

The Yea Chronicle

PO Box 5, Alexandra Vic. 3714

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

Ph: (03) 5772 1002; Email: reception@alexandranewspapers.com.au Your community newspaper since 1885 Wednesday, March 25, 2026 \$2.00 inc. GST

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Norma Tobias: Local legend turns 100

NORMA Tobias celebrated her 100th birthday with family at the Royal Mail Hotel in Yea last Monday. With around 67 years of living in Yea, she is an essential part of the community, and has volunteered with many committees over the years. She is also a war veteran.

Norma was born on March 16, 1926, and grew up with her family

in Tongala, west of Shepparton, before moving to Yea with her husband Ken.

She enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in April of 1945, and was discharged in February of 1946 at the rank of Aircraftwoman. During this period, she undertook cypher training, which was learning to decode messages.

"I was only in the air force for nine months, and I spent half of it at Point Cook, down past Werribee, and the rest at the Melbourne Show Grounds," Norma said.

"We'd just finished our training at Point Cook when the war ended, so we never got out on the job. We were ready to go, but it didn't happen. So

then I was sent to the showgrounds just as an ordinary clerk.

"I ended up writing out leave passes, so I was fairly popular. Particularly at Christmas. I don't know how many I wrote out, leave passes for them to go home for Christmas. Then I had to write my own."

After the war, Norma worked as a phonogram operator for the Post-Master General's Department, which included the forwarding of correspondence via telegram, particularly good wishes and business grams.

She met her husband Ken in Tongala after the war, through their mutual passion for tennis. He was there working as a butcher when they met.

"We met through my parents actually. Where we lived in Tongala, we were over the road from the grass tennis courts. We were all tennis nuts. And my father was the curator of the tennis courts, among other things. Ken came to Tongala butchering and he played tennis," Norma said.

"We had met before, we used to travel around to tournaments over Christmas and Easter. They had sort of three or four day tournaments, and we'd travel around. We met him in Rochester, I think it was. His father was the station master in Rochester, and they were living there. That's where I first met him, and then he came to Tongala after the war. And I got to know him a bit better then."

The pair moved to Yea with their two children (Chris, the oldest, and Peter) to buy the Yea Butcher Shop, which Ken operated and Norma did the accounts for. Their daughter Vicki was born at the Yea Hospital after they moved to town, making three children.

Norma now has seven grandchildren, and is about to have her sixth great-grandchild. She is very proud.

"When I think one of the great-grandchildren is nearly 16, it's crazy," Norma said.

After moving to Yea, Norma got involved with the operations of various committees, in order to promote the butcher shop. She has continued to be a part of the community ever since.

"When we came to Yea, Ken said I had to get involved in the community, because we had a shop. So you wanted customers, and you had to be involved," she said.

She was first involved with the kinder committee, and then she was on all the school committees, the Yea Tennis Club committee, the vestry for running St Luke's Anglican Church and the op shop. Her and Ken were heavily involved in the creation of the Rosebank Hostel, which provides aged care services to Yea. She herself is a resident now.

Daughter Vicki spoke about Norma's work in the creation of Rosebank.

Continued Page 3



Norma Tobias. -S

EASTER OFFICE HOURS

CLOSED GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 3 AND MONDAY, APRIL 6

**EARLY DEADLINES
APPLY FOR APRIL 8
EDITION**

NOON, THURSDAY, APRIL 2
★ DISPLAY ADS - BOOKING AND ARTWORK
★ CLASSIFIEDS INC DEATH NOTICES ★ TRADES

10AM MONDAY, APRIL 6
★ EDITORIAL, SPORTS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE WILL REOPEN 9AM TUESDAY, APRIL 7



43 Grant Street, Alexandra Ph: 5772 1002
email: reception@alexandranewspapers.com.au

The Yea Chronicle

THE ALEXANDRA - EILDON - MARYSVILLE
Standard

ALEXANDRA
NEWSPAPERS

MURRINDINDI Shire Council has formally requested the state and federal governments to take immediate action to safeguard access to fuel and fertiliser, warning that supply pressures and increased costs risk slowing bushfire recovery across the region.

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



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PUBLISHERS

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Murrindindi Mayor Cr Damien Gallagher said reliable access to diesel is essential for on-the-ground recovery activities including fencing, clean-up, freight and farm operations, following the catastrophic January 2026 bushfires across Murrindindi Shire.

“Fuel is not optional in a recovery like this. It underpins every part of getting people back on their feet,” Cr Gallagher said.

“Any disruption to supply or sharp increases in cost place additional pressure on producers who are already dealing with significant losses.”

Council has also raised growing concerns about fertiliser prices and availability, particularly nitrogen inputs, which are vital for restoring pasture and stabilising fire-affected land.

“For many of our producers, this is a narrow window to act. Without access to fertiliser at the right time, recovery is delayed and productivity is impacted well into the future,” he said.

The January bushfires caused widespread damage across Murrindindi Shire, including livestock losses, destroyed pasture and extensive fencing impacts, with fencing



replacement costs alone estimated to exceed \$120 million.

Council is advocating for immediate, practical measures to support fire-affected regions, including priority access to fuel for primary producers, recovery contractors and regional supply chains; targeted, time-limited financial support to offset extreme fuel costs and secure fertiliser supply; and active intervention to stabilise fertiliser supply pathways, particularly nitrogen inputs

Cr Gallagher said the issue is not about convenience, but about ensuring recovery can continue at pace.

“This is about maintaining the capacity of our community to recover, keep producing and remain viable through a period of compounding disruption,” he said.

“Murrindindi was the hardest hit areas in the January fires, and our recovery depends on being able to act quickly, not absorb further shocks.”

Council has offered to work closely with government to support local coordination, including identifying priority users and assisting with distribution and communication on the ground.

ACCC investigating diesel supply conduct in regional and rural Australia

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has launched an enforcement investigation into allegations of anti-competitive conduct by each of the major fuel suppliers, Ampol Ltd, BP Australia Pty Ltd, Mobil Oil Australia Pty Ltd, and Viva Energy Australia Pty Ltd.

The ACCC received reports concerning diesel availability to independent wholesalers and distributors servicing regional and rural Australia. This investigation will assess the alleged conduct.

“The ACCC is closely scrutinising all fuel markets during this period, and we have received reports of alleged anti-competitive behaviour. We are therefore investigating these matters urgently,” ACCC Chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb said.

“It is not our usual practice to publicly announce investigations, but given the significance of the issue, the ACCC is confirming this enforcement investigation. We recognise the widespread concerns held by consumers, businesses and farmers about

fuel pricing and supply issues arising during the Middle Eastern conflict.

“It is important that fuel market participants and the community know that we are closely watching market conduct in relation to all fuels and we will not hesitate to act swiftly to enforce Australia’s competition and consumer laws,” Ms Cass-Gottlieb said.

“Our investigation is at a preliminary stage, and therefore we are yet to form a view about these matters.”

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.

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	0.40	LGH	falling
Acheron River at Taggerty	10.00AM Mon	0.51	LGH	steady
Home Creek at Yarck	8.34AM Mon	0.16	LGH	steady
Yea River at Devlins Bridge	8.26AM Mon	0.41	LGH	steady
Murrindindi River Above Colwells	10.00AM Mon	0.19	LGH	steady
Yea R at Old Killingworth Rd	10.00AM Mon	0.42	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Ghin Ghin	10.00AM Mon	3.92	LGH	steady
King Parrot Creek at Flowerdale	10.00AM Mon	0.30	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Trawool	10.00AM Mon	1.63	LGH	steady
Sunday Creek at Tallarook	10.00AM Mon	0.30	LGH	steady
Goulburn River at Seymour	10.30AM Mon	1.89	LGH	steady
Whiteheads Creek at Seymour	10.00AM Mon	0.94	LGH	steady
*ISSUED AT 10:54 AM AEDT MONDAY 23 MARCH 2026				



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Letters **must be 300 words or less**. We will not publish defamatory letters, or content which is offensive, threatening or containing personal attacks. Submitted letters may be edited before going to print.
All letters must contain writers name, address and contact number. (not necessarily for publication). Letters without these details supplied cannot not be published. Deadline for Letters to the Editor is 9am Monday.





Weekly Weather
March 25 - March 31, 2026
Temperatures may be subject to change from date of publication



Alexandra

Yea

DAY	LOW	HIGH		DAY	LOW	HIGH	
Wednesday	14	27		Wednesday	14	27	
Thursday	8	18		Thursday	8	18	
Friday	8	15		Friday	8	15	
Saturday	7	19		Saturday	9	18	
Sunday	6	22		Sunday	6	22	
Monday	8	23		Monday	9	23	
Tuesday	11	26		Tuesday	10	26	



DISTRICT RAINFALL	
Alexandra.....	24mm
Buxton.....	33mm
Eildon (AWS).....	26mm
Flowerdale.....	17mm
Jamieson.....	27mm
Kinglake.....	22mm
Lake Eildon.....	27mm
Mansfield.....	10mm
Taggerty.....	23mm
Yarck.....	18mm
Yea.....	20mm
Above details for 7 days to 9am Monday	
LAKE EILDON	
Height above sea level this week.....	270.71m
Capacity as at 9am Monday.....	43.3%
Metres below full supply.....	18.19m
Daily inflow.....	400ML
Release.....	5000ML
Eildon Pondage (may be subject to rapid change).....	84%

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

Norma Tobias: Local legend turns 100

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“Eventually they got very involved in this [Rosebank Hostel] because they thought, well, the one thing that’s missing in the town, it’s always been sort of an older town and there was nowhere for anyone to go. They got very involved in pushing to get this aged care facility established,” Vicki said.

“The original hostel, there were 17 beds in that. I don’t know how long it functioned for before they decided to build a nursing home,” Norma added.

“But then of course, we had such fights to get money out of the government. And ‘oh Yea isn’t big enough to do anything, you couldn’t support it, blah blah blah’, you know. Anyway, eventually we convinced them we could.”

Norma is still on the Yea Hospital Auxiliary, though she doesn’t attend meetings anymore. She is also still a member of the Yea RSL.

Vicki also spoke proudly about how Norma was one of the first volunteers for Meals on Wheels when it came to Yea.

“When Meals on Wheels became a thing back in the day, Mum and another lady in Yea, Dawn Sunbloom, were the first two volunteers. And Mum delivered Meals on Wheels until about three years ago when

she lost her licence due to an infection in her leg,” Vicki said.

Norma was proud to be the first lady president of the Yea Tennis Club, as well as a life member of the Yea Golf Club. She played golf to the age of 92 years.

For her 100th birthday, Norma received a letter from the King, one from the Governor-General of Australia, one from the Governor-General of Victoria, one from Jacinta Allan, one from the Department of Veteran Affairs for her war service, and there is one on the way from the Prime Minister.

On becoming a centenarian, Norma said, “You don’t have anything to do with it, I mean, it’s one of those things that either happens or it doesn’t. You can go out and say, ‘you want to see my letter from the King?’”

To close, Norma shared a bit of wisdom and advice, learnt through her years of experience.

“Take life as it comes and get on with it,” she said.

“Whatever I’ve done, it’s because I wanted to and enjoyed it. I look at other people and they sit on their backsides and do nothing and they just waste away. And I think, what a terrible waste,” Norma concluded.



Norma Tobias in her Royal Australian Air Force uniform. -S



Norma Tobias (second from left) celebrating her 100th birthday with her children. -S

Kinglake Bendigo Bank set to close on June 5

VALLEY Community Financial Services Ltd has made the difficult decision to close its Community Bank located at 4/1 Victoria Road, Kinglake from 12.30pm on Friday, June 5, 2026,” a Bendigo Bank spokesperson said.

“This decision takes into consideration sustained changes in customer banking behaviour and declining in-branch transactions.

“The bank is in the process of communicating this network change to customers via email and SMS.”

Customers will be able to continue to transact face-to-face at Community Bank Hurstbridge, or Community Bank Yea and District, which is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10am to 3pm.

Customers can also continue to transact at any Bendigo Bank branch, ATM or at any time via internet banking, Bendigo Bank’s mobile app or by phone on 1300 236 344, or by using Bank@Post at the nearby Kinglake LPO. The Bank@Post service is free for concession account holders.

MDBA urges locals to shape the future of our rivers

THE Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is urging everyday people across the Basin to speak up as public consultation for the Basin Plan Review reaches its halfway mark.

Hundreds of conversations have already taken place in towns and communities across the Basin, and councils, community groups and industry bodies are well underway with their submissions.

MDBA Chief Executive Andrew McConville said now is the time for individual community members to add their perspectives. “Local voices matter. Whether you live on a farm, in a regional town or city, or anywhere along the rivers, your experience helps us understand what’s really happening on the ground. Your local knowledge is incredibly valuable, often more than you realise,” he said.

More than 2.4 million people live within the Murray–Darling Basin, and the MDBA wants to hear from as many of those people as possible.

Mr McConville said a healthy Basin means resilient ecosystems, stronger industries, thriving communities and opportunities for future generations.

“That’s why a plan for the Basin matters. It’s how we protect what we value and ensure rivers remain healthy, for generations to come.”

Mr McConville said people often think their view will not make a difference, but every submission contributes to building a clearer picture of community perspectives.

He said submissions don’t need to be long, technical or cover every issue raised in the Discussion Paper which was released on February 5.

“You don’t need to be an expert to make a submission. You can simply tell us what’s important to you, your family or your community. If there’s just one aspect you care about, you can focus on that. Your feedback will assist the Authority in making recommendations on how the Basin Plan and Basin water management can be improved.”

People can find information on how to make a submission via the MDBA website at *2026 Basin Plan Review: Have Your Say - MDBA*. Community members who would like assistance can also call the MDBA consultation hotline on 1800 230 067.

Submissions for the 2026 Basin Plan Review close on May 1.

Help at hand for farmers recovering after fires

AGRICULTURE Victoria is encouraging bushfire affected farmers to access recovery support as it passes two months since the blazes brought significant impacts to agriculture and communities.

Agriculture Recovery Manager Sarah Wallis said farmers are navigating short, medium and long term recovery, and Agriculture Victoria staff are here every step of the way.

“We know that all farming businesses are unique and recovery will depend on many factors and occur at different paces. We want to remind farmers that support is available,” Ms Wallis said.

“Our staff are on the ground in local communities, partnering with local shires and other support services, to provide farm management advice, and chat with farmers, their families and the community.

“Recovery staff are also at events providing farmers with technical advice on a wide range of topics including managing and feeding livestock, pasture recovery, managing and protecting farm water supplies, farm mapping and re-fencing.”

Financial assistance is also available. There are Primary Producer Bushfire Recovery Grants of up to \$75,000 to assist with clean-up and reinstating enterprises. Funding can be used for essential recovery activities such as disposing of stock, rebuilding or replacing damaged on-farm infrastructure and restoring operations. There are also Primary Producer Bushfire Recovery Concessional Loans of up to \$250,000 for those who have suffered major asset damage or loss of income. Funding can be used to cover essential costs such as repairing or replacing damaged equipment, rebuilding infrastructure, purchasing livestock and meeting working capital expenses like wages, rent and fodder.

Apply on the Rural Finance website at ruralfinance.com.au/grants

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) can help with grant applications including eligibility questions, alongside their free and independent financial information, decision-making support and referral services to farmers. RFCS can be contacted on 1300 771 741.

“Support is here for farmers, families, and rural communities feeling stressed or overwhelmed, and we encourage anyone seeking support to get in contact with the services available,” Ms Wallis said.

Wellbeing counsellors offer free, confidential support and are available to visit bushfire-affected producers and their families at their property or over the phone. To access the support of a specialist wellbeing counsellor, call the RFCS on 1300 771 741.

For more information on available supports, visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/bushfires

Free Funeral Information Pack

Our Free Funeral Information Packs are designed to assist you with planning end-of-life and funeral services.

Included in the pack is:

- Funeral Planning Booklet
- Pre-Paid Funeral Info & FAQ's Sheet
- Free Legal Will Kit for Basic Estates
- Comprehensive Checklists
- Other Information & Funeral Service Ideas

To order your free pack please call or email us.



FINAL EMBRACE FUNERALS
PH: 5756 3740

info@finalembbracefunerals.com.au

NDIS services available locally

RESIDENTS now have access to NDIS health services locally thanks to the expansion of Omnia Community Health’s allied health teams. With clinicians in Broadford and Seymour, people on an NDIS plan can access essential supports such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and dietetics closer to home, reducing travel time and barriers to care, making it easier for individuals and families to receive timely, ongoing support.

The service expansion follows the recent merger of Nexus Primary Health and Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health, bringing together two long-standing not-for-profit healthcare providers. The NDIS registered, and Rainbow Tick accredited organisation, now covers communities across the Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Mitchell and Macedon Ranges Shires.

Services are available to adults and children with NDIS funding and no referral is required.

David Wild, CEO at Omnia Community Health, said that despite having a new name and brand, the organisation continues to build on 50 years’ of experience delivering community-based health services across rural and regional Victoria.

“While our name has changed, our commitment to local communities has not. By combining the strengths and history of both organisations, we are able to continue delivering high-quality, accessible health services that support people to live well in their own communities. Our staff are passionate about supporting local families, and improving the lives of local people remains at the centre of everything we do.”

The multidisciplinary clinical teams at Omnia can support children experiencing developmental, learning or participation challenges, working alongside families and early childhood educators and schools to help children thrive at home, in early learning settings and in the classroom.

The teams also provide support for adults with NDIS funding, offering services such as podiatry, physiotherapy and exercise physiology to assist with mobility, independence and overall wellbeing.

“As well as taking enquiries from families,” Mr Wild said. “We also welcome contact from educators or other support staff who would like to discuss options available for those they are working with.”

If you want to find out more, call the NDIS intake team at Omnia on 1300 773352 or email ndis@omniach.org.au

Church Services

ST PETER’S MEMORIAL ANGLICAN CHURCH

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

ST LUKE’S ANGLICAN CHURCH OF YEA

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

CATHOLIC PARISHES OF ALEXANDRA AND YEA

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

CATHOLIC PARISH OF KINGLAKE

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

SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, YEA

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

UNITING CHURCH

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



The underside of the bridge at Kanumbra. -S



The underside of the culvert. -S



A surface view of the culvert. -S



The bridge at Kanumbra provides an example of the damage caused by the January 2026 fires, and why the rail trail remains closed in many locations. -S

Great Victorian Rail Trail remains closed for community safety

MURRINDINDI Shire Council is reminding the community that while some closed sections of the Great Victorian Rail Trail may appear safe, significant risks remain. Residents and visitors are urged to respect closure signage and safety barriers.

Ongoing inspections following the January 2026 bushfires have revealed extensive damage across multiple sections of the trail. Some bridges and culverts that appear intact from above have severely weakened or missing supports underneath, with several at risk of collapse. Fire-damaged trees also remain along the trail and may fall without warning until arborists can safely complete necessary works.

Given the scale of the fire and the number of impacted assets, council is continuing detailed asset and environmental inspections to determine the full extent of the damage. To date, 27 bridges and major culverts along the trail have been inspected, with three bridges identified for full replacement and at least seven sustaining significant damage. These figures may increase as assessments continue.

The Great Victorian Rail Trail is a key tourism asset in Victoria’s High Country,

attracting around 150,000 users each year and contributing an estimated \$17.5m to the regional economy. An extended closure is expected to have flow-on impacts for local businesses and communities across the region. The scale of damage also highlights the need for external funding support to restore this critical regional asset, particularly as the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements exclude the trail.

Council is seeking funding to implement a comprehensive recovery program for this much loved and treasured asset. The scale of impact is well beyond a small rural shire to address alone. Council has made multiple submissions to government regarding the financial sustainability of small rural shires with dispersed communities and high visitation.

The detailed assessments are required to inform the rebuilding program, and this is already underway. Council is also working closely with partner councils and the Victorian Government to clarify funding options for repair and restoration.

Currently, around 60 km of the trail is open to the public, including: Tallarook through to the far side of the Cheviot Tunnel (with the tunnel open); Mansfield

to Merton; Alexandra trailhead to Maintongoon Road.

The central section of the trail, spanning approximately 70 kilometres, remains closed. This includes areas through Cheviot, Molesworth, Cathkin, Koriella, Yark and Kanumbra, as well as the Cathkin to Alexandra spur line.

Safety remains council’s highest priority, and the trail will not fully reopen until all identified risks have been addressed. For the most up-to-date information on closures and access, visit greatvictorianrailtrail.com.au

Mayor Damien Gallagher thanked the community for its patience and understanding.

“The Great Victorian Rail Trail is a much-loved attraction for our region, and we know how important it is for both locals and visitors,” Cr Gallagher said.

“While safety must come first as we work through these assessments, Murrindindi is very much open. Our towns, villages and natural landscapes are ready to welcome visitors, we simply ask that everyone respects the trail closures until it is safe to reopen.”

Out&About

THE items in Out and About are sourced from our current advertising. Out and About is **not** a free community listing diary. Not all items can be included and are placed at the discretion of Alexandra Newspapers.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

Alexandra Bushfire Relief Rodeo. Women’s ranch, bronc riding, saddle bronc and much more. Food, rides, clothing sales, live music. Tickets online at Trybooking. Full details contact Andrew Embling 0418 266 038 or visit alexandrarodeo.com.au

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

Epic book sale Eildon is on at the Eildon Community Centre, Saturday 9am-6pm and Sunday 9am-2pm. Free entry. Fiction, non-fiction, and much more.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

Friends of Library Alexandra AGM will be held at 6pm at the Alexandra Library. New members welcome, full details from proctor@virtual.net.au

WHAT'S ON?

Veteran solidarity shines after bushfire devastation

WHEN Vietnam War veteran Jeff Swain lost his home to the Victorian bushfires earlier this year, it was the veteran community that helped him find stability and a new place to call home.

Jeff's home in Highlands was destroyed by fire on January 9, 2026, leaving Jeff and his loyal dog Geordie homeless in the blink of an eye. When Vasey RSL Care became aware of his situation, the organisation moved quickly, offering Jeff a permanent home at its newly

completed Ex-Service Accommodation site in Bundoora.

Completed in late December 2025, the Bundoora development includes 20 new single-storey affordable housing units designed to meet growing demand for secure, long-term housing for veterans. Jeff and Geordie have now settled into one of those homes, marking a fresh start after an incredibly challenging beginning to the year.

For Jeff, the loss was confronting and brought back memories of earlier bushfire threats. During the 2006 Victorian bushfires, his Highlands home narrowly escaped destruction, an experience that never left him.

"Bushfires remind you how quickly everything can change," Mr Swain said.

"One moment you're at home, the next you're starting again. What makes the difference is knowing there are people and organisations who step in and help."

Despite losing his home, Jeff remains grounded and optimistic.

"At the end of the day, they're just possessions," he said.

"Geordie and I are safe, and now we have a secure place to live again. Having stability makes it easier to stay positive and move forward."

Vasey RSL Care Chief Executive Officer Janna Voloshin said providing safe and secure housing in times of crisis is central to the organisation's mission.

"At Vasey RSL Care, we exist to serve those who served," Ms Voloshin said.

"When veterans experience hardship, whether through bushfires, housing stress or other crises, our focus is on offering practical support that helps them recover and rebuild.

"Secure housing is fundamental to recovery and wellbeing. We are proud to provide Jeff with a permanent home after such a significant loss, and to ensure he and Geordie have not just a roof over their heads, but a supportive community around them."

Jeff also acknowledged the broader support he received in the immediate aftermath of the fires, with the Highlands Caravan Park providing emergency accommodation, and assistance flowing in from Middle Kinglake Primary School, the Vietnam Veterans Association (Goulburn Valley and Diamond Valley), the Defence Force Welfare Association, RSL Victoria, Seymour RSL, Frankston RSL, Seaford RSL, Box Hill RSL, Kilmore RSL and his own RSL Sub-Branch, Yea-Kinglake.

Now settled into his new home, Jeff says the experience has reinforced his belief in the importance of community and the value of organisations that step up when it matters most.

Vasey RSL Care's Ex-Service Accommodation program provides affordable, secure, long-term housing to veterans and their families across Victoria.



Georgina and Emma (Vasey RSL Care Veteran Services staff), Jeff (new Bundoora resident), Bob (President, Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia) Chris (Vasey RSL Care Executive General Manager Veteran Services) and superstar pup Geordie. -S

Are you looking for NDIS funded health services?



- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Dietetics
- Diabetes Education
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Victoria Police's response to the Crime Statistics Agency data

THERE were 630,592 criminal offences recorded in Victoria last year, an increase of 25,250 offences or 4.2 per cent.

The crime rate, which factors in population growth, rose by 2.4 per cent (8,885.5 offences per 100,000 people).

Victoria Police analysis suggests positive signs are beginning to emerge, with overall crime starting to stabilise after several years of sharp increases.

However, the same analysis forecasts any major reduction in overall crime is unlikely to be imminent, given ongoing issues such as the cost of living, recidivism, and the increased use of technology in offending.

For example, theft from motor vehicle, theft of motor vehicle, retail theft, and theft other currently account for a third of all criminal offending. With the challenging financial environment, there are no indications these crimes, which heavily impact the overall crime rate, will reduce.

Victoria Police arrested 26,645 people a total of 78,014 times last year, with a more focussed approach directed towards those committing serious and violent crimes.

This included the arrest of four youth gang members each day, the seizure of a record 17,400 knives and machetes, and record family violence arrests that saw one offender arrested every half hour.

Victoria Police is also undertaking significant organisational change to increase the amount of time police officers are spending in the community preventing crime in the first place. This includes releasing officers from administrative duties such as staffing reception counters, as well as enhancing the technology supporting police.

Over the past year, Victoria Police commenced enhancing the use of body worn cameras, with interviews now able to be conducted at the arrest location in the community, rather than the time-consuming process of conveying offenders to police stations. A new mobile app will also start to be used by frontline police in the middle of this year, allowing officers to charge and bail lower-level offenders at the point of detection, rather than in a police station. It's estimated the new process, which is set to be rolled out statewide from September, will save more than three hours of police time on each occasion or the equivalent of 53,000 policing hours per year.

This initiative is one of many that Victoria Police continues to progress, to deploy police officers where they are needed, in the right place at the right time within the community, deterring criminal behaviour and preventing crime.

KEY CRIME THEMES *Car theft*

Car theft has reached its highest levels in a calendar year since 2001, with over 32,000 cars stolen last year.

The number of cars being stolen has escalated markedly over the past three years, rising by 96.9 per cent.

This has directly coincided with a surge in car thieves using key mimicking or cloning technology to override car security systems, with Victoria Police intelligence suggesting between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of all cars are now stolen in this manner.

Last year, police seized around 800 of these devices during search warrants where offenders were set to be charged for stealing vehicles or when suspicious cars were intercepted.

Intelligence indicates the most stolen vehicles using key cloning devices include Holden Commodores, Toyotas (Land Cruiser, Corolla, Hilux, Rav4) and Subaru Imprezas.

Police urge owners of these vehicles to look at a range of preventative measures to help deter thieves, including an on-board diagnostic port lock, parking your car off the street, and locking all doors and windows.

Retail theft

There were 41,547 retail theft offences last year, an increase of 2393 offences or 6.1 per cent.

In December, Victoria Police launched a major operation deploying officers and PSOs to Melbourne's biggest shopping centres, following rising shop theft, anti-social behaviour, and aggression towards retailers.

As part of Operation Pulse, police have arrested almost 710 people and laid over 1450 charges for crimes committed at Eastland, Fountain Gate, Highpoint, Northland, Bayside, Werribee, Southland or Watergardens.

Those arrested include prolific shop lifters, offenders carrying weapons, and criminals in stolen cars in shopping centre carparks.

The operation, which has been extended until the end of 2026, has also proved instrumental in preventing crime, including planned fights between youth gangs in shopping centre food courts and surrounding public transport hubs.

Home burglaries

Aggravated home burglaries reduced for the first time since 2020, falling by 4.1 per cent (7151 offences, down from 7458).

While this is positive, aggravated burglaries remain at the second highest levels in history, with significant ongoing police work required to achieve sustainable reductions in home break-ins.

Operation Trinity, which is Victoria Police's largest operation targeting home burglaries, has a strong focus on preventing break-ins in the first place.

Each night across Melbourne, suspect cars are pulled over, known suburban hotspots are patrolled, and offender homes are monitored as part of this operation.

When burglaries can't be prevented, swift enforcement occurs. Trinity led to the arrest of 612 burglars a combined 1436 times last year.

Child offending

Overall offences committed by child offenders increased (23,690 offender incidents, up 2.3 per cent).

During this reporting period, Victoria Police arrested 1223 children a combined 6997 times.

Children committed 57.6 per cent of carjackings, 52.6 per cent of home invasions, 47.8 per cent of aggravated burglaries and 62.4 per cent of robberies.

Youth gang members are most commonly responsible for these crimes, with Victoria Police making 1480 gang related arrests and laying 4300 charges last year as part of Operation Alliance.

In addition to arrests, Victoria Police continues to work with key stakeholders across a range of sectors including education, employment, health, and corrections to prevent young people from becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system.

Deputy Commissioner Regional Operations Bob Hill commented, "While it's heartening that crime appears to be stabilising, it will take time before offending reduces to levels more traditionally seen in Victoria.

"With 230,213 different victims of crime, we are seeing far too many innocent community members harmed.

"This is simply not acceptable as we want Victorians to not only be safe but feel safe in their community.

"Our officers are remarkably efficient at holding prolific and dangerous offenders accountable, with thousands of youth gang arrests, record knife seizures, and family violence offenders locked up every half hour.

"This has occurred at a time when Victoria Police has also dedicated significant resources towards managing rolling major protests, bushfires, floods, and regular major events.

"We are also in the process of rolling out significant organisational changes that are geared towards having more police in the community preventing crime.

"This includes transferring administrative duties performed by officers to non-sworn staff, as well as delivering technological advancements that allow police to conduct everyday tasks, such as interviewing and charging offenders, while on the road."

McLeish expresses concern over crime data

MEMBER for Eildon Cindy McLeish said that Victorians are less safe than ever before, saying new data confirms criminal offending has reached a new all-time high under Labor.

Independent Crime Statistics Agency data shows that over the 12 months to December 2025 a total of 630,592 crimes were committed, the equivalent of one crime every 50 seconds.

Ms McLeish said that since becoming Premier, Jacinta Allan has overseen 1500 vacancies on police rosters and weaker bail laws than what they were in 2023.

She added that across Murrindindi Shire, overall crime has risen by 38.5 per cent. While overall offence numbers are considerably lower than in municipalities in the outer metropolitan area, there is still cause for concern.

Breach of Family violence intervention order topped the offence list. Motor vehicle theft and theft from a motor vehicle is up 61 per cent, while prohibited and controlled weapons offences, including those involving machetes, have increased by 54 per cent.

Yea and Alexandra are the hotspots recording twice as many offences as Kinglake or Eildon.

State Member for Eildon, Cindy McLeish said, "The data shows that what residents tell me, they feel relatively safe, but remain concerned about the trend of rising crime in other parts of Victoria. People see horrendous and scary footage and worry about their family and friends and even travelling to the city. This should not be the case. The increase in breaches of family violence intervention orders is deeply troubling."

286,329 crimes remain unsolved, almost half of all recorded offences and a 15 per cent increase over the past year.

In May 2025, the Victorian Government reduced funding by almost \$50 million to Victoria Police as net debt continues to grow by \$1.7 million an hour and is expected to reach a record \$192.6 billion by 2028-29.

Leader of the Opposition, Jess Wilson, said, "Labor has created Victoria's crime crisis. Victorians have never felt less safe. I will make sure our bail and sentencing laws reflect community expectations; if you commit a crime, you will face consequences. If you break bail, you will face jail."

The importance of staying connected

WARREN Davies, The Unbreakable Farmer, has been active in Murrindindi Shire and beyond from the early post-fire recovery stages. He was asked what he has been hearing from people and what he has learnt along the way.

He commented, “I think the thing that I’ve learned is that the power of community, particularly in the regions, with the community hubs standing up and supporting their community. That’s a real positive. It’s something that’s a little bit different to some of the other disasters that I’ve worked in, how that initial response was stood up by the community.

“When you look at communities like Highlands and Terip and Ruffy and Fawcett and Yarck, the ones that have all stood up community hubs, that’s been a real positive to the recovery. That’s something that I’ve noticed that’s been a little bit different to some of the other disasters that I’ve worked in.

“Moving out of that response into a recovery phase and now, two months out, some of the energy is waning in the community. A big rush of adrenaline and the support and all that, now things are just slowly starting to get back to whatever normal looks like.

“One of the worrying signs is, I actually wrote a post about it the other day where a lot of people are commenting on Facebook to some of my posts, and it’s really late at night. So there’s people out there that have probably got a lot on their mind. There’s a lot to deal with. And the other thing that’s noticeable as well at this stage of the recovery is the gaps broadening between the haves and the have-nots, if that’s the best way to describe it. In that initial phase, everyone was in the same boat and the impact and the shock and all that, everyone was kind of in the same boat.

“But now, as everyone’s starting to navigate their journey, things are stretching out a bit where people have accessed insurance and they’re moving ahead, some are yet to have blocks cleaned up or fences done, and some are just struggling because they’re under or uninsured and trying to navigate the system. There’s been a lot of support around that, but once again, probably a little bit different to other recoveries because, I suppose, without being critical, the position that the government’s in, as far as funding, and some of the support services have had major budgetary cuts, so they haven’t got as many people on the ground. So that’s where there’s been a real reliance on those community hubs.”

He agreed that some of the smaller hobby farmers that earn money from other professions have been missing out in terms of their financial supports.

“Obviously, and then the impact to business as well, through some of what was the peak time for their tourism or for trade and were impacted by the roadblocks and for obvious reasons, but there’s also that impact, so that they can access some support, but some of that is hard to navigate as well and trying to justify your position sometimes can be really frustrating,” he said.

Asked what recommendations he has for people and what he would have liked see put in place in terms of supports, Warren said,

“The services that are on the ground are doing a great job with the resources that they’ve got, but probably a little bit more action and support coming from federal and state government, which is probably comparing apples with apples and disaster with disaster, has probably been lacking in this one as well. And probably the underestimation by those services of the impact to the agricultural sector from right across the fire ground has been something that’s been underestimated too, and that impact to livelihoods and incomes, etcetera.”

He said that for people who have been impacted, “One of the most important things as we move into this phase of the recovery is to make sure you’re staying connected and communicating, particularly if you’re struggling. Make sure you’re staying connected to your community or to your support network and make sure that you’re letting people know how you’re travelling. Because if we isolate ourselves and we don’t talk about this stuff, then it’s very hard for people, particularly when they’re probably dealing with their own clean up and recovery to identify that you are struggling.

“My concern is that as people isolate themselves back to their farms, as the weather changes, etcetera, that people will start slipping through the cracks. I think it’s really important that, as individuals and as a community, we really have to be vigilant and try our hardest to stay connected and keep communicating and identifying those people who may not be attending events or you haven’t seen them in town for a week or so, or whatever that is, just identifying those behaviours and making sure that we’re checking in or getting someone to at least check in with them and making sure they’re travelling okay, because those little simple conversations can save lives.”

Given that so many people have been impacted, there are people in the same boat who will understand what others are going through.

“That’s really important... In that first initial response phase the communities were really connected, as that drops off a little bit, people can start thinking, I’m the only one going through this. In my own story, I thought I was the only one going through things, until you start talking about it, and then you can start relating with people. One of the powerful things from staying connected to your community is shared wisdom, because your neighbour might have been able to access something that you haven’t even heard of yet. And just by having that conversation, you realise, well, maybe I need to give those people a ring or that organisation a ring to see if they can support me as well.”

The current fuel crisis is exacerbating the situation for some as well. Warren commented, “I think all these things are just compounding layers of the challenges that we face, particularly living in rural and regional communities. On top of the fire, these things can cause problems and cause stress and worry, and they can be, as the saying goes, the straw that breaks the camel’s back as well. You might have been dealing with things really well and then this has come



Warren Davies, The Unbreakable Farmer. -S

along, which has added another layer as well. It could be impacting your enterprise, your business, and your ability to travel or stay connected. That can create another whole range of challenges as well.”

Warren spent a lot of time on the Murrindindi Health Van in the early recovery stages following the fire, and the van is still very active with different health professionals using it to reach different communities.

He said of the van, “It’s hard to put into words how valuable an asset the Murrindindi Health Van has been to the community. Who would have thought that a couple of days after the launch, it would be straight into action and being utilised for one of the reasons that it was implemented, so strongly supporting the community. It has been amazing.”

The van is an Alexandra Events initiative funded by local community groups, individuals, and Jayco Australia. Over \$114,000 was raised for the project at the Alexandra Truck Ute and Rod Show weekend in June of 2025.

Warren was keen to reiterate the importance of “community and connection and conversation. People are struggling out there. We need to have the courage to, one, stick our hand up and ask for help. It doesn’t matter how much we talk about that, it’s still a challenge for particularly rural and regional people to ask for help and understand that it doesn’t matter how big or small your challenge is. It doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ve had to have lost your house or lost everything to be facing a challenge. It doesn’t matter how big or small that challenge is, if you are struggling or your mental health and wellbeing is being challenged by the event, that do ask for help and communicate that. That’s really important. We do that through communication and connection because it’s

vitaly important, particularly in this stage, as we’re moving into a change of seasons, getting further away from when the fire actually happened. People will slip through the cracks. Have that courage to ask for help, but also have the courage to reach out and check in on your neighbours and your family and friends to see that they’re doing okay.

“You never know, you can’t assume, and by just having that conversation it could open up a conversation that could lead that person to seek help.”

There’s also no timeline on recovery either. Warren said, “That’s something that’s another concerning point, particularly for those who are navigating the journey fairly well. History tells us that this is still going to be a two plus year recovery phase. You might be ahead of the timeline at the moment, but you might also encounter some roadblocks along the way that will slow that up, and be prepared for that as well. You might have been able to navigate your recovery journey fairly well so far, but at the same time, there are going to be some hurdles that are going to stretch that out as well.

“It’s really important to understand that this is a long-term recovery. It’s not going to be a short fix. Even though the colours are changing in the landscape a little bit, that doesn’t necessarily mean there’s going to be feed on the ground if the weather turns cold. There’s going to be a range of problems, whether that’s stock coming back or lack of feed, or there is no more hay coming into the town and how do you feed animals for the rural people. There’s going to be a lot of range of challenges that we’ve got to be prepared for and probably build some capacity in our toolbox to be able to withstand those and navigate them when they come along,” he said.

How many people received Personal Hardship Assistance Program grants?

THE Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) was asked how many Personal Hardship Assistance Program grants were provided to people impacted by the January 2026 fires, as well as the Longwood fires specifically.

January 2026 fires

As at 5pm on March 17, the DFFH has paid 10,437 emergency relief payments totalling \$12,118,790.

They have also paid re-establishment assistance to 35 households totalling \$1,052,298.

Longwood fires

As at 5pm on March 17, DHHS has paid 6031 emergency relief payments applications totalling \$6,905,670 across the four councils directly impacted by the Longwood fire (Strathbogie, Murrindindi, Mitchell and Mansfield).

Inthesametimeperiod,DHHShaspaidseven re-establishment assistance applications totalling \$219,900 to households in the four councils directly impacted by the Longwood fire.

To find out more about these grants, call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760.

Nominate an unsung hero in your community

VICTORIA’S dedicated volunteers and the organisations they power deserve to be recognised.

Minister Spence is calling on Victorians to nominate the outstanding people and groups making a difference in their community.

“Victoria’s volunteers are the quiet achievers behind so much of what makes our communities strong, these awards are our chance to shine a light on them,” Ms Spence said.

“Whether it’s their time, skills or lived experience, every volunteer brings something unique. The state government is proud to celebrate the people who show up for others.”

Nominations are officially open for the 2026 Victorian Volunteering Awards.

The awards celebrate excellence across eight categories, including: Young Volunteer Award; Volunteer Commitment Award; Volunteer Leadership Award; Volunteer Impact Award; Inclusive Volunteering Award; Volunteering Innovation Awards; Volunteering Partnerships Award; Grassroots Volunteering Award.

The Volunteer of the Year, selected from the individual categories, will receive the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award and a \$10,000 donation to a not-for-profit of their choice.

Last year saw a total of 447 nominations. Nominations close on Wednesday, May 27.

For more information or to nominate visit volunteeringvictoria.org.au/awards

THE Age Discrimination Commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald AM, recently welcomed the release of the *National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026–2036*, describing it as a decisive step toward ending the abuse and mistreatment of older Australians.

“Elder abuse is prevalent and a growing national problem. It is one of the clearest and most harmful expressions of ageism, with significant social, legal, and economic implications,” Commissioner Fitzgerald said.

“Every older Australian has the fundamental right to live free from abuse, neglect and exploitation. This plan sets out the priority actions needed over the decade ahead to uphold that right. These include stronger

prevention and early intervention, improved community awareness, culturally safe and accessible support pathways, enhanced data and evidence, a more capable service system, and strengthened legal and policy protections.

“A human rights-based approach for ending abuse and mistreatment is at the heart of the plan, placing dignity, autonomy, equality, safety and participation at the core of every principle, policy and action. It positions the protection and promotion of older people’s rights not only as a moral imperative, but as the necessary pathway to lasting systemic change.

“Critically, the plan includes the recognition of ageism as a driver of abuse, the inclusion of targeted initiatives to address and end ageism,

as well as a new focus on recovery and healing for older people who have experienced abuse,” he said.

The Commissioner also welcomed the plan’s focus on addressing the urgent issue of financial elder abuse.

“Since the last national plan, community awareness of financial elder abuse has increased significantly,” Commissioner Fitzgerald said.

“Financial exploitation is also expected to grow, particularly as Australia undergoes the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in its history and as families face sustained cost of living pressures.”

The Commissioner welcomed the plan’s approach to understanding First Nations experiences, commitment to culturally informed and community-led responses, as well as recognition of the disproportionate risks faced by older women.

following actions for implementation are prioritised: Introduction of adult safeguarding laws and dedicated agencies in all states and territories to protect and safeguard older Australians from abuse; achievement of national consistency in laws governing enduring powers of attorney laws and urgent amendments to the privacy laws to allow the exchange of information where there is risk of harm from financial abuse; formal support by the Australian Government for a binding international Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to strengthen human rights protections for older persons and guide a rights-based approach in Australian laws, policies and systems; strengthened financial support of community legal, advocacy and support services to provide a real increase in capacity to deal with elder abuse victims.

“I look forward to working with government, service providers and communities to ensure lasting progress that safeguards the autonomy and dignity of older people across Australia,” Commissioner Fitzgerald finished.

Kick out pests with a grant

INVASIVE pests threaten farms and communities, and the Victorian Government is helping Victorians farmers protect their land with targeted pest management funding.

The program will help farmers protect their crops, and livestock pasture from invasive pests, and improve the long-term health of their land.

Applicants can apply for grants of between \$10,000 and \$50,000 to deliver projects over a 12 month period.

Farms, bushland and parks support many regional communities and Victoria’s agricultural industry.

The Victorian Government is making sure farmers and other land managers

have the support they need to keep their land healthy and productive.

The government has supported 66 organisations to deliver projects that have helped to get rid of harmful pests.

A webinar will be run on March 27 for prospective applicants to ask questions, learn from previous successful groups and be shown the online application process.

Applications are open until May 11. Total funding available for Round Five of the program is \$600,000.

For more information and to apply visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/protecting-victoria/partnerships-against-pests-program-and-grants/partnerships-against-pests-grants

“Abuse does not occur in a vacuum. It is important that the plan acknowledges diverse experiences and the gendered nature of many forms of abuse, and it will be essential that these realities are reflected in implementation to ensure responses are targeted, effective and equitable,” he said.

“Preventing elder abuse is a collective responsibility, and the opportunity now is to create systems and responses that genuinely uphold the wellbeing of older people.”

The Commissioner stressed the need for strong coordination across governments, services and communities to turn the plan’s commitments into practical action.

Two five-year action plans will follow the plan’s release. Commissioner Fitzgerald is calling on all governments to ensure the

CFA preparedness initiative delivers strong results

VICTORIANS have taken steps to better prepare for fire risk following the inaugural Get Fire Ready initiative delivered by CFA last October with evaluation results showing strong behaviour change and increased community engagement across the state.

Delivered throughout October 2025, CFA brigades hosted events and engaged with their communities on local risk, property preparation, creating fire plans and knowing where to access emergency information before the fire season.

Market research, conducted by EY Sweeney, shows the initiative moved communities beyond awareness and into action with 96 per cent of attendees reporting they had taken or intended to take steps to prepare their property, while 70 per cent said they learned something new.

Post-event surveys also found 91 per cent of attendees surveyed had prepared their property or were likely to do so in the future.

CFA Acting Chief Officer Alen Slijepcevic said these results highlight the impact of early preparedness conversations.

“It shows that when communities understand their local fire risk, they take practical steps to get ready and the outcomes are safer for everyone,” Alen said.

“Preparedness starts well before summer and Get Fire Ready helped thousands of Victorians build confidence and take action to protect themselves and their families.

“This summer we saw firsthand the life-saving impact of early preparedness. Communities didn’t just make fire plans, they enacted them. People left early, stayed informed and made proactive decisions that undoubtedly saved lives.”

More than 530 brigades hosted events across Victoria, with 60 per cent delivered in high fire-risk areas, ensuring preparedness information reached communities most at risk.

The initiative also drove strong digital engagement, including a 70,000 increase in active users of the VicEmergency app between September and October 2025, alongside a 300 per cent increase in visits to information about setting watch zones in the app.

While the results were statewide, the program’s success was driven by local volunteers connecting directly with their communities through open days, pop-ups and information sessions.

“Our volunteers are trusted members of their communities, and those face-to-face conversations are what turn information into action,” Alen said.

Following the strong outcomes achieved in 2025, CFA plans to deliver Get Fire Ready again in October 2026, continuing to build community preparedness across Victoria.

The wonderful impact of The Recovery Wardrobe

MENZIES Support Services was quick to spring into action following January’s Longwood fire, setting up a pop-up shop, The Recovery Wardrobe, where fire-impacted people could come in and collect free clothes and shoes.

Two months to the day after the shop opened, it closed on Friday, March 20, having achieved so much in such a short amount of time. The scale of their impact is almost impossible to quantify.

Providing clothes for free to the people impacted by the fire was so important, as people needed clothes fast, particularly clothes and boots for working in. The community was so generous, providing what they could.

Kellie said, “The reason why I aligned with the clothing side was because of The Dame. We’ve got The Dame social enterprise and we already do clothes, so when we were thinking about how can Menzies help, it aligned with what we already do in the community, so we were staying in our lane, I thought.”

They started to get a few donations and quickly outgrew their office in Nihil Street. They quickly needed to find a larger location. Fortunately, they were able to track down the owner of the shop at 75 Grant Street. The owner, Maree Robb, kindly provided free rent for the pop-up shop and Menzies were also delighted that their insurer, Gallagher’s Insurance, provided free public liability insurance to them.

When they first opened in the Grant Street store, the whole side room was filled with shoes and now there’s only a tiny rack left. The area out the back was full of clothes as well, and now most of it is gone.

Kelly commented, “We couldn’t have done this without the generosity of the community and the generosity of the volunteers.”

It was thanks to the volunteers that they were able to open the shop seven days each week to help people out. Kellie said that 99.9 per cent of the time, the shop was staffed by members of the community who wanted to help. “Everyone wanted to do something,



Betty, Cheryl and Kellie. -AR

Their heart goes out to the people that have been so significantly impacted,” Kellie said.

Menzies were also aligned with the community hubs. Someone from a hub would get in contact and ask for specific items and these would be packaged up and taken over. This was particularly helpful as they were items which were requested and were right for the recovery stage. “Sometimes you don’t need the stuff that people think that you need,” Kellie said.

Being in such a frontline role, a lot of sensitivity was certainly needed. Kellie said “Just to hear how all of our people in here reacted to and supported those people. There’s been tears of absolute desperation, anger and sadness and then joy and everything in between in here. It’s been, you know, just remarkable.”

She was also keen to support those who have been supporting the people impacted by the fire. “Blaze Aid got wind of us. We couldn’t be more thankful to Blaze Aid in the community, so we’ve encouraged them to take work items... Blaze Aid have been a really big advocate of ours too.”

The store became inundated with donated clothes about a month after opening, so they

started telling people that they were only taking work clothes and work boots.

Given that they had too many clothes, they decided that anyone at all could walk in and take some items home in exchange for a donation to Foundation Murrindindi.

In addition to the thousands of items which have been provided to fire-impacted people, and their donations to Foundation Murrindindi are currently standing at \$5200 with more to come.

With the store now closing, the remaining items will be taken by a clothing recycler and by The Dame, as the opportunity shops have also been provided with a large amount of clothing post-fire. The aim is for the clothing to be kept out of landfill. Kellie explained that the Menzies ethos is to reuse and recycle.

Kellie added, “Two months isn’t enough, and we’ve still got The Dame. People are still fire affected, and we’re aware of that. We can certainly offer the same service at The Dame, so that opportunity will continue, for as long as the community needs it, but as far as The Recovery Wardrobe, it’s time.”

She also commented, “I’m pretty proud of little Menzies, of what we’ve been able to pull together in a pretty short time to be honest.”



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KID'S PUZZLES PUZZLES

SOLUTIONS
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Colouring Page



Word Search - Words starting with "H"

HAIRY	E R H A H D N E M Q Y P P A H
HAMMER	S E A I A U H R S R B H H T C
HANDY	U M O E P E M X I R A G I U W
HAPPY	O M H Y L P V A O A O Z V A D
HEAD	H A H P X Z O J N P I H W Q A
HELICOPTER	C H F J R E T P O C I L E H O
HELPFUL	T U Z S Z T A E O R P T N A E
HIPPOPOTAMUS	L J N X E Q G Q R T A B Y D I
HOLIDAY	I L A B I J X O I H A A F M O
HORSE	U S J O X H T G V I D M C M B
HOTDOG	I F V N S U Y R O I F P U Q E
HOUSE	Y Z O U D N U Q L D R V V S L
HUMAN	H A N D Y G K O E A T D D I D
HUNGRY	I G K D N R H L C E N O H W A
	N L Q M U Y H A I R Y N H L A

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.

	+		+		13
-		-		-	
	+		+	9	20
+		-		-	
	-		+	1	6
3		-1		-5	

Jokes

- Q: What do you give a sick lemon?**
A: Lemon-aid.
- Q: What creature is smarter than a talking parrot?**
A: A spelling bee.

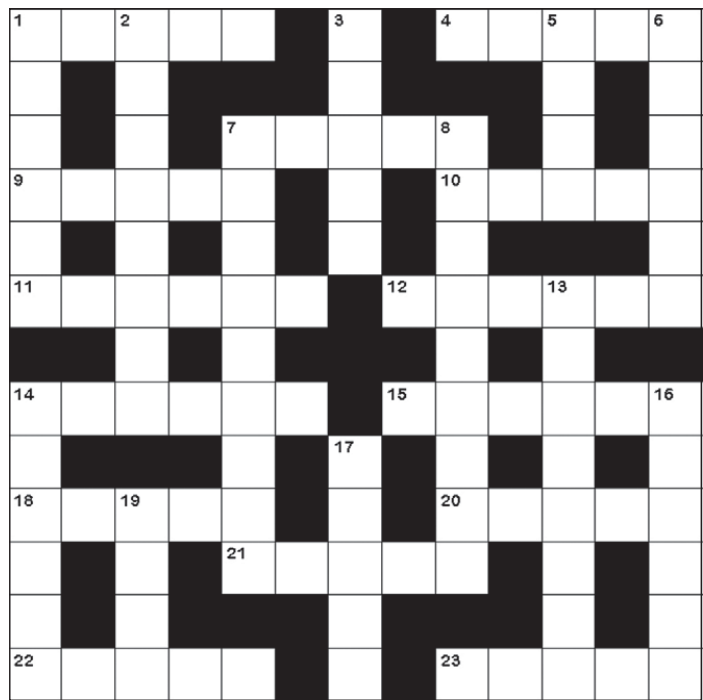
Crossword

ACROSS

- Intimidate and frighten with threats.
- A behaviour that is very hard to give up.
- The part of a garment below the waist.
- The sound made by a horse.
- Incapable of compromise or flexibility.
- Involving death, grief, or destruction.
- Marksman who shoots from a hidden place.
- In a submissive or spiritless manner.
- Parcels of mining land allotted or taken.
- Someone who has committed a crime.
- The flexible part of a whip.
- Thin, shiny coating applied to foods.
- A wanderer who has no fixed home.
- Existing in a wild and untamed state.

DOWN

- A hat tied under the chin with ribbon.
- Float up and be suspended in the air.



- The liquid part of fruits and vegetables.
- An instance of boastful talk or behaviour.
- Material for starting a fire.
- Continuous and piercing high-pitched sound.
- Change from one language into another.
- A person who is in captivity.
- A small, cup-shaped quick bread.
- A prearranged sign conveying information.
- Trades or exchanges one thing for another.
- A machine for weaving yarn into a textile.

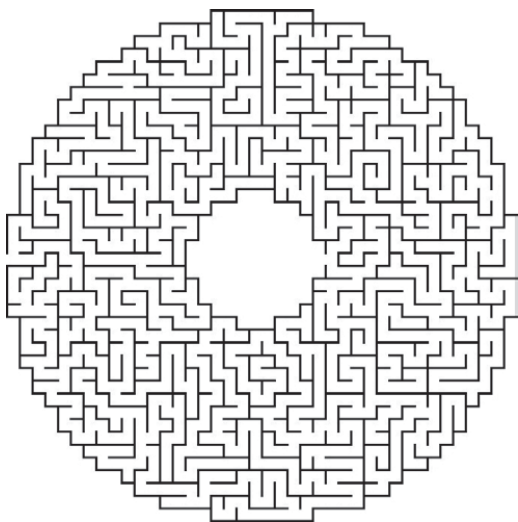
Word Search

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

BASEBALL	PICKLEBALL
BASKETBALL	RUGBY
CRICKET	SKIING
CYCLING	SNOOKER
FOOTBALL	SWIMMING
NETBALL	VOLLEYBALL

Maze



Sudoku

				2	7
		9	2	8	
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	4	3		7	5
9		8			

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.

Math Square

	x		÷		16
-		x		-	
5	-		x		-23
x		+		+	
	-	2	-		-10
3		44		8	

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.

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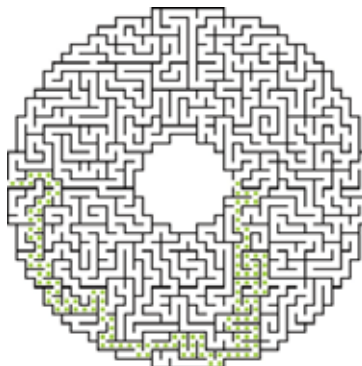
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1	6	5	8	9	2	7	4	3
2	4	3	1	7	5	6	9	8
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MATH SQUARE

8	x	6	÷	3	16
-		x		-	
5	-	7	x	4	-23
x		+		+	
1	-	2	-	9	-10
3		44		8	

MAZE



KIDS - MATH SQUARE

2	+	6	+	5	13
-		-		-	
7	+	4	+	9	20
+		-		-	
8	-	3	+	1	6
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VFF urges commuters to ditch the car to preserve critical farming fuel

VICTORIAN farmers are urging commuters to consider swapping their car for public transport and the government to make public transport free, with the potential fuel savings helping ensure farmers can keep planting, harvesting and producing food as our fuel crisis lingers.

Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) president Brett Hosking said fuel shortages affect rural communities very differently to metropolitan households, where farming operations rely solely on critical fuel to grow their products.

“For most Victorians, a fuel shortage means cancelled plans, longer queues and a tighter weekly budget,” Mr Hosking said.

“For farmers, timing is everything. Farming runs on narrow weather windows, and if the tank is empty at the wrong moment you can’t just wait for prices to settle, you lose the opportunity, and sometimes the entire crop.

“Keeping farmers moving is in everyone’s interest. Victorian farmers grow almost a quarter of Australia’s food and feed millions more across the globe.”

The VFF says small changes in commuting behaviour across Melbourne could make a meaningful difference.

“If just one in five Victorian car commuters shifted to public transport, the fuel saved would be enough to plant

roughly half of Australia’s wheat, barley, canola and lentil crop,” Mr Hosking said.

“A little would go a long way. Even taking one or two trips a week on the train, tram or bus instead of driving can leave more fuel in the system for the jobs that keep supermarket shelves stocked.”

To encourage the switch in commuting behaviour, the VFF is calling on the Victorian Government to: Make public transport free across Victoria until supply stabilises. Fare-free public transport makes it easier for households to choose trains, trams and buses over cars, particularly when living costs are high.

Run more services, more often, especially at peak times. Free transport only works if the system can absorb extra passengers safely and comfortably. Add services, increase frequency and expand capacity.

“When the dust settles, the government needs to take a good hard look at the numerous warnings they’ve ignored that’s left us in this predicament. For now, we’re asking for a helping hand to grow the food and make sure it gets to where it needs to go,” Mr Hosking said.

Those wishing to register their support for farmers can visit vff.org.au/paddock-to-plate-fuel-crisis/ and they will make sure the government knows that Victorians have stepped up during this crisis.

SPORT



Daniel W lines up to drive it down the wall past Jim. -S

Alexandra Squash Club: Round seven of term one pennant

by Kristelle Leary

Monday competition Magpies versus Pelicans

ETHAN versus Tyler: Tyler maintained a slight advantage throughout the match. Despite Ethans efforts, Tyler won every game and the match. 61 to 47.

Randy versus Jess: Jess was able to neutralise Randy’s serve and from there had the upper hand in this contest. Outplaying Randy in the rallies, Jess claimed the match. 72 to 47.

Matt versus Ben F (fill in): Good long rallies with lots of running from both players. Matt kept ahead with a mix of persistence and deep shots. 60 to 52.

John versus Michael H: A great game by both. Michael started well with good shots, but John’s consistency was too strong. 61 to 43.

Crows versus Eagles

Robbie versus Eric: There was great effort put in by both players. Overall, Robbie was too good from start to finish. 75 to 43.

Laura versus Liane (fill in): A tussle from beginning to end. Liane had a slight advantage after two games, but Laura pulled ahead in the third, only for Liane to come back to win in the fourth game by three-points. 62 to 59.

Chris versus Justin: Justin had Chris on the ropes with good shot depth and placement, but Chris has a knack of hanging in there with his defensive game and bringing the contest to the front of the court. Justin pulled away in the end to win by fifteen-points. 74 to 59.

Jim versus Daniel W: Daniel wanted a power game, but Jim wasn’t taking the bait, forcing Daniel to adapt and he did to have a small lead after two games. Jim changed his serve and maintained shot placement to gain the upper hand as Daniel started to make errors. 54 to 44.

Wednesday competition Kenworths versus Freightliners

Matthew versus Jessica/Beth (fill ins): With his opponent absent Matthew played two games against each fill in. Changing his game against each player, Matthew claimed the win by four-points. 56 to 52.

Mick versus Sam: Mick made a flying start and took the first game. Sam fine-tuned the accuracy of his serves and soon Mick found it hard to hit winners. Both players used the side walls well but Sams ability to work angles overworked his opponent and proved decisive. 66 to 45.

Daniel K versus Michael M: It was a one-man show. Despite Michael’s slipping, sliding and jumping he was no match for Daniel’s skill and placement. 73 to 30.

Macks Versus Western Stars

Jessica versus Beth: This was a great game. Both Beth and Jess were quite well matched, but Jess was just a little more consistent with her shots. 61 to 46.

Kristelle versus Daniel L: It was a sibling battle, but with Daniel being bleary eyed and seemingly unable to make contact with the ball, Kristelle held the higher ground. With her serve hitting in all the right places, Kristelle claimed victory. 67 to 49.

SPORT

Celebrating a wonderful Murrindindi Little Athletics season

IT has been a wonderful season for the Murrindindi Little Athletics community, capped off by a fantastic end-of-season presentation held last Friday evening at Rotary Park in Alexandra. Families, athletes and supporters gathered to celebrate a year filled with effort, improvement and achievement.

The evening featured the presentation of the final Personal Best (PB) medallions, recognising the dedication and persistence shown by athletes across the season. Age group champions were also announced, along with outstanding

performers in running, jumping and throwing events.

Age Group Champions

In the Under Six age group, Chloe Cooper and Sonny Munro were recognised for their efforts, while Luke Stoate took out the Under Seven honours.

The Under Eight champions were Chloe Deelen and Sonny Crouch, with Shiloh Clacy and Cohen Pearce awarded in the Under Nine division.

In the Under 10 age group, Hannah Feegan and Maverick Clacy were named champions, followed by

Alisha Abdullah and Jager Feegan in Under 11.

Amelia Kociancic and Athan Woo were recognised in Under 12, while Abi Caswell and Sam Mawson received the honours in Under 13.

Harish Balansag was awarded the Under 14 championship, with Cheyanne Richards and Levi Campbell named Under 15 champions.

Event Champions

Running champions for the season were Chase Hilder and Marli Meert, while Zoe Collier and Ethan Boulton

took out the jumping titles.

In the throwing events, Tate Fraser and Emmy Lou Ackerman were recognised as champions.

Special Awards

The Committee Award was presented to Lachlan McInnes, acknowledging his contribution to the club, while the Encouragement Award went to PJ Smith.

Regional recognition was also given to Levi Campbell and Zoe Collier for their achievements beyond the local level.

A heartfelt thank you from the club was extended to the dedicated committee for their tireless work throughout the season, as well as to the many parents and volunteers who contribute each week particularly on busy Saturday mornings to keep the club running smoothly.

As the season comes to a close, the club wishes all members the very best for upcoming school cross country events and winter sports. The countdown is already on, with excitement building for a return in October for another season of athletics fun, friendship and competition.



Under Eight athletes Sonny, Emerson, Marlo and Ned. -S



Under 10 Maverick Clacy. -S



Under Seven Ned Hedger. -S



Throws champion Tate Fraser. -S



Running champion Marli Meert. -S



Under Six athletes Sam, Tate, Sonny, Flynn and Angus. -S



Under 11 athletes Alisha and Isaac. -S



Levi and Zoe region awards. -S



Under 13 athletes Abbey, Zoe, Ethan and Clay. -S



Under 12 athletes Ryder and Amelia. -S



Jumps champions Ethan Boulton and Zoe Roller. -S



Senior athletes Cate, Charlotte, Cheyanne and Levi. -S



Under Nine athletes Shiloh, Makaylah and Cohen. -S



Under Seven champion Luke Stoate. -S

Yea Bowls Club news

by Angela Finn

THERE has been lots of activity at the Yea Bowls Club over the last couple of weeks. As well as the regular club events, other groups have also been hiring the venue.

Last Wednesday evening, March 18, Sacred Heart Primary School held a social gathering where they self-catered. Bowls club members serviced the bar and provided guidance on the greens. The event was attended by staff, parents and students in ideal settings and

beautiful weather. An enjoyable time was had by all.

Last Saturday, afternoon, March 21, a family group from the Bennettswood Bowls Club and beyond, hired the greens. They organised their own games of bowls, had the TV on the horse racing for those interested, and the bar was open for those enjoying a relaxing drink. This was the second year they have attended and from all reports they will be back again next year. The whole town benefits through accommodation, meals, etcetera, when groups like this come.



Monday Triples winners for March 16, Jeff Green, Leonard Sheahan, and Terry McInnes. -S

Monday Triples

The Wow Barber Monday Triples has been well attended. Last week's winners were Terry McInnes, Jeff Green, Angela Finn and Leonard Sheahan. Runners up were Barb Tanner, Craig Birtchell and Maurie Finn.

Community Challenge

The Nutrien Harcourt Community Challenge has been held on the last three Thursday evenings for anyone interested. The club have had several keen new bowlers taking part, showing significant improvement over the

time, as well as having a very enjoyable time.

This coming Thursday will be the final week for this period. Anyone interested please head along. Starting at 6pm with a sausage sizzle before hitting the bowling green.

Thursday Social Bowls starts at 10am and finish at noon. It is for new and experienced bowlers alike and continues to be well attended. Everyone is most welcome.

Saturday Social Bowls start at 11am. It is just a friendly roll up. New players are most welcome to attend. Club members are happy to teach the finer points of the game.



Monday Triples winners for March 9, Jeremy, Fiona Tanner and Darren Sherman. -S



Joy and Amanda in action at the Community Challenge. -S



Community Challenge winners for March 9, Greg, Sharon and Amanda. -S

Yea Golf Club: Anthony La Grutta hits form

by Alan Pell

LAST Wednesday saw 23 men contest a stableford round with the in-form Anthony La Grutta (16) winning with 38 points on countback from Greg Clements (19). Third was Phil Armstrong (20) with 32 on countback from Bill Dredge (27) fourth, Brian Priestley (25) fifth. Nearest the pin was visitor Michael Luscombe and Rob Gill won the Club Award.

Last Saturday was the Monthly Medal and first round of the Sichlau Trophy. With 30 competitors the winner was again Anthony La Grutta (14) with a fine 81 off the stick nett 67. Zach Pell (11) with nett 68 was second.

Curtis Wentworth (21) returning after several months lay-off was third with nett 70. Jonathan Fisher (10) with 73 fourth and Rick Wills (9) 74 on countback fifth. Nearest the pin was Jonathan Fisher and Zach Pell won the putting with 24 putts. Brian Priestley won the Club award.

Yea ladies' newsletter

On Saturday, March 14 under sunny autumn skies, eight ladies competed in the Saturday stableford competition on offer. Christine Simmons (22) continued her recent form to win the day with an impressive 38 points. Di Elliott (30) took second place on the podium with a very satisfying 37 points, just pipping Jan Wealands (29) on a countback.

On Wednesday, March 18, the Yea Ladies competed for the second round of the Monthly Medal. However, it appears there was no competition for Margie Wright (24) who won the day with an incredible 60.

Although there were some other great scores, such as Miranda Gill (16) coming in second with 72 and Jan Wealands (29) having another good day with a score of 75, no-one came close to Margie.

It might be expected that Margie will be saying "good-bye" to her current handicap imminently. Margie also won the putting

with 27 putts. Congratulations Margie, you played a fantastic game. The club's guest, Narelle, won nearest the pin.

However, some others on the day decided that golf wasn't difficult enough with merely driving, fairway shots, chipping and putting. Di Elliot found another way to make the game of golf even more challenging. The day concluded with lunch generously supplied by Judi and Carolyn. Thank you.

The Phyllis Williams Bowl was held in Seymour on Thursday, March 19 with Vicki Clements, Judi Newman and Christine Simmons representing Yea. The course was heavy and unfortunately the girls didn't take home the trophy this time. Christine had a bit of luck however, winning the lucky draw nearest the pin. The club says thanks for putting up a good show for Yea, ladies.



Miranda Gill, Margie Wright and Narelle Anderson. -S

The Chronicle Sport



Sports Editorial: sports@alexandranewspapers.com.au

Merton cricketers claim victory in WDCA Grand Final

MERTON Cricket Club won their first premiership in the Wangaratta and District Cricket Association (WDCA) B Grade competition, defeating Rovers Bruck United at Wangaratta last Saturday.

A fantastic effort for Merton after finals success in the Seymour competition in 2017 and then going into recess for three seasons before reforming and building to a premiership victory in the Wangaratta league.

Merton won the toss and batted making 5/168 the opening pair of Luke Benton 40 and Murray Sutton 43 setting up the victory for the Merton side. Luke Berriman 31 not out, Jai Lerch-Mackinnon 21 and Jarrod Mahoney 13 not out the top performers for Merton. Jerrimy Ackroyd and his son both taking two wickets apiece.

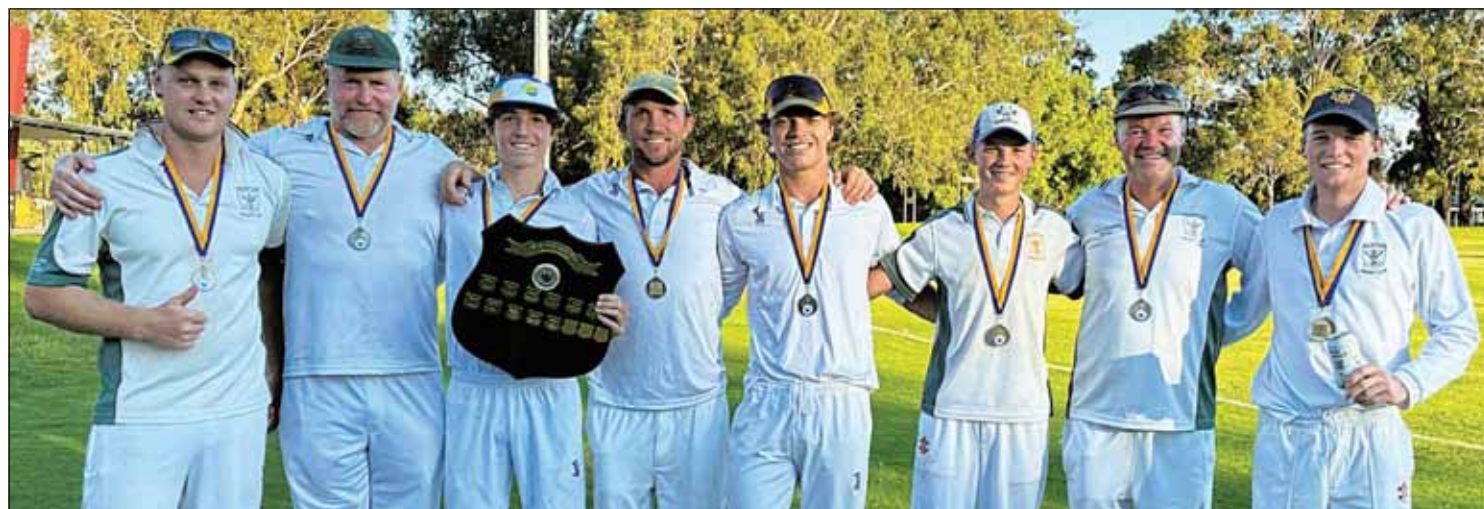
Merton had a dream start when Jai Lerch-Mackinnon dismissed Garry Elliot with the very first ball off the innings brilliantly caught by Murray in the gully. Rovers in big trouble at 4/46 steadied lead by top scorer Jerrimy Ackroyd 63 to 5/105 however with a rising run rate and top bowling Rovers could not find any momentum and finished their 36 overs on 8/131.

Luke Berriman 2/26, Lerch-Mackinnon 2/19, and Sutton 2/14 the top wicket takers with Henry and Rohan Berriman the other wicket takers. Merton taking out the Ken Stewart Shield for the first time and taking their unbeaten streak to 12 games, a fantastic effort.

Luke Berriman won player of the match as voted by the umpires. A victory well deserved for the tiny community after the many challenges this summer with the fires in January. Celebrations continued well into the night after the game at the Merton Cricket Ground (MCG).



The Merton Cricket Club players took victory against Rovers Bruck United in Wangaratta last Saturday, winning their first Grand Final in the WDCA league. -S



Some of the family groupings of the Merton Cricket Club. Pictured are Jai and Ross Mackinnon, William, Luke and James Benton, and Henry, Rohan and Luke Berriman. -S



KBA coach Sue offering some advice at a time-out. -S



Young athletes enjoying their time playing basketball. -S

Kinglake basketball on a roll as season develops

IT was a whirlwind week at the Kinglake Basketball Association (KBA), with the hardwood floor barely getting a moment to cool down between whistles. From the youngest recruits to seasoned juniors, the Kinglake Basketball Association is growing.

The standout highlight of the week was undoubtedly the under 14 division matchup. The game was played with incredible speed, and both teams were impressive. What was most impressive, however, wasn't

just the speed, but the quality of skills on display. There were precision chest passes, advanced ball-handling to navigate tight defensive presses, and remarkable calm when shooting. The growth in these players over the last few months is a testament to their hard work and the coaches' dedication.

Both coaches were full of praise for their players throughout the game, with great instruction both in the breaks and on the court. If this game was any indication, the

future of Kinglake's representative teams is in very capable hands.

While the under 14s provided the thrills, the Mini Ball program is providing the heartbeat of the association. It is officially taking off, and it is great to watch the youngest players take to the court each week.

The association are seeing remarkable development in their foundational skills. The "smile factor" is at an all-time high

as they land their first baskets and gain confidence with every drill. Watching these mini athletes develop their love for the game is exactly why they do what they do.

Heading into the next week, the club want to thank the referees. Thank you also to the parents, who cheerfully yell out and cheer, not only for the team their child plays on, but for the opposition too. Without your support, these fast-paced games and developmental programs wouldn't be possible.