

**Submission
No 292**

INQUIRY INTO THE 2026 SUMMER FIRES ACROSS VICTORIA

Organisation: Towong Shire

Date Received: 17 April 2026

Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria

SUBMISSION BY:

TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL

APRIL 2026

***Towong Shire Council wishes to be included in the schedule to
address the Inquiry Committee.***

Introduction:

Towong Shire Council welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the January 2026 fire events.

The Walwa – River Road fire event commenced on 5 January 2026 and impacted 121,000 hectares of land within Towong Shire (18% of the municipal land area). The majority of the fireground was contained to public forests, and parks, and a privately owned large pine plantation.

Despite this, more than 17,000 hectares of private agricultural land has been burnt by the fire, including hundreds of kilometres of rural fencing, and significant numbers of livestock.

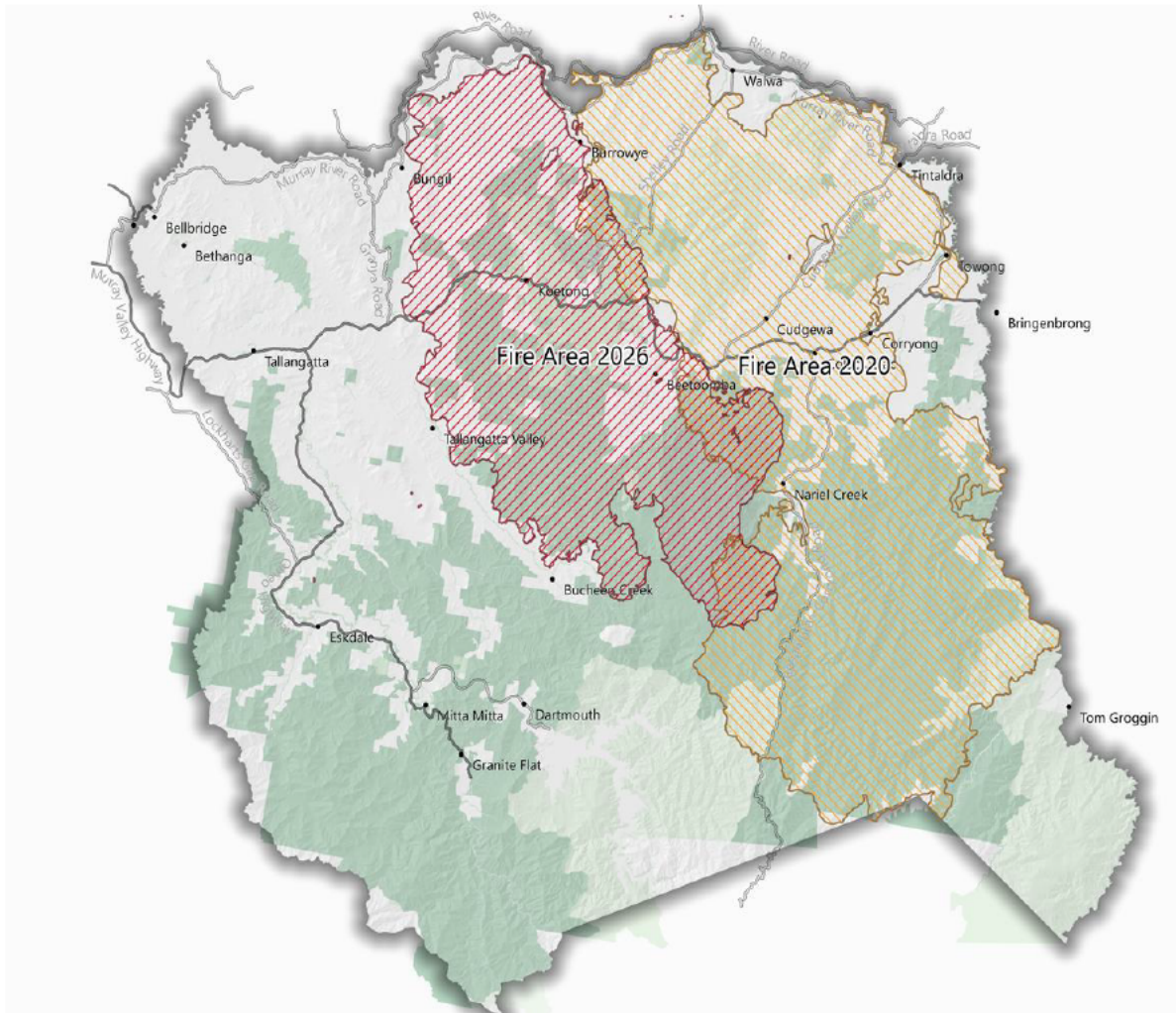
Sadly, the fire destroyed nine places of primary residence, along with 93 farms sheds, and a range of other farm-based infrastructure i.e. silos, water tanks, stock yards etc.

The impact on the community has been significant in the immediate context, and as a continued level of trauma, due to the fire event continuing a prolonged sequence of emergency events. These include:

- 2015 Drought and downturn in Dairy industry
- 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires
- 2020-22 COVID-19 pandemic impacts
- 2022 Flood event
- 2025 Widespread drought
- 2026 January fire event

Whilst Towong Shire Council's submission to this inquiry will focus on the January 2026 bushfire event, the extended sequence of emergency events experienced by the Towong community underscores the important realities faced by all communities and the responsibilities of governments to understand and respond accordingly to ever-present risks and challenges.

The Fire Map included in the submission demonstrates the impact on the Towong Shire across the 2019/20 and January 2026 fires. Collectively the two fires have impacted over 50% of the total municipal area.



INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE AND TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL RESPONSES

(1) *The preparation and planning by government, emergency services agencies and the community ahead of the fire season, including management of public and private land and roadsides;*

The preparation and planning undertaken by all emergency services agencies, and Council, across the North East region, and particularly in Towong Shire was excellent. The planning and preparation reflected the lessons learned from previous events, evidenced through the co-ordinated work of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC), which is recognised as one of the stronger MEMPC across the state.

The organisation of the Incident Control Centre and the capacity of all agencies contributed to a well-managed, and responsive control effort, demonstrated by regular and pertinent communications across the agencies.

Council's own capacity to stand up and staff Relief Centres at quick notice and contribute Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) support to the Incident Control Centre was impressive and highlighted the extensive investment and work by Council in establishing robust systems and processes in the aftermath of the 2019/20 Black Summer fire event.

Since the 2019/20 fire event, Council has worked with many small communities in the Upper Murray to develop Community Emergency Plans. This process - and the ensuing Plans - have given the communities a level of knowledge and preparation for future events. This was evidenced by the general compliance of community members with any orders or directions from control agencies.

The issues associated with government agencies being unable to complete pre-fire season fuel reduction burns remains an item which causes consternation for local communities and Council. It is recognised that fuel reduction burns during cooler months can be scheduled but can be affected by inappropriate weather conditions and resourcing levels.

(2) *The causes and circumstances of the bushfires, including climate change and the adequacy of the Government's climate policies and actions, forecasts, warnings and public education on bushfire threats;*

Towong Shire has been impacted by a number of climate related events since 2015, including droughts, fires, and floods. It is clear that the frequency of these events is increasing, and the intensity of the events is becoming more severe. The evidence is also clear that these events generally occur in municipalities that are very large in land area, with small rural Councils that have significant resource challenges. The capacity of these Councils to prepare, respond and lead recovery can be difficult.

It is a multi-layered issue to be addressed. Climate change and its impacts are a significant cause of emergency events, and governments must do all they can to mitigate the impacts and risks of climate change. Governments must also provide greater support to small rural Councils to ensure that the capacity to plan, resource, and co-ordinate is strong and guaranteed. Government support is often good when reacting after an event but is not as generous or committed in terms of supporting the establishment of appropriate systems, processes, community engagement and facility resilience.

A small but important example is the current Victorian Government annual contribution of \$60,000 to Towong Shire Council and other Councils towards the cost of an Emergency Management Co-ordinator. This \$60,000 annual contribution, though welcomed, has not changed for the best part of ten years, meaning that Councils must find the balance in securing a qualified and experienced candidate with an annual market-based salary expectation of \$150,000 - \$200,000 plus all oncosts.

(3) Funding, equipment and appliances for the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria, and recruitment and retention of CFA volunteers;

This is not a matter on which Council feels qualified to provide extensive comment, other than to note that local community CFA brigades do express frustration and disillusionment at the inability of government and agencies to determine a resourcing level that is agreed, planned, and implemented in timely ways.

One practical initiative to be considered is the fitting of all CFA fire trucks with heat mapping capacity to support the understanding and on the ground response of firefighting crews.

(4) The emergency responses to control and contain the fires, including adequacy of resources and communications;

This is an area which will always have contrasting views and inputs from agencies and communities. There is feedback from CFA brigades in the Upper Murray that the communication from the Incident Control Centre was less than adequate which caused concerns for not only the CFA unit's activities, but also for the communities in understanding the most appropriate course of action to take.

Specific feedback from the brigades included:

- Disconnect between Incident Control Centre and local CFA Brigades
- Limited recognition of CFA training and qualifications
- Loss of experience within Fire Management Victoria
- Limited use of local knowledge and experience in previous fire events

The perceived failure of control agencies to have the Corryong Aerodrome activated quickly is seen as a missed opportunity to potentially respond more quickly to the fire event. The reliance on local individuals or organisations to stand up the Aerodrome operations is something that concerns Council and the Corryong community. It was well known that January 5 was likely to be dangerous and every available resource would be required to be prepared and ready to respond.

(5) Resilience of critical services and infrastructure such as electricity, water and telecommunications during and after the fires;

The inability of key infrastructure services to maintain reliable and adequate performance is a serious matter that must be addressed as a priority. In small rural areas in Towong Shire, and in larger towns, there is a heavy reliance on electricity supply to support water infrastructure that is required to support fire management.

Corryong was without power for long periods which impacted water supply, which when coupled with telecommunication challenges, leaves the township exposed.

The Dartmouth, Mitta Mitta, and Eskdale communities are all located in extreme bushfire risk areas and are significantly impacted by very poor telecommunication services that leaves a void for the community to support each other, communicate with the outside world, and to learn about various orders and directions. It is not a situation that can be tolerated in non-emergency situations, let alone during and after a significant emergency event like a bushfire.

Small communities such as Granya, Shelley, Koetong, Burrowye, Berringama, Lucyvale, Tallangatta Valley, Bullioh, Nariel Valley, Thowgla, and others experienced the same lack of reliability of critical infrastructure services. The importance of protecting critical infrastructure through powerline clearance from vegetation and tree impacts, the replacement of timber power poles with concrete ones, and clearing around mobile towers, cannot be underestimated.

(6) The impact on the community, business and agriculture and efforts to aid in recovery;

The scale of the fire event has resulted in a range of impacts, which will create challenges for a small rural Council like Towong Shire Council to support what will be a long recovery period. The remoteness of impacted communities further exacerbates the challenges to the recovery effort.

Community and Social impacts:

The January 2026 bushfires will have significant ongoing impacts on communities in Towong Shire, affecting safety, wellbeing, access, and social connection. Many residents experienced prolonged isolation due to road closures, disruption to essential services, evacuation and uncertainty regarding property and livelihood impacts. The scale and duration of the emergency, combined with the early stage of the fire season, has contributed to heightened anxiety and fatigue across the community.

Key social impacts include:

- Prolonged isolation of communities due to extensive road closures.
- Disruption of access to health services, education, employment, supplies and support services across impacted towns and rural areas.
- Temporary displacement of 14 residents, with ongoing needs transitioning to DFFH-led arrangements.
- Disruption to potable water supplies for households reliant on tank water, requiring emergency drinking water access across multiple locations.
- Loss of power to 1,900 customers for multiple days.
- Significant psychosocial impacts, including fatigue, stress, grief and anxiety associated with loss, uncertainty and prolonged response activity.
- Re-traumatisation for some community members with previous bushfire experience of the 2019-2020 bushfires, COVID-19 pandemic and 2022 floods.
- Compounding impact of prolonged drought in the Shire.
- Sustained pressure on community leaders, volunteers and informal support networks due to extended community-led relief activity.

The region experienced elevated rates of suicide following the 2019/20 bushfire which highlights the imperative for wellbeing centred recovery.

Economic impacts:

The 2024 Gross Regional Product (GRP) for Towong Shire was estimated at \$467.4 million. The region is renowned for its natural beauty, focusing on primary production and tourism. The economic drivers of the Shire were all impacted by the bushfire event.

Agricultural impacts include loss of:

- 227 head of livestock.
- 2458 tonnes of hay.
- 784km fencing.
- machinery sheds, hay sheds, tractors, farm vehicles and other agricultural machinery, with assessments ongoing.

The loss of the wild dog exclusion fence has the potential to impact future livestock loss and reduce economic return.

An estimated 10,500ha of the 13,000ha pine plantation, mostly managed by HVP Plantations, has been fire affected. Salvage harvesting of pine will result in increased traffic along roads managed by Towong Shire Council.

Access in and around Towong Shire was restricted by the fire through extensive road closures. The Murray River Road was closed from Thursday 8 January to 19 January. The Murray Valley Highway was closed from Friday 9 January to Friday 30 January. This meant people from Tallangatta needed to travel through NSW to Corryong for a period of time. This increased travel time from Tallangatta to Corryong by over one and a half hours.

Corryong, and surrounding fire affected localities, became a series of unconnected valleys that were extremely difficult to access for service providers, these areas were also off limits to visitors for an extended period. National Park and forest areas were closed. The closure of roads and key visitor sites resulted in workforce and trade disruption and the loss of peak-season tourism trade.

Broader economic impacts include:

- Loss of trade for local businesses due to prolonged road closures, restricted access and reduced customer movement.
- Loss of power and power distribution infrastructure.
- Cancellation of accommodation, events and tourism activities during the peak summer period, affecting hospitality, retail and visitor-based businesses.
- Disruption to supply chains and freight movements, particularly for agricultural inputs and outputs.
- Reduced income and employment impacts for workers, contractors and small business owners.
- Increased financial stress for households and businesses, with compounding impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

These economic impacts are expected to have medium to long-term consequences for Towong's agricultural base and local economy. While only a small number of businesses were directly impacted by the fire, there was a widespread loss of trading across the entire Towong Shire due to the fire threat and major access limitations.

Recovery will depend on timely restoration of access, availability of labour and contractors, and insurance outcomes, and sustained support for affected businesses and primary producers.

Built impacts:

Initial impact assessments identified 16 house impacts (14 homes had been destroyed (9 of which were primary places of residence) and 2 were significantly damaged) and 93 other structures, primarily sheds, were damaged or destroyed. 31 other pieces of infrastructure, including silos, water tanks and cattle yards, were also identified as damaged or destroyed.

Impacted Community Infrastructure:

- Over 130 km of Council managed roads impacted, requiring debris removal, hazardous tree assessment and treatment, assessment of damage to infrastructure and repair.
- Damage to power infrastructure with 50km of high voltage line impacted, 58 poles requiring replacement and significant hazardous tree assessment and treatment required around power infrastructure.
- The Wild Dog Exclusion Fence which runs from the southern end of Tallangatta Valley to Burrowye was compromised in the fires. This critical piece of protection infrastructure reduces the vulnerability of livestock to losses from wild dog attacks. Its reinstatement is critical to recovery and reducing the potential for additional trauma to primary producers affected by the fires.
- The High Country Rail Trail, which runs through the fire ground, suffered major impacts including the loss of 15 iconic trestle bridges and an estimated 70 kilometres of fencing. Parklands Albury-Wodonga manage the asset and will need multi-agency support to work through the large volume of hazardous tree assessments and treatment. This will be followed by the challenge of rebuilding the tourism value of the rail trail following significant damage to the 'brand' of the trail.

Including impacts to the following infrastructure:

Bridges and Structures - damaged or destroyed

- 9 historic Timber Trestle Bridges
- Bullioh bridge
- Cudgewa Rail Trail Footbridge
- Shelley railway station
- Lucyvale school bridge
- Perkins bridge
- Mildren's bridge
- Lawrence Lookout
- Berringama Exchange
- Koetong Telstra Tower
- Shelley Camp
- Thomas Mitchell Reserve and public toilets. The loss of these public toilets means there are currently no publicly accessible toilets between Tallangatta and Corryong. This has an impact on tourism recovery as well as having a direct impact on those returning to their lost homes, and those involved in recovery efforts.
- Assets in Public Land recreation sites at Avondale Gardens, Mt Lawson State Park.

Road impacts:

Management and maintenance of roads across the fire area are shared between:

- Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).
- Towong Shire Council.

DTP and DEECA will maintain responsibility for their road assets following the transition to recovery.

All roads managed by DTP are now open to the public.

Over 130km of Council managed roads have been impacted by the fire, requiring debris removal, hazardous tree assessment and treatment, assessment of damage to infrastructure and repair.

The incident assessment and treatment of hazardous trees has been undertaken along the majority of Council managed roads in the fire footprint.

The assessment has focused on clear and present danger trees.

Ninety-eight per cent of Council managed roads impacted by the fire are now open (a significant amount with local traffic only access still).

To ensure the ongoing safety of roads Council will need to undertake further assessment and treatment, management of debris, hazardous tree, assessment of damage to infrastructure and repair.

Corryong Health Service impacts:

The Corryong Health Service has made its own submission to this Inquiry, and Council urges the Committee to consider that report carefully. The Corryong Health Service is a much-loved facility that serves the Upper Murray and is home to many elderly and frail residents. Evacuating the facility under agency orders is a major consideration for any Incident Control Centre.

Council wishes to highlight what the Corryong Health Service details in its submission.

- A sense of being isolated by various government departments in activating the evacuation order.

- Limited assistance from any government department to manage or facilitate the evacuation of very vulnerable residents.
- Strong feelings of being left to its own devices and plans and a heavy reliance on local staff who were also expected to manage and respond to their own property and family needs.
- No communication or co-ordination between government departments.
- Regular passing of responsibilities to other departments.
- Reliance on the goodwill and sacrifice of the Corryong Health Service staff and executive to co-ordinate and manage the evacuation.
- Inadequate cross-border arrangements to accommodate evacuation to the north of Corryong and the Upper Murray when both major roads were unable to be used.

(7) The impact on the environment, including native wildlife, and any measures to better protect native forests, including technology for early detection and firefighting in remote locations

The impact of the fire on the natural environment is devastating and leads to a deterioration of the landscape and ecological values which make regions like Towong and the north-east of Victoria so prominent in the psyche of Victorians and locals. Any access to the development and implementation of technological advances in the detection and response to fires in remote areas is a matter that cannot be ignored.

Known and emerging environmental impacts include but are not limited to:

- Extensive loss of native vegetation and habitat across the fire footprint, including areas supporting threatened species.
- Impacts to waterways, riparian zones and catchments, increasing the risk of erosion, sedimentation and degraded water quality.
- Damage to soils and groundcover, heightening vulnerability to post-fire flooding and environmental degradation following rainfall events.
- Impacts to native forests, private bushland and plantation areas.
- Impacts to native wildlife and threatened species.

There are now ongoing risks to biodiversity recovery due to the scale of the burn, loss of dog fencing and compounding climate pressures.

Environmental impacts will continue to emerge over time and will require co-ordinated monitoring, land management and recovery planning in partnership with State agencies, landholders, community groups and Traditional Custodians.

Heritage impacts:

Loss of and impacts to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Historic Heritage sites:

- 43 cultural heritage register places have been impacted.
- An additional 28 heritage sites including trestle bridges, mining sites, sawmill sites and huts have been impacted.

(8) *The impacts of climate change on the natural environment, which has resulted in more frequent and intense bushfires occurring in Victoria;*

Further to its response to Terms of Reference 2 above, Council considers the impacts of climate change to be exacerbated after bushfire events through the subsequent widespread or isolated storm events.

In the immediate period after the recent January fire event, parts of the Towong Shire fireground were hit by torrential rain which resulted in damage to fire impacted properties, the loss of vast quantities of prime agricultural topsoil, Council infrastructure such as bridges destroyed and roads severely damaged.

The most impacted area was Burrowye where 260mm of rain fell in under 4 hours in an isolated super cell weather event. Farming fences only just replaced after the fire were washed away, many cattle were drowned, and Council has had \$11m worth of infrastructure damaged or totally destroyed.

An already damaged landscape was further impacted, and the subsequent mental health issues for farmers and families deepened.

(9) *The prevalence and impact of misinformation leading into and during the fire season;*

The culture of misinformation and mistrust in authorities through various mediums of commentary and social media forums is a scourge that impacts all elements of society worldwide. Being able to establish a single source of trusted truth in emergency circumstances is becoming increasingly difficult for all agencies to manage.

The defiance and non-compliance of individual community members or various cohorts to the warnings issued, or direct orders made by control agencies, creates a dangerous situation that ignores personal responsibilities of community members. The proliferation of this defiant culture seems to be a genie that will be very hard to put back into the bottle.

(10) *The interjurisdictional support into and out of Victoria leading into and during the fire season, including interstate and international deployments, Commonwealth support and relief efforts; and*

The Walwa – River Road fire benefited from the introduction of firefighting crews from New South Wales, and Canada. By all reports the contributions and efforts of these crews supported local and regional crews manage workloads and rostering of crews. Reciprocal collaborations such as these seem to be critical in maintaining and enhancing particularly given the strong likelihood of increases in the number and intensity of emergency events across the country, and in an international context.

Cross Border Challenges:

The importance of agreed cross-border protocols in relation to Relief Centres, cannot be underestimated. The lessons have not been adequately learned from the 2019/20, and the recent January 2026 fires.

Both events highlighted that fires in the Upper Murray generally cut major access roads such as the Murray Valley Highway and the Murray River Road. These major roads, when cut by a fire event, limits access to designated Relief Centres usually established to the west in Tallangatta or even in Wodonga.

This was the case in January 2026 when Corryong and surrounding communities were ordered to evacuate. Many residents chose to remain in place, others made the decision to travel north into NSW, where members of the Tumbarumba community rallied to provide basic relief services. This was not a pre-arranged and agreed response and highlights the need for both sides of the Border to collaborate more to establish functional arrangements in the event of any emergency that results in cross border movement of residents.

Both Victorian and New South Wales governments must support local cross border communities in establishing and resourcing relief and response outcomes.

(11) *Lessons from and progress on the implementation of recommendations from previous inquiries, reports and Royal Commissions*

The Towong Shire geographical footprint has been hit with two significant fires in six years, which qualifies Council to observe and comment on how governments, government agencies, and communities have implemented recommended changes.

In general terms, Council believes that the lessons from previous bushfire events, as identified in various Royal Commission and Inspector General for Emergency

Management recommendations and reports, have been implemented in a systematic and progressive manner which was evident in the improved management and responses to the January 2026 fire event.

It was observed that beneficial improvements and actions implemented include, but are not limited to:

- Preparation and readiness of control and response agencies.
- Strengthening of Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC) interactions and co-ordinations at the local level.
- Improved Incident Control Centre conditions and efficiencies.
- Introduction of Emergency Management Liaison Officers (EMLO) into the ICC.
- Long term Recovery funding support to Council to enhance its training of Municipal Emergency officers and development of Emergency Relief Centre protocols and operations.
- The introduction of daily Council Emergency Operations Committee (CEOC) meetings involving key agencies and the Incident Controller.
- 2019/20 Recovery funding support for the Council initiated Resilient Buildings Project to increase the capacity and resilience function of community halls in small, often isolated communities.

Lessons not learned or not progressed from previous recommendations and reports that were evident during and after the January 2026 fire in Towong Shire include:

- Ongoing difficulties and challenges for impacted residents in accessing government grants and support assistance.
- Poor co-ordination between government departments and other agencies in the collection of impacted residents' data and information, forcing residents to tell their story many times.
- Significant failure of the Disaster Recovery Financial Assistance (DRFA) assessment and eligibility criteria and function. (Described in more detail below).
- Limited use of local CFA knowledge within the ICC environment
- Absence of formalised Victorian and New South Wales cross-border protocols and arrangements in the response and relief context. (Described in more detail below).

Additional Items for Consideration by the Inquiry:

1. The transition of the fire event to the recovery stage under the management and responsibility of Council has identified serious issues with the administration and management of **Commonwealth and/or State grant support programs.**

The Commonwealth Disaster Relief Funding Assessment (DRFA) program administered by the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), has proven to be inconsistent, confusing, imprecise, and ignorant of the local impact. Designed to provide small grants to members of families and households impacted by fire, one part of NEMA focuses on the loss of the principal place of residence as the controlling criteria for eligibility. Yet its own guidelines state that eligibility also includes assets lost by members of the household impacted by the fire event.

Tallangatta Valley and Burrowye are two small communities where principal places of residence were not lost but significant farm assets were lost to the fire. NEMA has not approved any household in either community to receive the DRFA financial grant support despite clear evidence from multiple agencies of the impact of the fire.

In a ludicrous situation, the town and district of Walwa is eligible for financial support by virtue of the naming of the fire event, when in reality the fire ignited 30 kilometres from the Walwa township and no principal places of residences, or other assets were lost in the fire.

Similarly, the Department of Families Fairness and Housing in Victoria oversees grant support to families impacted by an evacuation order. Families have been deemed eligible for support if the evacuation was to a relief centre or to a motel or caravan park type accommodation which drew associated costs. Other families have been deemed ineligible for support if an evacuation was to a friend or family in a safe zone or due to no registration at a relief centre.

It is Council's view that compliance with evacuation ordered by control agencies qualifies those that have evacuated for grant support, no matter where the evacuation destination is finalised.

The approval and receipt of grants has been randomly administered. Success can vary from DFFH officer to officer, if the contact with the DFFH is online or in person, or in some cases triggered by evacuated people registering at a relief centre but moving onto private support with families or friends.

The poor processes and bureaucratic inconsistencies in both funding schemes requires urgent review and change. The adverse impacts on community members are unnecessary and disrespectful.

2. The **Murray Valley Highway** is the most prominent road through Towong Shire. It links up with the Murray River Road, and Snowy Highway into New South Wales. The importance of the Murray Valley Highway for access into and across the Towong footprint and the Upper Murray by community members, visitors, business, and emergency agencies is well recognised.

In the emergency context the Highway is a strategic asset that needs to be protected and available for all times. The Highway is also a very strong candidate as a strategic fire break or containment line and the appropriate clearance of barriers, obstacles, vegetation and infrastructure on either side of the Murray Valley Highway should be considered.

3. The provision of **relief or evacuation centres in the Upper Murray** (Corryong and surrounds) is a challenge in fire events. In the recent fire event, when the Upper Murray was under serious threat, decisions to stand up Relief Centres in the main centre of Corryong were compromised by the impending danger to the town, the closure of access roads - including the Murray Valley Highway and Murray River Road - and local roads, and the distance from other safer towns or city centres e.g. Wodonga is 121km from Corryong through steep and hilly areas. Average travel time is 90 minutes.

The changing nature of the event saw the relief centre opened, then closed, and opened again, before closing quickly, often causing confusion and anxiety for community members and staff charged with providing the relief centre services.

This issue would be encountered in other regions and government sponsored joint assessment of the issues, and the detailing of improvement opportunities is recommended.

4. Many **farm fences between privately owned agricultural land, and Crown land** are lost in fire events in rural and remote areas. This was the case in the recent fire. Re-establishing fences as soon as possible after the fire event is important for farmers to manage stock and their farming activities. The ability to undertake the work required is often compromised by the presence of damaged, burnt out, and dangerous native vegetation and trees within close proximity of the fenceline.

Whilst the process to understand sharing of costs, access, and management of the fence line work between private and public owners has improved over time, the recent fire event has revealed ongoing challenges, frustrations and obstacles for affected farmers.

Major issues include:

- Assessment of conditions on both sides of the fenceline – who and when?
- Timely responses to contact with public land managers – delays in communication.
- Confusion over Planning Scheme provisions on the stipulated clearance corridors of fencelines, and the adequacy of the corridor.
- Access to financial support.
- Lack of precision in guidelines and expectations.

5. The location of Towong Shire on the border between Victoria and New South Wales, highlights the importance of serious **Cross Border arrangements** and agreements which can support neighbouring shires and councils in emergency events. Examples of cross border opportunities include:

- Electricity supply to Corryong.
- Evacuation and relief centre arrangements.
- Relief and recovery staff support.

6. The **condition of the Murray Valley Highway and Murray River Road** is very poor in non-emergency times, littered by an array of significant potholes, deteriorating surfaces, crumbling road shoulders, and more. In emergency events such as the recent fire, these road conditions are unacceptable, particularly given that both roads are major evacuation routes for community members, and access and response routes for control agencies.

Significant government funding to restore the roads and to maintain appropriate condition is an urgent requirement.

7. The **Corryong water supply** was affected during the recent fire event as a result of the situation where residents evacuated and left sprinklers on to protect their property. The town supply was drained and this caused issues when the population returned. There is a need for government to support an assessment and recommendations for the augmenting of water supply in small rural and remote towns.

8. **The use of Council staff and resources (e.g. graders) in 'red fire zones'** is a concern for Council. Whilst Council staff have the skills and competencies to operate various pieces of heavy equipment, their experience in particularly hot fire zones, often on their own, is often limited. Whilst the motivation of staff to support the fire control efforts is genuine, Council is concerned that serious and potentially catastrophic consequences may result.

9. **Parking and vehicle management at the Tallangatta DEECA facility** when operating as the Incident Control Centre is inadequate and requires attention to ensure safe conditions, appropriate circulation of a variety of vehicle types and operational demand efficiencies.

10. **Earlier access by Council teams to impacted property owners** needs to be addressed. In the recent fire event, it was nearly four weeks before Council relief and recovery staff could access impacted residents because the fireground was still under the control of the ICC. Council recognises the reasons for that practice but is somewhat frustrated that its obligations under the Local Government Act to the health and wellbeing of the community can be stymied, even when the immediate or short-term risk of fire has passed.

Many residents have expressed frustrations that Council has been absent in supporting them in a manner that lessens the impact on the residents and their families. The current protocols should be reviewed and adjusted as part of the ICC management practices.

11. There are reports that townships with **ambulance services were affected when the services were restricted or suspended** under particular protocols. Council is concerned that such practices can place the wider communities at risk of poor access to ambulance service for non-fire related accidents or injuries.