrindindi Disaster Fund to assist bushfire-affected communities across the shire.

A team of 36 kids travelled to Tauranga on New Zealand's North Island and competed over three days. Levi entered four individual events and two relays. Levi gave a very impressive performance at the games.

Not only was he selected as a flag bearer, he also achieved personal bests in every event, broke the 13-second barrier in the 100 metre sprint for the first time and secured a bronze medal in the four × 100-metre relay. Along the way, he forged friendships with competitors from across the Tasman and embraced the experience with enthusiasm and maturity.

For many, the true highlight of the auction wasn't the fundraising total but the spirit behind it. The event showcased the strength and heart of a small community rallying behind its young people to help chase their dreams.

Levi and his mum Kim expressed deep gratitude to Peter Molloy, Murrindindi Shire, Rotary Club Alexandra, Eildon Lions Club, and every individual who contributed. Their combined efforts have created lasting impact: supporting a young athlete's dream and the remaining funds have been donated back into the community that helped make Levi's dream a reality.

Jerusalem Creek Marina and Holiday Park would also like to wish all the Murrindindi Little Athletes competing in the Regional Athletics in Bendigo good luck this weekend.



Levi pushed hard in his events. -S



Levi with his bronze medal. -S



Levi Campbell on the track. -S



It was a big achievement for Levi to get to New Zealand to compete. -S

Alexandra Golf Club up early to beat high temperatures



Just how close the fire came to the golf club grounds. -S

by Dave Silverman

SOMETHING quite amazing happened last Tuesday. Due to the forecast of extremely high temperatures, Brad dragged himself out of bed an hour earlier than usual, and seven other brave souls joined him for an 8am hitoff.

John Greateorex returned the best score of the day, his 39 points taking him three clear of the nearest pursuers. Bill Wind came in second on 36, and 36 was also Russell Purcell's score, putting him in third.

Russell also took nearest the pin on seven, and Gretto claimed 17. Eighteen went begging. Both Leo Dynes and Brad got a voucher in the rundown.

There were not enough starters for a ladies' competition last Wednesday, and, as Saturday saw the Marysville round of the FoodWorks Murrindindi Masters, that is all she wrote for last week in golf at Alexandra.

The author leaves you this week with two images, taken from the seventh tee box, which graphically illustrate how close the club came to some serious damage, were it not for the efforts of a lot of very brave people.



The fire got close to the Alexandra Golf Club greens. -S