



# Upper Goulburn Community Radio Inc.

ABN 69 318 792 779

1st March, 2026

## **UGFM – Radio Murrindindi Submission to Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry to 2026 Summer Fires in particular the Longwood fire.**

As a state designated emergency broadcaster, we have been involved in broadcasting emergency information to the Murrindindi Shire and surrounds for small to large scales of emergencies from motor vehicle accidents, storms, floods and fires for over 30 years, we also provided evidence at the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission.

### **Public information and warnings**

We found that warnings provided to us for broadcast were adequate and timely whilst the ICC was located at Alexandra, however there was a general feeling of disconnect and loss of local knowledge when the ICC was initially transferred to Seymour for the first few days. We had good regular daily access to the Incident Controller or Deputy throughout the fires keeping the community at large up to date through the public information staff, this worked very well.

We found that the warnings were heeded by most and many people evacuated with plenty of time prior to the catastrophic day on January 9<sup>th</sup>, significantly, in our belief reducing loss of life.

### **Reliability of Communications during Mains Power failure and Optic Fiber failure**

This is a significant issue especially in the Murrindindi Shire. It would seem that only one Optic Fiber serves the Murrindindi Shire with no alternative backup. The fiber is used by both Telstra and NBN to provide both landline, mobile telephone and internet and NBN services across much of the Murrindindi Shire to Yea, Glenburn, Molesworth, Alexandra, Thornton, Taggerty, Eildon, Narbethong and Marysville.

At multiple times, during loss of mains power, the fiber failed, once due to loss of power at the Yea telephone exchange, that has no permanent generator, all the terrestrial communication services to the area were lost for many hours. The week prior to the Longwood fire, the Alexandra telephone exchange failed due to a mains power failure, it is believed that the generator did not start and batteries went flat, again resulting in loss of all terrestrial communications locally for a number of hours. A third incident occurred and all NBN services went down for nearly two days to the eastern half of Murrindindi Shire, then when the Fiber was cut to make repairs to the Fiber, as it had been compromised by the fire, resulted in the complete loss of all Telstra terrestrial services including NBN that was already down.

During all of these outages, and the passage of the Longwood fire no one could call 000, the reliance for the general public was on UHF CB radio to the local emergency services or via Starlink and Skymuster if they had power.

The large generators that luckily just happened to be in Alexandra for the canceled Alexandra Rodeo, were redeployed by the SES and DEECA, UGFM technicians and local electricians to assist powering the Thornton Telephone Exchange, Rennies Hill Alexandra and Yarck Telstra CMTS, ESTA and OPTUS sites and also Devils River Telstra CMTS, RMR and ESTA sites. Had this not occurred much of the area would have been without internet and telephone services for days. I have also heard of similar instances of this occurring in the Walwa fire in the NE of the state.

It was not safe to bring generators into the area during the fires as it was a red zone; it was just lucky they were available locally at the time. This again highlights the necessity for permanently installed generators to be installed at key communication sites like Rennies Hill Alexandra and Yea CMTS and Yea Telephone Exchange.

When it was safe a few days later Telstra and Optus were able to deploy generators to Highlands and Alexandra to re-instate mobile phone and RMR services. Battery backup simply does not provide longevity of service; permanent backup generators are required.

Also, an alternate Fiber feeding to Alexandra and the Murrindindi Shire via Mansfield Shire, that I believe is actually in place but is not operational as a backup, providing service when the primary fiber connection is lost.

This was highlighted to the Federal Minister for Emergency Management Kristy McBain MP and Victorian Emergency Services Minister Vicky Ward MP and Victorian Treasurer Jaclyn Symes visited Alexandra.

These generators remained running providing power for 3 – 5 weeks being refueled every two days to maintain communications.

Through all of this loss of mains power, telephony and internet, UGFM – Radio Murrindindi continued to broadcast emergency information, relying on permanent generators, satellite for internet connectivity and local two-way radio systems for communications with local Hospital, CFA, SES and DEECA.

Yours faithfully,

**Peter Weeks** ESM OAM  
**President**  
**Upper Goulburn Community Radio Inc.**