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Michelle Young (Bairnsdale) Treasurer
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John Fallon (Sunrise)
Bernie Farquhar (Mitchell River)
Don Osbourne (Orbost)
Peter Sindrey (Lakes Entrance)
Martin van Elst (Bairnsdale)

"If you're planning on visiting East Gippsland today or Monday, don't do it. If you're already visiting East Gippsland, you need to leave the area today.

"It is not possible to provide support and aid to all the visitors currently in the East Gippsland region, and if the Princes Highway is impacted, you may not be able to leave for some time. If you live in East Gippsland, you need to move to safer locations."

Who could forget that urgent waring issued by Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp to East Gippsland on Sunday 29 December 2019? A fire season that was already one of the worst experienced in the outer regions of East Gippsland had suddenly become real for residents of the larger, more insulated towns.

With 3 significant fires burning in East Gippsland forests near Bruthen, Buchan and Bonang, emergency services were saying it was likely these fires will grow in size on Monday 30 December 2019, with a high possibility of these fires combining into a "mega blaze", impacting communities and potentially crossing the Princes Highway with potential consequences catastrophic.

This was front page news not only in eastern Victoria, but across the state, nation and the globe.

# The Beginning

In the midst of those first few days over New Year, President Elect of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Martin van Elst, felt that the response required by those affected would far surpass the ability of any individual Rotary Club. Only a committed and combined group effort by all Rotary clubs in our East Gippsland Cluster would be able to provide assistance on the scale to match the devastation.

Making contact with all Presidents in the cluster and East Gippsland AG Anne Cross, Martin asked for all Rotary Clubs to join together and co-ordinate whatever assistance is needed as a cohesive group. With President Bernie Farquhar from the Rotary Club of Mitchell River (Bairnsdale) keen to get something going, the result was a meeting with all interested Rotarians at the home of Anne Cross on Wednesday 1 January 2020.

All members of our club were invited with President Patricia Murray-Walton, Martin van Elst, Gillian Reeve, Tony Murray, Noel & Rhonda Wheeldon, and Margaret McFarlane attending to show support. D820 DG Adrian Froggatt and D9820 Disaster Relief Chair & PDG Janne Spiers made the trip to Bairnsdale to add Districts help.

Everyone was of the same mind, to give aid to the fire affected areas using our vast network of Rotarians. With Noel Wheeldon's in attendance, his knowledge of the Alpine Fires in 2009 was instrumental, passing on information about how the Clubs in town were able to 'get assistance 'on the ground' quickly. D9820 Disaster Relief Chair & PDG Janne Spiers also passed on her experience of the Latrobe Valley Fires in 2014.

A committee was formed on the day from members of clubs present, with ideas on how to assist the region starting to come together from the knowledge and experience of Noel Wheeldon and Janne Spiers. Rotary Clubs of Orbost and Lakes Entrance were unable to attend due to the bushfires having already cut off the roads to those towns.

A name was chosen that truly reflected the combined effort, East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid. A central email was setup to reflect this naming, eastgrotaryfireaid@gmail.com, by D9820 IT expert Gillian Reeve. Branding followed closely behind in an easily identifiable logo as designed by staff at Yeates Media as organised by Bob Yeates of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise.

As the only club in the East Gippsland Cluster to already have the necessary infrastructure, ability and contacts to implement immediate assistance, the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale were able to provide a template for the other clubs to follow. In areas that Rotary Club of Bairnsdale didn't already have contacts, President of Rotary club of Mitchell River (Bairnsdale) Bernie Farquhar did, such as in fencing and contacts within the trades industry, along the requisite knowledge. The Rotary Club of Orbost President Don Osborne while not in attendance, had put forward his clubs participation with their presence and contacts in the Orbost area and right through to the border.

The basis and bulk of the initial assistance provided by the combined clubs would stem from what the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale has been doing through the Farmers Relief Project, singled out by D9820 Emergency Relief Chair Janne Spiers as an excellent example to follow of a highly successful and well administered and implemented project.

To this end, extension of our Farmers Relief Project to include farms affected by fire will bring stock feed and hay to these famers, all managed by Rex Estoppey from our club who, with his finger on the pulse as far as hay and feed is concerned, is in the best position to coordinate.

In addition to this, the voucher system from the Farmer Relief Project would also be utilised. While it would have a separate funding base from Farmer Relief and with new look vouchers, the core of the system would be from Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's efforts. This would be managed by Martin van Elst, also from our club.

Fencing was another aspect that has been highlighted in previous Bush Fire disasters as an area where assistance would be required. Bernie Farquhar volunteered his club to spearhead this effort due to his contacts in the construction fields. While EGRFA was not going to be erecting fences, funds would be provided to do so for properties that 'slipped through the cracks' of local government, insurance coverage and BlazeAid. This would also extend to coordinating volunteers to provide manpower for clean up of fence lines and properties.

Liaising with the East Gippsland Shire Council became the purview of Pearl Findlay-James from Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise who along with their other well connected members, assured us all on the newly formed committee that partnering with the local council will definitely be happening and our efforts will be valued by the Shire Council and essential in recovery of the area.

Once again, being the only club with the ability and knowledge to accurately record the projected donations in and assistance going out to transparent and auditable level that would be required, the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale were the only ones in a position to take on the finance side of the relief effort. Our current Treasurer Michelle Young took on these duties, with some assistance from the various and high number of bookkeepers within our club. Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's Projects Bank Account became the account for all donations to be directed to

With grants available through Rotary, Gillian Reeve took the initiative to apply on behalf of EGRFA, successfully applying for a \$15,000 RAWCS Compassionate Grant and laying the groundwork for an additional \$35,000 Rotary Global Grant for Stock Feed, Gillian Reeve laid a solid foundation to build on with other donations starting to come in. Still helping behind the scenes, Gillian Reeve taught Pearl Findlay-James how to apply for further grants.

# The Initial Mission

The aims of the newly formed committee "East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid" was to provide long term support to local residents, farmers and communities directly impacted by the Bush Fires. All the discussions on 1 January 2020 can be concisely summed up in the following with donations going to the following areas;

## 1. Hay, Fodder, Fencing

Many land-owners have insurance for their fencing and only require volunteers to assist with cleaning of fence lines. Others will require hay/fodder for their livestock.

#### 2. Money Vouchers

Allowing people affected to purchase items they determine for themselves at participating businesses, placing money into local retailers which have been hit hard by the loss of the peak holiday season trading.

# 3. Emergency Fund

For items that sit outside the above two categories and are deemed to be having a great impact on a community or a family and need urgent action.

#### 4. Community BBQ's and Working Bees

Organised to assist and support communities to reconnect.

100% of funds raised by East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid will be used to benefit the East Gippsland Community that has been impacted by these fires.

## **Other Rotary Bush Fire Initiatives**

District 9820 via a meeting on 30 January, initiated their own Bush Fire Appeal through RAWCS. The District Governors Committee, Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) and the Rotary Foundation agreed to partner to coordinate funds and capabilities to support bushfire recovery. Through this National Bushfire Appeal collected through RAWCS, the total donated was in total \$1.2m, with the majority of that having come from overseas Rotarians and Rotary affiliated groups.

Rotary Districts throughout the world are keen to commit District Designated Funds (DDF) to support fire related Global Grant Projects.

Rotary Clubs of Australia joined with Carlton and United Breweries to promote Relief Efforts in their own Bushfire Appeal for all Bush Fire affected communities in over 1000 of their hotels across the nation over the Australia Day long weekend. Over \$1m raised went to RAWCS for distribution through Bush Fire affected Districts RAWCS Funds.

# Member involvement in other Relief Efforts in East Gippsland

Margaret Macfarlane spent Tuesday 31 December 2019 and Wednesday 1 January 2020 helping at the ladies at the Lucknow Hall who started a clothing, food, bedding, towels and hygiene items drive, where she reported that they had been inundated and they have now expanded to the Lucknow Football club rooms. This was the first Relief effort to get off the ground and was purely grassroots community based. So heart warming to still have the community looking after each other.

Margaret Macfarlane has also been spending her time at Dahlsens Relief Centre over the past weeks, who are providing, food, water and pet food and toiletries, with minimal sundry other items. Dahlsens have agreed to be a distribution centre. Much of the produce has been offloaded in Traralgon then is being transported to Bairnsdale as time and need allows. She has been unpacking goods most of each day and assisting people to navigate their way through the aisles. Saturday was a very emotional time for all working from the Dahlsens centre. There seems to be no bounds to the generosity of strangers.

Ula Sheather volunteered her time with BlazeAid, doing much needed and valuable behind the scenes work. Ensuring that residents who are in need of fencing is essential in the farming communities where the Bush Fires hit disproportionately and devastatingly hard. Many hours spent late into the night.

There were many other members who provided their time and skills over the initial days and weeks to help the area recover outside of Rotary that we will never know. Providing assistance no matter the form, is what matters.

# A Word on those who came to assist in East Gippsland

Many groups and individuals offered their assistance to the Bush Fire Relief Effort. So many in fact, who can forget the signs placed on the outskirts of towns as a last ditch effort pleading with people to not bring any more donations in? All that goodwill was well meaning with the opposite of no aid came at all would have been catastrophic.

So many groups came that it would impossible to name them all. A couple of them do deserve a mention; a 4WD Club in Melbourne who were able to get supplies to remote and outlying areas. The Australian Defence Force also arrived, bringing with them manpower, equipment and experience that could not matched.



26 vehicles from a 4WD club in Melbourne arrived to transport supplies to Omeo, Benambra and outlying areas. They took an enormous amount of water and food over multiple trips, easing pressure on those communities.



ADF vehicles transporting much needed supplies into areas that were too dangerous to enter. Many of these places had uncontrolled bush fires. It wasn't just humans that needed emergency food, but animals as well.

#### **Avenues of Assistance**

The 4 Avenues of Assistance were initially outlined at the first meeting, but as we know these can change as the need arises. Some Avenues have taken on a greater importance while others have been scaled back and new, unforeseen Avenues have arisen. Here is where and how the donations to EGRFA have been distributed.

### Community BBQ's

The initial intention was to have free Community BBQ's in every town affected by fires, as soon as these towns opened. Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise were very keen to get these events happening as their clubs contribution to the EGRFA effort. The idea was to have crisis counsellors mingling with the crowds, unobtrusively offering help.

The first BBQ was held at Bruthen on 18<sup>th</sup> January. The event was open to all residents and thanking the Emergency



Michelle Young with therapy dogs at the EGRFA Community BBQ at Bruthen

Services who fought hard to save the town, Sarsfield and surrounds. There were pamper packs handed out and some activities for children, along with the ubiquitous BBQ's from 2 Rotary Clubs and members from all 5 of the cluster clubs.

A Bush Fire Eucemenical Service was the 2<sup>nd</sup> event EGRFA became involved in, on 27<sup>th</sup> January at St Mary's Church in Bairnsdale. All religeous denominations were present with Rotary Clubs and Lions Club participating for a joint venture. Quite a sight to see 3 BBQ's firing along, feeding 300 people in under 25 minutes. Judy Moore was in her element, ably assisting Club BBQ Master Tony Desio.

18 members of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale were present and it was awesome to see the level of community spirit on show from our club.



BBQ's of Rotary Club of Bairnsdale, Lions Club of Bairnsdale & Rotary Club of Mitchell River at St Mary's Church



Tony Desio & Judy Moore cooking up a storm at St Mary's Church BBQ



(R) Brenda Burney, Reverend of St John's & Rotarian, with husband Rod at the Bairnsdale Ecumenical BBQ.



Don Osborne (Orbost) with Judy Moore and Patricia Murray-Walton cooking on the BBQ at Cann River

The Cann River Community Event was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final community BBQ held, occurring Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March. The Rotary Club of Orbost organised the event, bringing along their fairy floss, popcorn and snow cone machines as well as their BBQ. Rotary Club of Bairnsdale also brought a BBQ along with 5 members.

The Australian Army Band of Melbourne entertained the crowd, playing music, dancing with some children and generally lightening spirits. They were exceptionally good and an absolute joy to listen to.

While Community BBQ's were envisioned by some on the EGRFA committee to be a major activity, with 3 done so far, it would appear that no more Community BBQ's have been planned in the future.

So far \$2,650 or 0.3%, of total donations have been spent on Community BBQ's.

#### **Community Rebuilding Initiatives**

Apart from providing a small amount of funds as required for communities to hold their own events, no large project has been initiated by EGRFA. The most promising one that ticks all the boxes for community benefit and ability for Rotarians across Australia to volunteer manpower is a Revegetation & Rejuvenation project spearheaded by Peter Sindrey of Rotary Club of Lakes Entrance, who has been in discussion with community garden groups. This idea holds particular interest for our D9820 AG Tony Murray who has university degrees in this subject and a passion.

So far \$4,450 or 0.5%, of total donations have been spent on Community Rebuilding Initiatives.

### **Hay & Stock Feed**

The major foundation of Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's effort with EGRFA is the distribution of hay. The already established 'Drought Committee' went into action immediately, found a new 'gear' and took up the challenge of distributing hay and dry fodder to farmers who lost their supplies over the New Year.



Warren Kennedy (Driver) with Rotary Club of Bairnsdale members (L-R) Bonnie & John Walker and Rex Estoppey.

With the first loads of hay rolling through Bairnsdale on 8 January, before the EGRFA committee had even sat down to finalise their Aid Response efforts, these trucks with volunteer drivers were reaching areas only recently burnt out, and some with fires still burning on the roadsides. In some instances, trucks were rolling so early in the piece and timed so precisely, that they had to wait only minutes at police roadblocks as they arrived in anticipation (and good local knowledge) of these being lifted.

Being for a different kind of disaster from drought and being independent from Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's Farmers Relief Program presented different problems and a sense of urgency. Stock were without feed and a day's delay due to logistics meant stock did not eat.

The committee led by Rex Estoppey with Cec Estoppey, John & Bonnie Walker were organizing transport, coordinating with farmers and community groups, managing dropoff depots, setting up accounts for stockfeed, and particularly through Treasurer Michelle Young and Gillian Reeve, managing various grants through Rotary District 9820, VFF and other stock agencies.

It must be acknowledged that a big thanks goes to Jim Cahill who has organised many of the trucks and trucking firms. While not a Rotarian (yet), the massive job over the last 5 months couldn't have been done without him.

The sheer size of effort by Rotary Club of Bairnsdale member Rex Estoppey cannot be under estimated in all of this. Working directly with farmers with the distribution and allocation of hay and fodder distributions, Rex has spread assistance across all of East Gippsland and Far East Gippsland areas, who were the most affected by bush fire.

Hay has been donated from all over Victoria, especially the Western Districts and Western Port surrounds, supported by local Rotary Clubs everywhere. Donations of money and kind have also came to EGRFA and the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale to specifically and directly assist East Gippsland farmers.

Approximately 35 truck loads of hay, carrying 1030 5ft round bales have been distributed so far to areas as widely spread as Tambo Crossing, Wairewa, Buchan, Sarsfield, Orbost, Cann River, Wulgulmerang, Tabberabbera, Ensay, Swifts Creek, Benambra, Combienbar, Club Terrace & Mallacoota.





Drivers taking hay to remote areas in the early days of the East Gippsland Bush Fires.



One highlight that should be mentioned is the truck driver who were driving one of our first loads after the bush fires hit. Driving from the Western Port area, 6 trucks were in convoy, one truck broke down at Sale on Saturday 18 January. With no other options available, another driver took his own load to Buchan, then returned to Sale to reload the 6<sup>th</sup> load & drove it to Buchan overnight, before returning all the way to Camperdown.

"It's all for the people that are hurting" was his reason. No other explanation was required in his mind. Nor ours really. This came from a volunteer donating his time, truck and fuel expenses who was asking nothing in return.

So far \$40,000 or 4.5%, of total donations has been spent on Hay and associated freight.

Approximately \$220,000 worth of hay and associated freight has been donated.

The Farmers Drought Relief committee members have done amazing work as Rotarians and it's a credit to them all.

### **Bulka Bags & Lick Blocks**

In the first weeks of EGRFA, a grant application was submitted by D9820 Disaster Relief Chair Janne Spiers for a USD\$25,000 Global Grant from Rotary International for District 9820. This grant was to be spent exclusively on stock pellets otherwise known as Bulka Bags, and Lick Blocks.

Rex Estoppey from Rotary Club of Bairnsdale managed all allocations of pellets, hay and lick blocks, and the distribution to East Gippsland and Far East Gippsland. Rex did a mountain of work ensuring there was a coordinated effort with the hay distribution and no farmer missed out.

Along with purchased dry pellet fodder, there was 61 bags of 800 kg Bulka Bags of pellets, 45 salt blocks, 32 dry feed blocks, and 106 magnesium lick blocks distributed so far to areas as diverse as Tambo Crossing, Wairewa, Buchan, Sarsfield, Orbost, Cann River, Wulgulmerang, Tabberabbera, Ensay, Swifts Creek, Benambra, Combienbar, Club Terrace & Mallacoota.

So far \$37,110 or 4.2%, of total donations has been spent on Bulka Bags and Lick Blocks.

### **Emergency Funding**

As stated in EGRFA's Initial Mission, this would catch any type of assistance that didn't fall into the other categories. This was also assistance that would be provided immediately in the aftermath of the bush fires to enable communities and residents to initiate localised relief efforts and in some cases provide shelter and amenities for entire communities defending their towns before government agencies could mobilise.

- Storage containers for Buchan to securely store goods and materials in the immediate aftermath of bush fires, after the towns relief centre were broken into and stores and equipment were stolen, twice.
- Provision of water and tank cleaning to a resident who used all their drinking water defending their home.
- Supply of CB radios to community relief crews to better coordinate their efforts.
- Donation to Bruthen Neighbourhood House to replenish their stores during the Sarsfield Fires.
- Fuel Cards Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House to enable their staff to immediately respond.
- Purchasing generators and various tools for rebuilding before electricity could be restored and machinery brought in to aid recovery in a number of towns.
- Personal assistance to individuals and volunteer workers who are rebuilding properties across multiple towns, who have received minimal or no assistance from assigned dedicated government relief agencies.

So far \$23,450 or 2.6%, of total donations has been spent on Emergency Relief.

## **Fencing Materials**

After a Bush Fire, fencing is always an aspect that gets pushed to the side by relief efforts concentrating on people and homes. However, stock and property fences are the usually the first to burn, be very expensive to replace, and be many 1,000's of kms in length with a multitudes of variations to be fit for purpose.

BlazeAid is just one the many organisations setup to deal with this aspect, providing some materials and plenty of volunteers. While they do good work and as with all large relief organisations, their criteria can sometimes exclude worthy recipients, making a return to normalcy all the more harder. Rotary aimed to 'fill the gaps' in this and assist smaller residents whom have missed out any fencing and desperately need it to keep stock fenced in.

Bernie Farqhuar of Rotary Club of Mitchell River (Bairnsdale) took it upon himself to tackle this area of EGRFA's Initial Mission. Sourcing fencing materials from Dahlsens and Reece in Bairnsdale, Bernie was able to fence a number of properties in the worst hit areas and well as erect much needed shedding to house farm machinery and equipment.

Using his many contacts in the construction trades, Bernie was able to make contact with construction companies for materials and diverse labour forces such as TAFE schools for





(A) Fencing erected at a property in Sarsfield using volunteer Rotarians(L) Rebuilt shed at the same property

construction of basic shedding, offsite conversion of caravans and the 'Shieks', a catering force unto themselves who cook up storm feeding many volunteers out on the land and at community events.

So far \$41,950 or 4.7%, of total donations has been spent on materials for Fencing.

### **Fencing Assistance**

In addition to providing fencing materials the early days for residents, it became apparent that once BlazAid announced their intention to leave the area, this left many farmers without rebuilt fences. While waiting for BlazeAid to 'get to them' a vast number of these farmers had managed to find their own way to get their fences rebuilt, stressing their already fragile financial circumstances, racking up huge bills while purchasing this fencing.

A \$1,500 contribution to these fencing costs distributed to 80 farmers was decided on, with Rex Estoppey of Rotary Club of Bairnsdale managing the distribution, with added help from John and Bonnie Walker.

So far \$120,000 or 13.5%, of total donations has been spent providing Fencing Assistance.

#### **Vouchers**

One of the first methods and another foundation area of distributing aid to bush fire affected residents was the voucher system based on Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's Farmers Relief project.

With the processes already in place for implementing a Voucher system through members of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale on the EGRFA Committee, fire affected residents could receive funds almost immediately. Amendments made by the EGRFA Committee to bring it closer to their vision of how it would operate was all that was needed before voucher program commenced.

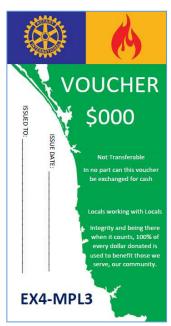
Starting with just over 10 businesses from Bairnsdale and Buchan in the first week, this grew to just under 200 within 2 weeks. This steadily grew over the months to now stand at 305 retailers & service providers in most towns across the entirety of East Gippsland who will honour vouchers issued. A true testament to the great relationships that Rotary Club of Bairnsdale has developed over the last 8 decades, the trust that has been nurtured through continued involvement in the whole community, and extended to EGRFA to assist those affected by fire over the 21,000km expanse of mostly remote East Gippsland.

TOWN	#	AMOUNT
Bete Bolong	3	\$3,000
Buchan	10	\$12,100
Butchers Ridge	1	\$1,500
Cabbage Tree Creek	3	\$5,500
Cann River	1	\$500
Chandlers Creek	1	\$1,500
Clifton Creek	4	\$3,500
Club Terrace	2	\$3,400
Gelantipy	1	\$1,500
Genoa	4	\$6,000
Mallacoota	18	\$19,500
Maramingo Creek	1	\$4,000
McKenzie River	1	\$500
Murrindal	2	\$5,000
Noorinbee	1	\$1,500
Sarsfield	47	\$68,300
Tambo	5	\$2,250
W Tree	1	\$3,000
Wairewa	7	\$11,000
Wangarabelle	1	\$2,000
Weeragua	1	\$2,000
Wiseliegh	1	\$3,500
Yalmy	1	\$1,500

The use of vouchers not only assists residents but is also a way to support local businesses, retailers and service providers by helping to keep donations made to the relief effort for East Gippsland stay in East Gippsland.

In the more remote areas where local businesses are no longer able to remain open due to bush fire damage or simply lack of ability to get supplies to the area, electronic bank transfers to residents are utilised.

Even with COVID-19 restrictions at its height, vouchers are still being presented at a steady rate across East Gippsland. With work situations in flux, vouchers have become valuable way to keep ahead for those who have received them.



Administration of the Voucher system is handled by Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's Martin van Elst, coordinating behind the scenes and dealing mainly with the businesses involved. Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's Treasurer Michelle Young has also been doing a mountain of work behind the scenes, doing the unglamorous work of ensuring everything runs smoothly and bot Rotarians work to the effort is immeasurable.

John Fallon of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise has been the 'public face' of the effort, talking to the majority of the recipients, learning firsthand how hard many areas were hit by the bushfires and in some cases how little support some residents are receiving from official government agencies.

The voucher system will be an ongoing program for the foreseeable future, potentially lasting to mid 2021.

So far \$200,500 or 22.6%, of total donations has been spent on funds directly to residents by Vouchers or EFT.

### **Agistment Assistance**

As with most things in life, one problem starts another. With no fences to keep stock in, and with very little feed available on properties that have been burnt out, farmers needed to keep alive the stock they did have left and the only solution was to agist this stock. This meant in most of these cases, stock was only just returning in the middle of May, 5 ½ months after the bush fire. Is some cases it will many months still, of agistment costs they would not normally have incurred, all the while trying to re-fence their own properties.

A \$500 contribution to these additional costs distributed to 20 farmers who had incurred long term agistment fees was decided on, once again with Rex Estoppey of Rotary Club of Bairnsdale managing the distribution, with added help from John and Bonnie Walker, also of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale.

So far \$10,000 or 1.1%, of total donations has been spent providing Agistment Assistance.

#### **Firewood**

When bushfire strikes it burns all wood, whether it is a tree standing or 2 years supply of firewood neatly chopped, split and stacked ready for use in the next winter. Another unexpected need as the recovery process extended well past autumn and into winter was replenishing firewood stocks for the homes that did not burn or have been partially rebuilt. Every little piece of assistance helps so that fire affected survivors do not have to worry about it.

So far \$1,120 or 0.1%, of total donations has been spent providing Firewood.

#### **Containers**

When a bush fire strikes and structures are destroyed, most of the attention is focused on habitable buildings such as homes and businesses. Not much attention is paid to the working structures that on farms can contain machinery and equipment worth many times the value of household items with in a home, but none of the sentimental value.



Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Glenferrie standing in front of 20ft shipping container similar to those distributed in East Gippsland

Securing any machinery and equipment that may have survived or even newly bought, is a very real issue for farmers. If any of this is sitting in the open, the chances of theft are very high. EGRFA's solution to this is Shipping Containers. They are in ready supply across all part of Australia, lockable and in some cases are insulated and in usual circumstances easy to relocate to where they are needed.

District 9800 came to the party, securing 21 20ft & 40ft shipping containers at a discounted price of \$500, delivered to site. This is a great price considering many of these shipping containers would be going to remote areas up to 150km from Bairnsdale.

Rotary Clubs from District 9800 not only sourced these containers, paid for them but also sorted freight to Bairnsdale for EGRFA to deploy.

With such a large swathe of East Gippsland affected, a list of 70 residents was compiled before the end of January for these shipping containers, far outstripping supply. Unfortunately EGRFA had to stop taking names until further containers could be sourced. Through both private sponsoring and EGRFA funds, an additional 32 containers were sourced and should be distributed by the end of June. This does leave 17 residents without a Shipping Container so far and EGRFA are working to get them to these residents as they are desperately needed.

So far \$27,000 or 3.0%, of total donations has been spent on Shipping Containers.

Approximately \$11,000 worth of Shipping Containers and associated freight has been donated.

No additional data on which towns these containers are going to was available to the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale from Pearl Findlay-James and Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise at the time of writing.

#### **Donated Goods and GIVIT**

The mainstay of any Rotary relief effort in donated goods, whether it be clothing, bedding or equipment Many items were donated to EGRFA for distribution. WERN (Western Emergency Relief Effort), other Rotary Clubs in the District provided most donated goods such as tools, household items, whitegoods and other items. Individuals also donated hand knitted items, as did various knitting, sewing, quilting, and patchwork groups throughout the world.

D9820 Disaster Relief Chair Janne Spiers started a Winter Woollies drive for donated winter clothing which was very successful with many items being donated as the winter temperature in the High Plains dips below 0°. Sturdy workwear is essential for those involved in recovery and rebuilding, with King-Gee donating plenty of these.

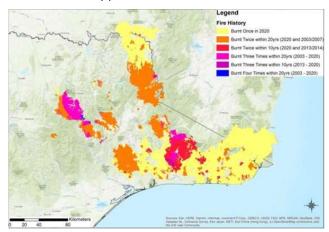
No data on what has been received, how much was donated, or where donated goods are stored was available to the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale from Pearl Findlay-James and Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Sunrise at the time of writing.

## The Recovery Effort

At many meetings of Rotary Club of Bairnsdale, members Brian Ross & Judy Moore have spoken about the recovery process in relation to clean up and rebuilding. Grocon have the Government contract to clean up properties and the recovery and rebuilding process is progressing albeit slowly, with meetings between Grocon, East Gippsland Shire and various community groups held regularly in many towns in East Gippsland.

All these Community Meetings have involved Rotary Club of Bairnsdale's own Brian Ross or Judy Moore through their professional capacity as Surveyors and Building Permits. Brian Ross & Judy Moore have been to the far reaches of East Gippsland with their work and are well appraised of the situation across the entire spectrum of effects caused.

They both have kept the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale well informed of where assistance is most needed and very clear idea of the degree of devastation each area, region and individual has experienced and what grants are available for people to rebuild, recover and rejuvenate.



In the early days of the bush fire, ADF personnel were a godsend to all residents as were the Australian Navy boats that evacuated many townships. The ADF were a fantastic help to all volunteers with their willingness to tackle anything asked of them and accessing areas that were impossible with civilian vehicles.

# **Rotary Club of Bairnsdale working behind the Scenes**

A Relief and Recovery effort of the magnitude required by the extent of the 2019/20 East Gippsland Bush Fires could never be done with just a handful of Rotarians. A combined effort using all the available resources of every Rotary Club in the East Gippsland Cluster of District 9820 was what was required.

Many members of the Rotary Club of Bairnsdale have been involved, mostly behind the scenes;

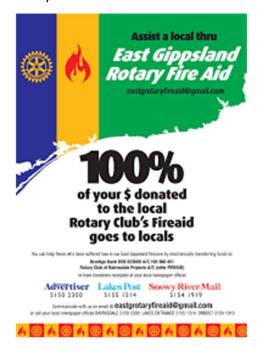
Club Representatives: Martin van Elst & Gillian Reeve EGRFA Treasurer: Michelle Young

Stock Feed, Fencing, Agistment & Hay: Rex Estoppey with Bonnie & John Walker, Michelle Young & Martin van Elst

Community Assistance: Brian Ross & Judy Moore Transport & Logistics: Bonnie Walker & Jim Cahill

Michelle Young's effort ethic for EGRFA has been phenomenal in a largely unseen role as Treasurer. Her work load has been intense and consistently on daily basis for what is now 5 months. Praise for Michelle Young could not sung loud enough. A greater contribution the Relief effort could only possibly be rivalled by Rex Estoppey and his work with farmers and distribution of assistance to them in all aspects of farm life.

Smaller and short term efforts such as that done by Michelle Worsley to distribute handmade Bird boxes that were kindly donated to fire affected areas through her professional role in DELWP as a coordinator in Fire Zones.



#### **How to Donate and Contact Information**

Contacts at Rotary Club of Bairnsdale are;

Club Representative: Martin van Elst 0450 921 756 EGRFA Treasurer: Michelle Young 0400 168 173

EMAIL: eastgrotaryfireaid@gmail.com

**FACEBOOK:** facebook.com/EastGippslandRotaryFireAid

Donation Funds should be directed to: Rotary Club of Bairnsdale Projects Acct BSB: 633-000 Account: 165960451

**REF:** FireAid

Report compiled by Martin van Elst