

INFORMAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF GLOBAL GRANT NO 2013599

(EAST GIPPSLAND DROUGHT / FIRE RELIEF)

In the months following the approval of this Grant, the East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid Committee – and particularly Rtn Rex Estoppey (RC Bairnsdale) have been vigorously purchasing a combination of hay / silage as general cattle and sheep roughage, as well as Bulka Bags of high energy food pellets and magnesium 'licks' in order to build up the strength and condition of stock remaining on drought and fire affected properties in East Gippsland.

In a wonderful segue, showing how far the weather conditions have come (despite a very cold Winter, but wet – thank Heavens) there is sufficient hope that the drought itself has pretty much broken, resulting in farmers requesting that instead of further donations of the fodder products budgeted for in the Grant, they be given either vouchers to purchase pasture seed, fertilizer etc or have it supplied as per the Bulka Bags etc, so they can actually begin to sow their own paddocks rather than continuing to rely on the goodness of others.

The result of this request was an approach to Steven Sundstrom, our wonderful Global Grant expert in Evanston, explaining the altered circumstances of the local farmers and he was happy to accept the alteration in so much as no monetary amounts were being altered and indeed, the farmers were moving to a far more long term / sustainable approach than had been able to be the case when the Grant was written!

This has resulted in very happy farmers being able to feel much more in command of their own destiny after a number of years of relying more and more on the goodness of service agencies such as Rotary. In fact I met with a number of farmers from Buchan South and surrounding areas in November (see photo attached) and they were thrilled to know that not only was Rotary 'still there' for them but that we were also willing (and able) to adapt our assistance to meet the current needs of their situation.

In terms of the training aspects of the Grant, the farmer training will start in the New Year partly because of Covid but also because it has been quite clear that it would have been too early and farmers were not ready for such programs at that point of time. A time frame is being worked on at the moment and we hope to get moving around February.

The training / welfare aspect for the farmers' wives / partners has likewise been adversely affected by Covid but again, in discussion with the training providers (East Gippsland Complete Health) we will be looking to get these sessions moving early in 2021 as well.

From a general viewpoint, the area is certainly looking much better, with house frames starting to appear on cleared properties, the bush is regaining a green tinge, fences are being rebuilt and people are starting to (predominantly) feel a little more positive. Now that the first Anniversary has passed things will potentially continue to improve (until there is a trigger situation of some sort) which may set things back for a time. However, the slow process of recovery is certainly moving forward and our affected East Gippslanders – farmers and urban residents alike – are continually amazed by the generosity that has been

shown to them not only by local Rotarians but also by those overseas, like yourselves, who have been so moved by the severity of the situation as it occurred last year.

Please see below a number of photos; -



A massive (even for us) 64 round bale silage delivery (with no other additional feed, even this huge load would only feed 200 cows for about 4-5 days)



Still obviously badly fire affected on the ridges but the green tinge is starting to improve the general landscape
(May 2020)



The global Rotary Club community has raised close to \$500,000 in donations for the fire-ravaged communities of East Gippsland. photograph supplied

Rotary's sterling support

By MICHELLE SLATER

THE global Rotary Club community has come together to raise nearly \$500,000 in donations to help fire-ravaged farming communities in East Gippsland.

The funding is being used to distribute fodder, high energy stock pellets and mineral licks to about 100 farmers from Bairnsdale and Mallacoota to the NSW border.

A group of Gippsland district Rotary clubs banded together to raise the cash through a Rotary

International Global Grants fire and drought relief program.

Traralgon Rotary Club member and district emergency management chair Janne Speirs helped build support networks from Rotary communities in Canada, New Zealand, Taiwan, India and Turkey.

"The fires were front page news internationally, particularly those couple of days in Mallacoota. It really hit worldwide and within a week we had contacts wanting to do something," Ms Speirs said.

"A lot of international Rotary districts offered support, people wanted to know how they could help and what they could do, even after COVID-19 hit, we still got that incredible support."

Ms Speirs said local clubs had formed an East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid Committee to assess the needs of local farmers and recommend those needing support.

She said the project's impact had already been huge, delivering truckloads of hay and silage bales, ensuring hundreds of

hungry animals got a feed. Ms Speirs said help was still being rolled out, with a new focus on providing seeds and fertiliser to help pastures grow back in areas that had a decent winter's rain.

"I get excited when the world comes together for the Olympics, but Rotary does this day-in and day-out," she said.

"Our job isn't done yet. Rotary sees a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change in our communities."

This article – written in conjunction with the Communications and Media Manager at our Zone Rotary Office in Parramatta NSW – demonstrates the enthusiasm being shown by Rotary leaders in regard to the Global Grants we have been fortunate enough to secure and was a wonderful opportunity in November for me to have a chat to these affected farmers and partners about the drought, fire etc and how they are going now. (I'm on the left of the guy in the hat in the centre of the photo). The interesting thing is that this was picked up by a newspaper called the 'Gippsland Farmer' which is distributed right through Gippsland so has potentially shown Rotary to hundreds of local farmers who had previously had no idea of what Rotary is / does



Sheep eating donated hay but those in the background at the 'feeder' (including one lamb) are actually eating the high energy pellets which are given in much smaller quantities and in a much more controlled environment