

INSIDE THIS WEEK'S EDITION

Man Walk visits Yarck



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Insight into the Alexandra ICC



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Images from fire affected shire north



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Weekend sport



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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

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.



A happy group of Hay Runners. -S

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

Wangaratta: 117 Murphy Street, Wangaratta | 03 5721 7077
Wodonga: 79 High Street, Wodonga | 02 6024 6284
helen.haines.mp@aph.gov.au | helenhaines.org

Authorised by Helen Haines, 117 Murphy St, Wangaratta VIC 3677.



Seeking people called up from 1951 to 1972

The National Servicemen’s Association of Australia (NSAA) is looking for any person who was called up between the years of 1951 and 1972.

NSAA ask that they assemble in the forecourt of the Shrine of Rembrance at 11.45 am on Sunday, February 15 to march off at noon. There will be a flyover by the RAAF museum at Point Cook at 12.15pm, and

then into the shrine for a guest speaker Dave

Sabben MG who was the OC of 12 Platoon

D Company 6RAR at the battle of Long Tan.

Please wear any medals, your own to be worn on your left side and relations to be worn on the right side.

Contact Peter Kemp on 0427 859 549 for more information.

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.



Letters to the Editor

Beware unwanted freeloaders

WONDERFUL hay donations have coming from far and wide, but be aware they might also be bringing in seeds of a few unwanted freeloaders. In my case in 2009 it was thistles, Bathurst burr, Paterson’s curse and heliotrope. Fortunately not the dreaded Chilean needle grass.

So as the rains finally arrive check your pastures for the emergence of weeds you might not have noticed before. Carry with you an appropriate herbicide mix and hit them as they emerge. There are apps and websites to help you identify them and which herbicide to use.

Julia Foletta, Buxton

Helping nature recover

THERE is no escaping the impact of the Longwood fire, either in the tired faces of friends and family, burnt hills and fences, ancient trees collapsed on roadsides or in paddocks. We focus initially on ensuring our community and our animals are safe. But we grieve our landscape too. How can we best support nature at this critical stage?

First and foremost a reassurance. Nature is resilient. She is adept at recovery from fire, but we can help. We have worked in environmental restoration for decades, and many of us have experienced times like these in the past. Here is what we have found has helped.

Take a moment and a breather. Take some photos of your burnt country. It’s important to look back in a month or two and remember how much has changed. Already the grass re-shoots.

Protect your creeks, dams and springs. Without groundcover, they are vulnerable to silting up during the next rain. In creeks, silt reduces habitat diversity and extra nutrients can lead to low water oxygen. Silt traps, which can be as simple as logs placed across the contour or over a gully, can help slow the flow and deposit of sediment and loose soil. Keep an eye out for silt trap workshops coming soon.

While it looks denuded, watch your bushland patches for germination. Seed often needs heat to crack the seed coat. Wattles and peas are likely to pop up, potentially species you have never

seen before. This can also be a good opportunity to target weeds while they are small, giving our natives the best chance at healthy re-establishment.

Many of the younger trees, while burnt, won’t be dead. Give them time. However, old ancient trees, hollow throughout, have been decimated. Ideally, if it is safe to do so, leave them in place or retain them as habitat on the ground. Other alternatives could be to place logs in creek corridors as habitat, or around existing paddock trees, away from the trunk. Stock can still access shade from paddock trees, but this timber will provide a place to scratch and also prevent compacting the roots of the old tree.

The environmental groups in the burnt country have formed an alliance, Granite to Goulburn, Bushfire Recovery Alliance. Bushfirerecoveryalliance.com

We will be working with you, our community, in the years to come. You are not on your own.

Cathy Olive, Euroa Arboretum

COMMUNITY DIARY

Yea District Hospital
5736 0400

Non-emergency police assistance
131 444
EMERGENCY 000

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

MONTHLY COMMUNITY GROUPS

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



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.

Weekly Weather

February 4 - February 10, 2026

Temperatures may be subject to change from date of publication

Alexandra

Yea

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

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

Standard

The Yea Chronicle

RIVER HEIGHTS FOR THE GOULBURN CATCHMENT

STATION NAME	TIME	HEIGHT	TENDENCY	FLOOD CLASS
Goulburn R at Lake Eildon (TW)	10.00AM Mon	2.02	LGH	steady
Rubicon River at Rubicon	10.00AM Mon	0.39	LGH	steady
Acheron River at Taggerty	10.00AM Mon	0.47	LGH	steady
Home Creek at Yarck	10.00AM Mon	0.08	LGH	steady
Yea River at Devlins Bridge	08.49AM Mon	0.39	LGH	steady
Murrindindi River Above Colwells	09.00AM Mon	0.20	LGH	steady
Yea R at Old Killingworth Rd	10.00AM Mon	0.34	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Ghin Ghin	10.00AM Mon	3.92	LGH	steady
King Parrot Creek at Flowerdale	10.00AM Mon	0.27	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Trawool	10.00AM Mon	1.61	LGH	steady
Sunday Creek at Tallarook	10.00AM Mon	-0.09	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Seymour	10.30AM Mon	1.86	LGH	steady
Whiteheads Creek at Seymour	10.00AM Mon	0.79	LGH	steady

*ISSUED AT 10:54 AM AEDT MONDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2026

DISTRICT RAINFALL

Alexandra.....	1mm
Buxton.....	1.6mm
Eildon (AWS).....	0.6mm
Flowerdale.....	1mm
Jamieson.....	1mm
Kinglake	2mm
Lake Eildon	1mm
Mansfield.....	N/Amm
Taggerty	0.2mm
Yarck	1mm
Yea.....	2mm

Above details for 7 days to 9am Monday

LAKE EILDON

Height above sea level this week.....	273.20m
Capacity as at 9am Monday.....	49.2%
Metres below full supply.....	15.70m
Daily inflow	400ML
Release.....	5000ML
Eildon Pondage (may be subject to rapid change).....	86%

The Yea Chronicle

DEADLINES

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

If you have any enquiries please do not hesitate to contact the office on

5772 1002 or

reception@alexandranewspapers.com.au

We thank you for your continued support

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

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

medicare

Now more people benefit from cheaper medicine



From January 1st 2026

Anyone with a Medicare card pays a maximum of \$25 for PBS listed medicines, down from \$31.60.

Concession card holders will continue to pay no more than \$7.70 until 2030.

For more information visit



health.gov.au/cheapermedicines



Australian Government

Authorised by the Australian Government, Canberra

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

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-badged uniforms, shoes and medical supplies being donated to various organisations in the past year.

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.

Protecting a hospital under threat

Elizabeth Sinclair, Chief Executive Officer, Yea and District Memorial Hospital

AS many readers would be aware, Yea and District Memorial Hospital (YDMH) came under direct threat from the advancing Longwood bushfire front from approximately 12.30pm on Wednesday, January 8, through to the early hours of Saturday, January 10, as catastrophic fire conditions bore down on the Murrindindi Shire.

The Longwood fires, which ignited on Wednesday, January 7, intensified rapidly amid extreme heat and strong winds. Warnings for the Yea district escalated from extreme to catastrophic, prompting heightened vigilance across the town’s only hospital and aged care facility.

Hospital executives closely monitored conditions via the Vic Emergency app, but by midday Thursday it was clear the fire front was moving swiftly toward the shire. An internal emergency management response was immediately established with regular staff briefings commenced, and a Code Brown (external disaster) was declared at 1.30pm. That Code Brown remained in place until noon on Wednesday, January 14.

At the height of the threat, YDMH was caring for four acute patients, 10 high-care residents and 14 low-care residents. One resident chose to evacuate with family on Friday, ahead of the state-issued evacuation warning.

Throughout the incident, the hospital’s leadership, including the CEO and Board Chair, remained in constant communication. Careful consideration was given to whether to shelter in place or evacuate. Based on strong advice from the local Incident Control Centre Emergency Management Team, evacuation was not recommended. Instead, YDMH was advised to shelter in place, with authorities assessing the facility as highly defensible and assuring priority protection should the fire reach Yea. This advice was later reinforced by the Department of Health Incident Management Team.

As conditions worsened, executive and leadership staff split into two teams to ensure continuous coverage across Friday and Saturday. Maintenance crews worked throughout Friday implementing local fire safety measures, including heavy watering of gardens, clearing debris, and securing gas, oxygen and fuel supplies.

Local intelligence proved critical. Regular communication was established with Alexandra District Hospital, as information on the ground was often more current than official warning systems. On the afternoon of Friday, January 9, an ‘Evacuate Now’ alert was issued to mobile phones across the area as the fire front advanced from Killingworth.

As the fire drew closer, hospital management sought confirmation of on-

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

site fire protection. We received assurances that a tanker and a small response vehicle were already positioned in Yea. It was made clear the hospital remained occupied and, as a result, confirmation was received that YDMH was considered the town’s key critical asset. Several CFA tankers and vehicles were deployed and remained on site until the threat passed. These assets included a specialist tanker equipped with a pressure pump to ensure sufficient mains water pressure to defend the building.

Throughout the emergency, CFA crews maintained regular communication with hospital management. We cannot commend their calmness, kindness and professionalism highly enough. Despite exhaustion and stretched resources, they projected a sense of reassurance that was felt by all on site.

Once the immediate threat had passed, staffing became the hospital’s major challenge. Road closures and personal circumstances prevented many employees from reaching work. Executive staff had remained on site throughout, supported by colleagues until late evening. They were very pleased to see relief teams arrive from 8.30am Saturday thanks to the assistance provided by local police contacts. The relieving executive team quickly established a formal 24-hour roster ensuring on the ground support for the following week. While access issues persisted due to roadblocks, cooperation with local police enabled essential entry into the area.

Communications added another layer of difficulty, with phone and internet services down for much of Saturday and only intermittent for the remainder of the weekend. We are grateful to our friends at the Neighbourhood House, who assisted us with essential communications during this time.

For Yea, this event underscored both the vulnerability and the resilience of critical services in the face of increasingly severe bushfire seasons. We are immensely proud of our staff, many of whom worked extraordinary hours while knowing their own properties were under threat. In responding to the crisis, staff also drew on deep local knowledge and long-standing community relationships, relying on trusted local contacts and, where needed, calling in favours to mobilise resources and solve problems rapidly. The leadership of the hospital’s executive team was strong, coordinated and united, and we were well supported by members of our Board, who maintained regular communication throughout.

Our sincere thanks go to the many members of our community who offered assistance, who expressed their gratitude, and who quite literally stood beside us at a time when we felt genuinely under threat. While our community has endured a horrific event, it has once again demonstrated that, in times of crisis, a rural town pulls together to support and care for one another in a way that is truly remarkable.

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

Church Services

ST PETER’S MEMORIAL ANGLICAN CHURCH

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

ST LUKE’S ANGLICAN CHURCH OF YEa

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

CATHOLIC PARISHES OF ALEXANDRA AND YEa

Parish Priest, Father Jose Mathew
0459 402 547

St Matthews Eildon, Saturday 5pm
Immaculate Conception Parish
Alexandra, Sunday 8.45am
Sacred Heart Yea, Sunday 10.45am

CATHOLIC PARISH OF KINGLAKE

Fr Martin Ashe, Parish Priest
Ph 9717 6482

St Mary’s Kinglake: Sunday 8.30am

SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, YEa

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

UNITING CHURCH

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

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."

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."

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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.



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



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



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



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



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



The walkers finished their walk in style, with morning tea in the Yarck Hall. -BD



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



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



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February

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Record heat and bushfire smoke create dangerous conditions for people with asthma

ASTHMA Australia says air pollution from bushfires across Victoria dramatically increases the risk of asthma attacks. Bushfire smoke contains fine particles and other pollutants that can penetrate deep into the lungs, triggering symptoms such as shortness of breath, chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing, and potentially leading to increased hospital admissions.

People over 65 or 14 and under, those with pre-existing heart or lung conditions including asthma and pregnant people are most susceptible to bushfire smoke.

During periods of poor air quality, Asthma Australia advises people with asthma to continue taking their prescribed preventer medication every day, even if they

feel well, as preventers help reduce airway inflammation and lower the risk of flare-ups. People should also keep their reliever or anti-inflammatory inhaler close at hand, stay indoors where possible and follow their up-to-date Asthma Action Plan, which outlines how to manage symptoms and what to do if they worsen.

It is important to monitor symptoms closely and follow Asthma First Aid if they escalate. If symptoms do not improve or continue to get worse, seek medical care promptly. In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).

Asthma Australia CEO Kate Miranda said, “Bushfire smoke can have serious health impacts for anyone with asthma,

even at low levels. Fine particles inflame the airways and make it difficult to breathe. People with asthma should minimise smoke exposure, follow their Asthma Action Plan, take their reliever or anti-inflammatory inhaler as prescribed, and watch their symptoms closely.

“If symptoms do not improve or worsen, seek medical care immediately. In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).”

Ms Miranda added, “Avoid going outdoors when air quality is poor, particularly for exercise, as physical activity increases how much smoke you breathe into your lungs. Stay inside with doors and windows closed, use an air purifier with a HEPA filter if you have one. If smoke cannot be avoided, a

properly fitted P2 or N95 face mask may help reduce exposure.”

You can monitor real-time air quality and smoke levels in your area using trusted sources such as government sites as well as the AirRater app, which provides up-to-date information for your location and can alert you when air quality deteriorates, helping you make safer decisions about going outdoors.

For support and information, contact Asthma Australia on 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462) or visit asthma.org.au

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 succesful 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,



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

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!’

“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.

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Prepare fire-damaged properties ahead of storms

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

For more information on land and water management after a bushfire, visit go.vic.gov.au/454Hpdz or call Agriculture Victoria's Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

An update on the Australian vegetable industry

Input costs and trends

ONE month into 2026, Australian vegetable growers remain under sustained cost and price pressure.

Many of the same issues which affected the cost of inputs last year remain, while additional factors with potential for further impacts on growers' bottom lines continue to emerge, amid ongoing international volatility, and the latest domestic inflation figures showing CPI jumped back up to 3.8 per cent in the 12 months to December 2025.

The 2025 AUSVEG Vegetable Industry Sentiment Report showed that two in five vegetable growers were seriously considering exiting the industry, with higher input costs and unviable returns two of the major reasons.

The cost of compliance is also continuing to weigh heavily on vegetable grower profitability and future viability. These issues were laid out in AUSVEG's: *Horticulture Compliance and Regulation - reducing the burden by 2030* report, along with recommendations to alleviate these pressures.

Geopolitical volatility, including in the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe, has also continued to provide uncertainty, with recent events having the potential to disrupt international supply chains, trading terms, and confidence. Within this volatile environment, there is potential for further upward pressure on prices of the imported inputs Australian vegetable growers need to produce their crops.

Domestically, wage and superannuation increases since the middle of last year have added further cost pressures to vegetable growing businesses, while increasing energy costs continue to present major challenges.

Meanwhile, the consumer cost-of-living crisis has continued to put downward pressure on farmgate returns for growers.

Fertiliser

Urea

The latest figures indicate that Australian demand for granular urea is slow, and there is an expectation of a price increases after India and Brunei's latest tender results.

In November last year Australia imported 194,500 tons of urea, more than double its imports in the same month in 2024.

Granular urea was assessed at A\$760-770/t fca Geelong in December, down from highs over \$900 in September.

Some uptick in Australian urea prices has been evident in January 2026.

Phosphates

Local demand for MAP/DAP remains strong but contracting activity dipped slightly after a strong lead up to Christmas.

The GrainGrowers' latest fertiliser report indicates that in late December there was 373,000 tons of MAP/DAP in transit to Australia across nine vessels.

Diesel

From a high in excess of 190 cents per litre in October 2025, diesel pricing dipped in early January, before showing signs of an uptick.

There has also been significant commentary and news coverage on the lack of onshore reserves for Australian fuel supplies, and also concerns about what impact ongoing instability in Iran, and elsewhere in the world, may have on global prices.

Australia imports almost 70 per cent of diesel, predominantly from Asia, and Gasoil sets the price benchmark for Australia. A prediction of Australian diesel prices can be found by following the Singapore Gasoil price; Australian pricing lags one to two weeks behind.

Energy

Since the end of December 2025 statistics from Open Electricity show a slight drop in the price per megawatt hour (S/Mwh), though this has fluctuated significantly over the past 12 months.

Renewable generation

Across 2025 there was an increase in renewable power generation in the National Energy Market (NEM), most notably in the month of November.

This was most noticeable in Victoria which saw a drop in coal generation of about 12 per cent partially driven by continued outages at each of the state's coal fired generators. Some of this reduction was replaced by gas, though the technology with the largest increase in absolute terms was wind, with the Golden Plains Wind Farm a significant contributor.

However, slight reductions in wholesale electricity prices do not necessarily translate into reductions in business costs, with vegetable growers across the country continuing to strain under major and unsustainable power bill increases.

Retail market data

CPI

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 3.8 per cent in the 12 months to December 2025, up from a 3.4 per cent rise in the 12 months to November 2025, according to the latest ABS data released recently.

The largest contributors to annual inflation over the past 12 months were housing (+5.5 per cent), food and non-alcoholic beverages (+3.4 per cent), and recreation and culture (+4.4 per cent).

Fruit and vegetables

The ABS reports that in June and July 2025 fruit and vegetable retail CPI rose 4.9 per cent over the previous 12 months, before easing in August through to October, then climbing to 2.7 per cent in the 12 months to November, and four per cent in the 12 months to December.

Vegetable prices rose 3.8 per cent in the year to December, according to the latest ABS data.

Retail sales

The NielsenIQ statistics show slightly higher volumes of vegetables purchased in the later stages of 2025 compared to the previous year, with slightly higher overall prices, in the corresponding period. The average price for vegetables overall ticked up in November 2025, with sales volume lower, compared to the previous month.

Sale volumes for potatoes dropped in the four months leading into November, with prices increasing accordingly. This aligns with reports from supermarkets of supply impacts towards the end of the period due to weather conditions.

Despite a short variation towards middle of the period, 2025 consistently saw higher onion sales volume compared to the previous year. Retail prices were also slightly higher throughout 2025, until three quarters through the year when YoY pricing approached parity.

Carrot sales volume was down throughout much of 2025 compared to the previous year, with a corresponding higher average retail price also recorded during much of 2025.

Tomatoes recorded high sales volumes at the start and end of the last two years, with levels dropping in the middle. Retail prices rose and fell in line with supply, with the latter stages of 2025 recording slightly higher prices in general.

Retail prices of other vegetable commodities reported on largely aligned with sales volume/supply, however broccoli recorded some significant fluctuations in both price and volume sold across the period.

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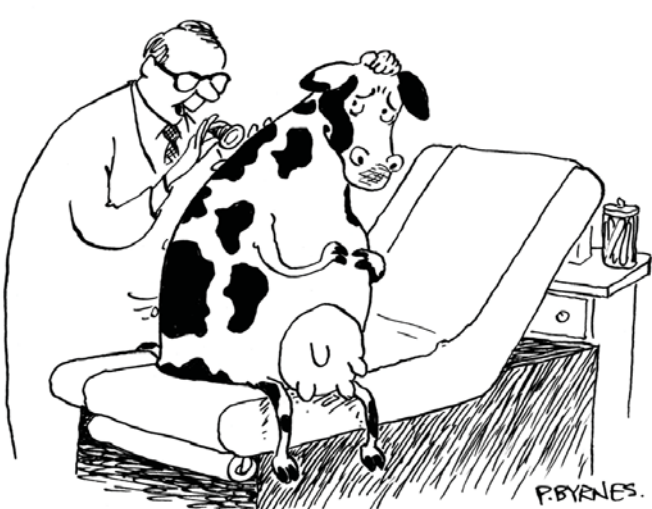
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An insight into the Alexandra Incident Control Centre

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 McCraes 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.”

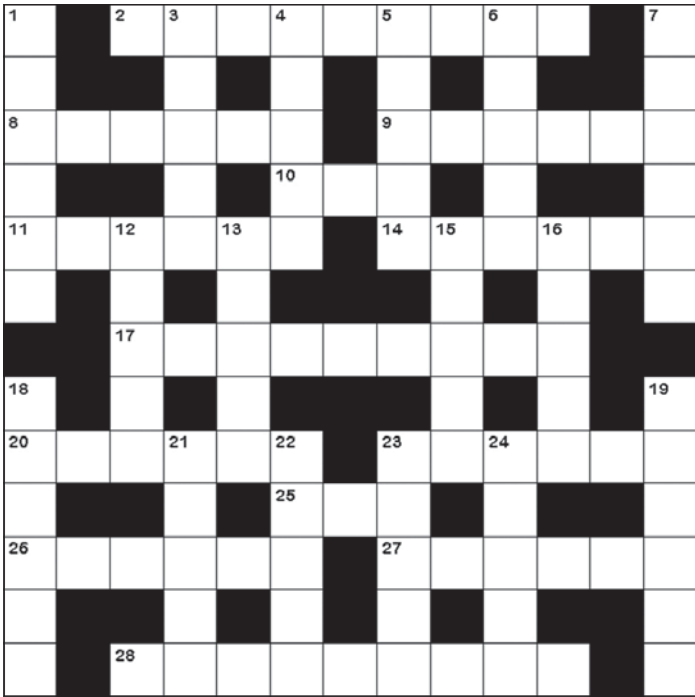
PUZZLES

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

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

Vale

Anthony Thomas McCarthy

by Matthew McCarthy (fourth son of Anthony)

5/11/1929 to 4/12/2025

DAD sometimes said, "The young may die but the old must die." My brother Kieran once aptly described Dad as a man of many colours. I cannot hope to capture all the shades and colours of our Dad, but hopefully I can provide a glimpse to our whimsical, hard-working and good-humoured father.

Anthony Thomas McCarthy was born on November 5, 1929, at the original Yea Hospital. It was Melbourne Cup Day and the winner that day was a horse called *Night March*. It would make a lovely story that due to this Dad had a life-long affinity for racing, horses or betting. As it happens, he had none of these and often declared betting on the horses 'a mug's game,' however perhaps not in earshot of our mum Carmel, who was known to have a regular flutter on the GG's.

Anthony was the youngest of five children born to Con and Kit McCarthy. His siblings were Jose, Mick, Carmel and Marie. The family was raised on the property at Dairy Creek, Homewood called *Samaria*.

Dad attended primary school mainly at the Homewood State School during the Depression years. Times were tough and the prospect of war was looming. However, Dad spoke fondly of his time at the Homewood school where he made lifelong friends and did well academically.

Dad had a great intellect, including a sharp ability for mental arithmetic. He devoured crosswords and was just about unbeatable at Scrabble. Up until just a few months ago, Dad would love to sit and work out the nine letter word or do the Wordle on his Ipad.

Dad's secondary school education was at St Bede's College in Mentone, Melbourne, boarding there from grade nine and finished with his Leaving Certificate in 1945 as the Second World War ended. The brothers and teachers at the school left a lasting positive impact on Dad.

Dad was keen on going to University to do Veterinary Science, however, at that time, returned soldiers were given priority entry to university, and opportunity faded. Dad's father convinced him to come back onto the farm at Homewood and grow wool and fat lambs.

Dad's formative years in farming were dominated by the great rabbit plague. Dad would often speak of seeing an entire hillside 'moving' with thousands of rabbits. He would say that he wasted his youth 'digging out rabbits'. Rabbit hunting was also the cause of him being accidentally shot in the leg by a shotgun by his cousin Jack.

Carmel and marriage

It is impossible to speak about Dad without speaking about our Mum.

Dad was asked to be a debutante partner by a young lady from Flowerdale, called Carmel Cunningham, and what resulted was a love story that would last over 70 years. Anthony and

Carmel married in this church in May 1952, and what followed was a loving partnership that stood the test of time until Mum's passing in early 2022.

Dad was a devoted husband and lavished praise on Mum both privately and publicly at every opportunity. He would recognise her and gave her the credit for all their achievements as a couple, setting a powerful example.

Mum and Dad moved into their newly built home on King Parrot Creek Road on New Year's Eve 1952. The house was un-finished, and they had virtually no furniture. They set about making a home which was to become the centre of their lives and that of their six children, Anthony [Jnr], Kieran, Angela, Dominic, Matthew and Joseph, for the next 65 years.

Initially there was no electricity and no telephone. It was 10 years before the power came to the valley bringing electricity and Dad had to build and maintain his own telephone line to the house to get the phone connected. These days it is hard to believe, but they were stoic and inventive.

The roles that Mum and Dad took on the farm were somewhat unconventional for the times. Dad encouraged Mum to be actively involved in farm decision making and welcomed her input. On the other hand, Dad also pitched in domestically and was known to whack a stew together for dinner to allow Mum to spend time in her beloved garden. They were a formidable team.

Dad's love and devotion for Mum was to the very end of her life. In her final 12 months when she was in ill health, every single day, often twice a day, Dad walked up to the hospital to sit and chat with Mum or just sit.

True love needs no words.

Work ethic

Dad had a solid work ethic and he applied this in building the productivity of the farm. Dad never shirked a hard day's work. Always an early riser, he would be up and about, usually in a cheerful mood and stirring any troops he had available to help. Dad always finished what he started even in the pouring rain.

"It's just an Irish mist," he would say, or when encouraging us to dig a post hole through rock hard ground with a crowbar and shovel, he would use another favourite "Okay, once more with feeling".

Get out of bed and get going was another of Dad's deeply held principles.

Dad never tolerated sleeping in occurring at *Clohaune*. No matter what events had occurred the night before, you could guarantee that Dad would bang at the bedroom door and declare with his booming voice. "The porridge is ready." The other more subtle tactic was to leave the kitchen door open with the radio blaring the ABC.

As a resourceful and frugal farmer, Dad had a thousand uses for number eight fencing wire, using this trick to 'keep the show on the road' as John Williamson sings in his song *True Blue*. Being a child of the Depression, Dad would say, "Nothing is cheap if you don't need it."

Dad was an honest and diligent farming neighbour, always particular about livestock mix-ups or boundary issues, and went the extra yard to correct it. He was on good terms with all his neighbours. He was accomplished at all aspects of animal husbandry and could tell quickly if there was a problem with livestock, etcetera.

Pragmatic and realistic

Dad saw the world through the eyes of a realist stating that things need to be dealt with as they are, not how you wished them to be.

Mum would often say Dad was like the character, 'Hanrahan', in John O'Brien's poem, saying we would "all be ruined". But I think Dad was being a realist about the situation, and yes sometimes he would describe the worse-case scenario, but he was being pragmatic.

I suspect as a result of being a child of the Depression, Dad was never a fan of the banks. He used to call his bank, Westpac, 'Wolf Pack.'

We also recall Dad always having a calmness about him when faced with calamity. In a crisis such as bushfire or flood he had a calm, level head and would call the shots.

His Irish heritage was something Dad was very proud of and he educated us about the struggles our ancestors faced in their homeland and in early Australia. To put this into perspective it was only our great grandfather Daniel McCarthy who escaped Ireland in the wake of the potato famine.

When faced with big inflation hits and increases in costs in the mid-1970s, Dad took a job off farm as a Tour Guide at the Fisheries and Wildlife at Snobs Creek Fish Hatchery near Eildon. Dad excelled at the job with his storytelling and public speaking skills coming to the fore. His public service stint finished with an administration job with the Housing Commission in Seymour which was much more convenient. These toils resulted in the family farm being retained.

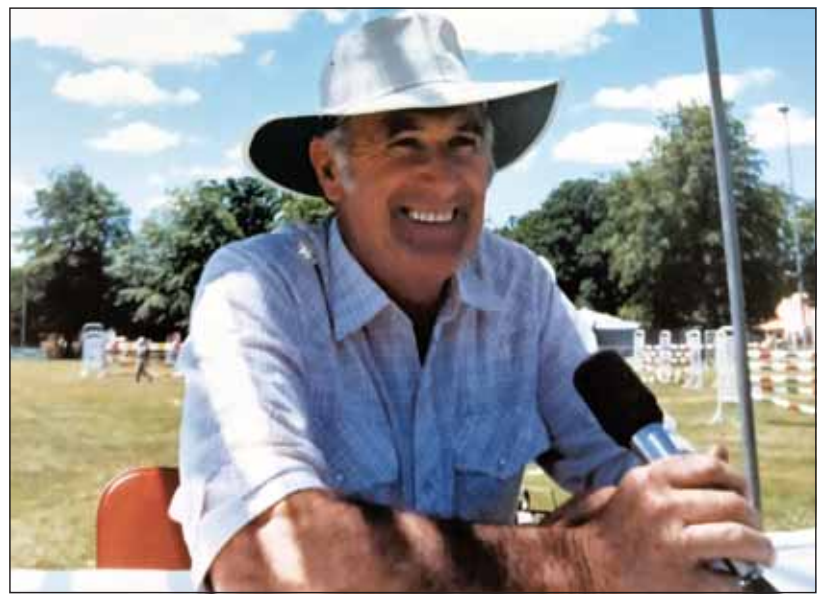
Happiness and optimism

Dad was quick to point out the funny side of even the most stressful situations.

He loved comedians such as Dave Allan, John Cleese and the late John Clarke. (Dave Allan poked fun at the Catholic Church a bit, but that was tolerated because he was Irish).

It didn't take much to get a smile or laugh out of Dad, even when things were at their lowest. He would quote Henry Lawson's *The Ballad of the Drover* with "We've breasted bigger rivers when floods were at their height."

Dad eventually returned to full time farming in the early 90s. Mum and Dad then worked the farm side by side for a few decades. Any visiting children, relatives or friends were conscripted to help and were usually happy to oblige. An important addition to the farm in later years was Nick Blay, who worked alongside Dad who was stoked to have a trusted mentee, and I know that Nick appreciated his mentor. Mum and Dad reluctantly retired from full time farming in their late 80s and took up residence at 5 Loan St, Yea.



Anthony McCarthy had many passions. -S

Community and sport

Dad had a passion for community service. He could not help himself. He was elected to various voluntary community leadership roles. Just to name a few: Councillor on the former Shire of Yea, Yea Parish Council, primary and secondary school councils, CFA Captain at Strath Creek and later a Deputy Group Officer.

Dad always avoided the petty politics that can derail volunteer organisations. He emphasised focussing on showing up on time and pitching in, not being a passenger. Dad was highly regarded and respected in the community and we were all enormously proud of him.

Dad's commitment to lawn bowls was next level. He played at the Yea Bowls Club and in his typical manner he not only played the game well, but invested a huge amount of time in the running of the club as president, secretary, coach and umpire, and was invested as a life member of the club.

He was instrumental in the building of the new club rooms and co-authored a book on the history of the Yea Bowls Club.

Dad would often say to us, "You should take up bowls. It's a great game. You will get a lifetime of enjoyment out of it." Followed closely by, "Don't leave it too late, bowls is a game that old people can play but young people play better."

His legacy is that there are currently four avid, and I would say addicted, bowlers in our immediate family.

Whimsical / musical

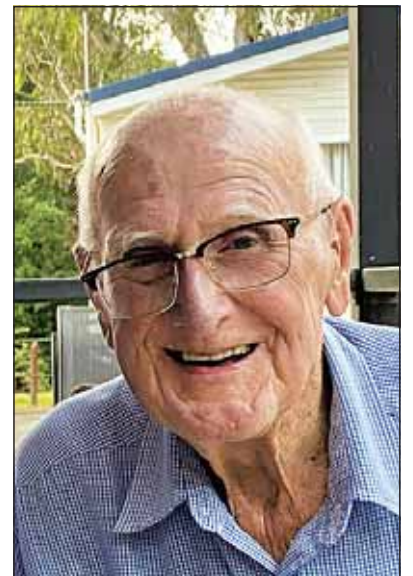
Dad also had a whimsical and cheerful disposition.

All our earliest memories of Dad involve him singing, yodelling or reciting poetry as we drove around the paddocks in the old Land Rover. He had a massive repertoire of songs, poems and stories. He was able to recite many poems by memory well into his old age and even in the last few months he would be known to come out with verses that were relevant to the moment. John O'Brien, Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson were his most quoted poets and he was often requested to recite one or two at public and private events.

He had a unique talent. He would retell stories and happenings from his life to us, usually with a comedic twist. Any situation could spark a relevant anecdote. Family members and characters from Homewood, Strath Creek and Yea, some who were long dead, came to life.

Dad was also more musical than some people probably know.

He could pick out a tune on the piano or harmonica. He purchased a drum kit and a saxophone in his early 30s, and Kieran recalls



Anthony Thomas McCarthy. -S

hearing bad saxophone coming out of the morning fog as Dad rounded up the house cows for milking.

We sent Dad off with a couple of selections from his eclectic record collection that included Hank Williams, the Beatles, the Seekers and Dean Martin.

Faith

I can't finish without speaking of Dad's steadfast commitment to his Christian faith. He had a great appreciation of the Eucharist and he and Mum attended weekly Mass mostly in this church their whole lives. Dad was progressive and relished any modernising of the liturgy and other aspects of Church life.

He befriended many of the Parish Priests who were stationed here in Yea and they were often beneficiaries of Mum and Dad's hospitality. Suffice to say that faith was not restricted to church for Dad, he applied the gospel values in all aspects of his life.

Conclusion

Dad's passing heralds the ending of a by-gone era. The last of his family generation and the closing of a chapter, a break in the link to a time when things were very different, times were harder, simpler, and community was everything.

Dad was steadfast in his values, fun to be around and looked out for his family and community. His whole long life was a lesson on how to live with integrity and humility.

So we say, thank and bless you Dad. We will always be proud of you and thankful to have had a father of your calibre. You are going to be missed enormously in so many ways.

However, as you often said, "Such is life." Now get a move along as Mum is waiting for you at the gate to go and check those ewes and lambs.

Anthony Thomas McCarthy's funeral was held at Sacred Heart Church in Yea on December 16, 2025.

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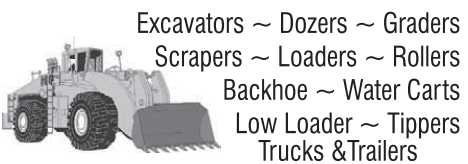
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Jack at Josephine Cutting, welcoming the truck convoy laden with much needed hay and other fodder into town as they arrive in Alexandra. -S

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."

PUZZLES SOLUTIONS

CRYPTOGRAM

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
25 24 4 1 19 3 5 20 8 2 21 26 7 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
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MATH SQUARES

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SUDOKU

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						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	

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DEATH NOTICES

FOR SALE

FOR HIRE

GOSS, Elizabeth -
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 Pallaoro


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


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MEETINGS

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

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TRADES ADVERTISING DEADLINE NOON THURSDAY

The Alexandra Standard and The Yea Chronicle are printed by North East Media, Wangaratta. Print Post Approved - PP 100000292.

THE Victorian Government is intensifying its crackdown on illicit tobacco, with Tobacco Licensing Victoria to begin enforcing Victoria's new tobacco licensing scheme this week.

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation Enver Erdogan last week announced inspectors will start compliance and enforcement operations, working with legitimate retailers to meet their licensing requirements and gathering intelligence to take action against operators selling illicit tobacco.

"Inspectors will be out in the community and won't hesitate to act on operators who think they can ignore the law," Mr Erdogan said.

"This scheme gives Victoria Police and other agencies the intelligence and powers they need to crack down on organised crime.

"If you are doing the wrong thing and dealing in illegal tobacco, you will get caught and you will face the toughest penalties in Australia."

Inspectors will undertake compliance and enforcement operations to ensure businesses are meeting their licensing obligations, and take strong action against stores breaking the law.

Under tough new penalties, anyone found selling illicit tobacco faces fines of almost \$370,000 or up to 15 years in jail, while businesses risk fines of more than \$1.8 million.

Since the scheme started on July 1, 2025, Tobacco Licensing Victoria has received more than 4100 licence applications, with more than 2000 licenses now granted.

Businesses that lodged their application before February 1 can continue trading while their application is assessed.

Tobacco Licensing Victoria can suspend or cancel licenses, seize illegal tobacco products and take court action.

Inspectors will also work closely with Victoria Police and other enforcement agencies, providing intelligence as part of broader efforts to disrupt organised crime and illicit tobacco supply chains.

Victoria Police continue to run intelligence-led operations targeting organised crime groups involved in illicit tobacco.

Tobacco Licensing Victoria will provide regulatory intelligence to support these broader investigations, enabling police to use their additional powers, including executing warrants and dismantling criminal supply chains, to disrupt illegal activity at every level of the market.

Victorians can also report stores selling illegal tobacco via the Tobacco Licensing Victoria website. A list of licensed tobacco retailers and wholesalers will be publicly available and regularly updated.

The *Victorian Budget 2025/26* included \$46 million to establish the new licensing scheme and regulator, which oversees the legal supply of tobacco products in Victoria including licensing, compliance and enforcement.

For more information or to apply for a tobacco licence, visit vic.gov.au/tobacco-licensing

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/gmwwater/home/public](https://eprocure.com.au/gmwwater/home/public)

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.

"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

Keep up to date with the progress of Payday Super at ato.gov.au/paydaysuper



A burnt out truck in the Caveat area. -BD



Some of the heavily forested areas of Caveat were burnt through. -BD



Some things survived, while the surrounding area burnt. -BD

Images from the fire affected north of Murrindindi Shire



The hills around Highlands covered in burnt trees. -BD



Blackened ground from the fire, and trees with all the moisture sucked out of them. -BD



Some grapevines were burnt in Caveat, while others survived. -BD



All along parts of the roadside through the Highlands were blackened and charred. -BD



The remains of trees and the ashy ground. -BD



The roadsides are full of partially burnt trees, making the roads slightly hazardous to drive. Driving safely is a must. -BD



The landscape around Terip Terip burnt and covered in ash. -BD



The fires tore through existing signs. -BD

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."

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."

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 fire-affected area. Access to these roads remains strictly limited, and conditions are unpredictable and hazardous.

"Community safety remains the highest priority and council is working closely with the Incident Control Centre to assess damage, clear hazards and progressively re-establish safe access to roads impacted by the fire. Residents are strongly encouraged to travel only on approved routes, including major roads and key connecting roads that have been inspected, made safe or opened under restricted access.

"Roads outside the fire impacted area remain open with travellers encouraged to 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.

"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."

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

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

The 'Cute Ute Crew' from the Hay Runners roll in



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



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



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



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



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

Community grateful for VFF's Emergency Fodder Support



Trucks leaving the Yea Saleyards to deliver straight to farms. -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

The Chronicle Sport



Sports Editorial: sports@alexandranewspapers.com.au

*Bowling for the chocolates, a fun activity. -S**A large crowd were catered for including children's activity. -S*

Barefoot Bowls kicks off at Yea Bowls Club

by Maurie Finn

Social Bowls

Monday Triples

THE Monday Triples at Yea Bowls Club was generously sponsored by Yea Garden Centre for the month of January. Despite being a hot day last Monday, January 26, a good number turned out to play a shortened schedule.

There were just two games of eight ends instead of the usual three, so that the club finished before the real heat kicked in. The only two game winners were: Brett Reece, Maree Brennan and Rob Marks.

Barefoot Bowls - Oh what a night

Barefoot Bowls began on Sunday, February 1 with a huge turnout, which exceeded all expectations. It

was a fantastic night, meeting new people, lots of fun, good music and even some good bowling.

A big thanks to Nutrient Harcourts for their generous sponsorship of Barefoot Bowls which will continue for the next three weeks, starting at 6pm on Sunday evenings. Why not head along and join in the fun?

Yea Pennant

Yea Pennant had a great day on Saturday, January 24, with a convincing win over East Shepparton. Starting early due to the forecasted heat, Yea got off to a strong start and held a comfortable overall lead for the whole day.

Saturday, January 31, saw Yea travel to Tatura Hill Top to play Pennant. The match started at 9.30am due to the predicted heat conditions.

Despite the greens being lightning fast, Yea remained very competitive with two rinks up and two down.

Terry McInness with Neil Rieschieck, Doug Shirrefs and Kym Cooper, held a comfortable lead for much of the game. Tatura fought back, but Yea was able to hold on to score a well-earned two shot win.

Rob Marks, Maureen Marks, Maree Brennan and Viv Cavanagh, had a real battle for most of the day with the lead changing multiple times. In the end Yea came away with an impressive five shot win.

The other two rinks battled hard all day, but Tatura won both convincingly.

Next week Yea travel to Shepparton Park to take on the top side which they defeated at home in the first round.

*Winners for January 26, being Rob Marks, Maree Brennan and Brett Reece. -S*

Gender report and Murrindindi Masters for Yea Golf Club

by Alan Pell

Gender Challenge round five

ROUND five of the Gender Challenge saw 35 members contest a Stableford event.

Winner of the day was Chris Keogh (29) with 40 points, followed by Martin Lowe (15) with 38, and Alan Pell (13) on 37 points countback. However, as there were more than 10 additional men than women playing, these three scores were not counted towards the Gender Challenge.

Gender points were awarded as follows: Di Holdsworth (32) with 37 points (countback) for 25 points; Zach Pell (13) with 37 points (countback) for 20 points; Vicki Butler (44) with 36 points for 15 points; Steve Rumney (23) with 35 points (countback) for 10 points; Miranda Gill (17) with 35 points for five points.

The team average was won by the Ladies, 32 to 31, earning 10 points. Day score: Ladies 55 defeated Men 30. Progressive total: Ladies 300, Men 125.

The nearest the pin on the 14th went to Alan Pell, and the club award to Phil Armstrong.

Gender Challenge round six

Round six saw 31 players, with the men having seven more players, resulting in

the top two men's scores not counting towards gender points.

Winner of the Stroke and Putting event was Tom White (17) with an exceptional nett 65. Second on countback was Vicki Clements (23) with nett 70, from Phil Armstrong (19) in third.

Fourth was Meryl Connell (24) with 71 nett (CB) from Christine Simmons (23), with Rob Gill (33) next best.

Gender points: Vicki Clements with 25; Meryl Connell with 20; Christine Simmons with 15; Rob Gill with 10; Jo Clayton with five.

The team average was again won by the Ladies, earning 10 points. Day score: Ladies 75, Men 10. Progressive total: Ladies 375, Men 135.

Marysville Murrindindi Masters

A strong contingent of 35 Yea players represented the club at the Marysville Masters last Saturday.

The weather began mildly but by midday temperatures were well over 30 degrees, making for hot and humid playing conditions. Congratulations to Greg Clements, who won the Men's Mini Masters under tough conditions. Greg also won the B Grade Veterans Competition last Thursday at Seymour.

*Men's Mini Masters winner Greg Clements with Cathie from FoodWorks. -S*

Other excellent results included: Andrew Bohn, runner-up A Grade; Anthony La Grutta, winner B Grade; Russell Wealands, runner-up C Grade.

Rob O'Halloran won first prize in the raffle, with many other Yea players also successful in the draws.

Well done to all Yea players whose efforts contributed to Yea's team average for the Normie Shield (results yet to be calculated).

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).