

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Monday, 27 January 2020

MORE TAX RELIEF FOR FIRE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The Victorian Government will fast-track payroll tax relief, slash stamp duty, waive water rates and give local councils extra support as part of a major package to help fire-affected communities recover.

Premier Daniel Andrews and Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay today announced the \$64 million package, which gives councils, businesses and local families hardest hit by bushfires the support they need.

The package includes:

- Immediate regional payroll tax relief in “State of Disaster” areas, so that regional employers only pay 25 per cent of the metropolitan rate
- A 50 per cent concession on stamp duty for eligible properties, allowing businesses to relocate, expand or move into the fire-affected areas – sending a clear signal that these destinations are open for business
- Waiving water rates for 12 months for all homes or businesses destroyed or significantly damaged by fire, and providing rebates for customers affected by interruptions to their water supply
- \$500,000 for grants to regional industry groups and chambers of commerce to facilitate vital networking events, tourism opportunities and pro-bono business partnerships.
- Small business advisers stationed at relief centres to give businesses the support and advice they need
- Support for the wine industry to access technical advice so it’s best placed for this years’ vintage.

The Government will also establish a \$10 million *Council Assistance Fund*, administered by Bushfire Recovery Victoria, for local governments in State of Disaster areas to access funding for people who have damaged or destroyed property, support businesses subject to annual charges or permits, or to waive other fees or charges.

Eligible councils will be able to determine how best to allocate their funding, which may include rate relief for residents and businesses if they choose.

As part of the package, the Labor Government will also waive administration fees associated with VicRoads registration refunds for vehicles that have been damaged or destroyed, saving owners up to \$60.

The Government will also waive associated costs and fast-track requests for birth and wedding certificates destroyed by the bushfires – a small gesture that will make a big difference.

The Government has now invested \$250 million towards support for bushfire-affected communities.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

“This is immediate and practical support to families and businesses who have been through so much.”

“We can’t change what these communities have been through, but we’re doing what we can make the recovery that little bit easier.”

Quotes attributable to Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay

“This package will go a long way towards helping these communities rebound after the fires.”

“The feedback I’ve been getting on the ground is that this is the type of support bushfire-affected areas need as they start the difficult recovery process.”

Media Release

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Premier



Monday, 13 January 2020

TAX RELIEF AND COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES DEVASTATED BY BUSHFIRE

Businesses, families, and individuals in bushfire affected communities will get immediate tax relief, with local people at the heart of the recovery and rebuilding efforts, the Victorian Government has announced today.

Premier Daniel Andrews visited Corryong today, alongside Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay, to announce these initial support measures for local residents and local councils.

Businesses, families, and individuals whose properties have been destroyed or substantially damaged by bushfires will receive ex-gratia relief for their 2020 land tax assessment. Land tax will be also be waived on eligible properties being used to provide free accommodation for people who need it.

This immediate tax relief follows the declaration of a State of Disaster and is similar to the assistance provided by the Victorian Government to communities following the February 2009 fires.

For people who decide not to rebuild in their local community, the Government will provide up to \$55,000 in stamp duty relief if they buy a home elsewhere.

For people who lost motor vehicles due to bushfires, they can receive up to \$2,100 in ex-gratia relief from the duty on up to two replacement vehicles.

The State Revenue Office has suspended land tax assessments in affected areas, and will continue to support businesses in fire-affected areas.

The Government understands that recovery and rebuilding efforts need to be driven by local people – that's why we're providing Councils \$7.3 million to put in place dedicated local teams to coordinate and drive bushfire recovery efforts.

Each council will set up a Bushfire Recovery Directorate for twelve months to oversee bushfire recovery, focusing on rebuilding and planning, economic development, support for the farming and primary production sectors, and the ongoing well-being of community members.

This initial funding package will help ensure that recovery efforts are undertaken by locals who live in and know their local community.

The Government has also approved a temporary 3-month increase in allowances for mayors and councillors in the Alpine, Towong and East Gippsland Shires. This reflects the significant additional demands and acute pressures on mayors and councillors during this time and is based on the experience of the February 2009 fires.

Quote attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"When it comes to local communities, local people know best. We will take the lead from them and give their communities and local councils the support they need to recover and rebuild."

Quote attributable to Treasurer Tim Pallas

"The last thing people need to worry about when they are rebuilding after bushfires is the next tax bill coming in – these measures will support local businesses and help get local residents back on their feet."

Quote attributable to Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay

"I will continue to visit communities devastated by bushfires to hear their concerns first hand and to make sure we respond with practical measures that best support their recovery."

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Statement

The Hon Dan Andrews MP
Premier



Thursday, 2 January 2020

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT DECLARES A STATE OF DISASTER

Premier Daniel Andrews has declared a State of Disaster for six Local Government Areas and the Alpine Resorts, after considering advice from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Emergency Management Commissioner.

The Premier is satisfied there is an emergency that constitutes, or is likely to constitute, a significant and widespread danger to life or property in the following part of Victoria:

- East Gippsland Shire
- Mansfield Shire
- Wellington Shire
- Wangaratta Rural Shire
- Towong Shire
- Alpine Shire
- Mount Buller
- Mount Hotham
- Mount Stirling Alpine Resorts

Conditions are expected to deteriorate from tomorrow and the Government's priority is the safety of Victorians.

A state of disaster:

- May be declared to exist in the whole, or parts, of Victoria
- Exists immediately upon the making of the declaration and remains in force for seven days (unless another declaration is made)
- Can be revoked or varied by the Premier at any time.

The declaration gives the Government, through the Minister for Emergency Services, the powers and resources it needs to keep Victorians safe.

Examples of the Minister's broad power to direct and allocate government resources include:

- Directing any government agency to do, or refrain from doing, any function, power, duty, or responsibility
- Declaring that the operation of an Act or subordinate instrument is suspended, if compliance by a government agency with that legislation would inhibit response to or recovery from the disaster
- Take possession and make use of any person's property to respond to the disaster
- Controlling movement in and out of the disaster area and
- Compelling the evacuation of persons from the disaster area or any part of it.

This is the first time the Victorian Government has used these powers since they were included in the *Emergency Management Act 1986* following the devastating Victorian Bushfires in 2009.

Dealing with the immediate aftermath of the fires while many fires continue to burn across the state is a significant challenge that involves all levels of government.

The Government has already established a Bushfire Response and Recovery Taskforce to support communities and help them rebuild from the devastating fires still burning in the east of the state.

Media contact: Stephanie Anderson 0422 031 125 | stephanie.anderson@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Media Release

The Hon Dan Andrews MP
Premier



Sunday, 12 January 2020

CASE SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR FIRE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The Victorian Government is standing with fire affected communities across Victoria, providing dedicated support coordinators to help affected families access the services and information they need to recover and start rebuilding their lives.

Premier Daniel Andrews and Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay today announced a \$14.4 million Victorian Bushfires Case Support Program will immediately be available for people in fire affected areas in Gippsland and North East Victoria.

Support coordinators will be a single point of contact for those who need it, working with local residents to link them directly with vital support – such as information and advice, mental health support or financial counselling.

They will also help with practical things like filling out paperwork, accessing grants and financial claims, and navigating all the services available through the local council, state and commonwealth governments.

The program also includes support for people who may have been impacted by the bushfires in these areas but live in other parts of Victoria. There is no charge for the services provided by this program, which is funded by the Victorian Government in partnership with Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

This work will be supported and coordinated by Bushfire Recovery Victoria, with the Chair Ken Lay starting to visit bushfire affected communities this week now that the immediate fire threat has passed. BRV is a permanent dedicated agency that will work with communities to help them rebuild and recover.

Services will be delivered by Windermere and Gippsland Lakes Community Health in Gippsland, Gateway Health in Northern Victoria, and cohealth in other parts of the state. Windermere is also providing a statewide contact, advice and information service.

Culturally appropriate services will also be offered by local Aboriginal community Controlled Agencies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians needing support.

Affected Victorians can access a support coordinator by contacting their local council, visiting a recovery centre or calling 1800 560 760. Information about recovery centre locations and opening hours can be found at emergency.vic.gov.au

Quote attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Recovering from these devastating bushfires will take time, but having a dedicated person helping those who need it most will – at the very least – make that process a little easier."

Quote attributable to Bushfire Recovery Victoria Chair Ken Lay

"To all the people who are doing it tough, please don't try to soldier on on your own. Reach out to these case workers and professionals so you and your loved ones get the help you need."

Quote attributable to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan

"There are many families who have lost everything. The last thing they need is to be calling and coordinating different services – these case workers will ensure that doesn't have to happen."

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Monday, 20 January 2020

BUSINESS, SPORT BACK NEW DRIVE TO SUPPORT FIRE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The Victorian Government has released details of a new initiative that will see more than 115 major organisations hold multi-day stays in bushfire affected areas in regional Victoria.

Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula today released details of the 'Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery' program, which has won enthusiastic backing from business chiefs who have pledged to hold meetings, events or conferences in a bushfire-affected region over the next six months and then through the rest of 2020.

The minimum stay is two nights and in just days more than 115 organisations have come on board, including the AFL, NAB, the Herald & Weekly Times, EY, Alibaba, BHP, Swisse, Tabcorp, Crown, Tennis Australia, PWC, Bosch, and AustralianSuper, as well as every Victorian AFL club.

The Government expects more organisations from the corporate, sports and government sectors to take the pledge in coming days to invest their time and money in regional Victoria.

Individuals can also support regional tourism businesses which have suffered a massive hit to their trade in what would normally be their busiest months by exploring a part of Victoria impacted by these fires.

The Government's tourism and events company, Visit Victoria, will also put in place a range of marketing activities to promote the experiences on offer for visitors to regional Victoria.

High-profile Victorians including Rachel Griffiths, Dave Hughes, Andy Lee and Nick Dal Santo will lead the charge to help regional communities by recording video messages to share with their followers on social media.

In further Government support for tourism operators, Tourism North East and Destination Gippsland will each receive a \$200,000 grant to assist with their immediate recovery efforts. This includes support for a dedicated staff member to work directly with operators and coordinate marketing and campaign activities.

For details on how companies can get involved in 'Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery', go to businesseventsvictoria.com/bushfirepledge. Companies enrolled in the program will be listed on the same page.

Quote attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"These bushfires have devastated communities, with businesses taking a massive hit during what is normally their busiest time of the year - I encourage everyone to follow the lead of these organisations and visit and spend money in these bushfire affected communities."

Quote attributable to Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula

"The days and nights that these groups spend in regional communities will be warmly welcomed and the money that they spend will make a massive difference to the economies of those towns."

Quote attributable to Bushfire Recovery Victoria chair Ken Lay

"These initiatives are a great start to what will be a long and difficult recovery process for regional tourism businesses."

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP

Minister for Racing

Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events



Friday, 24 January 2020

ROAD TO BUSHFIRE RECOVERY LEADS TO REGIONAL VICTORIA

Victorians are being encouraged to travel to regional Victoria to support bushfire-affected businesses and kick-start the road to recovery.

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula was in the Gippsland Lakes region yesterday and today, meeting with tourism operators and hearing about the impact of the fires and how the community could help.

Towns including Lakes Entrance, Metung, Paynesville and Loch Sport have the welcome sign out for fellow Victorians looking for a break now and over coming months.

Visitors are also being encouraged to travel to the High Country with Bright, Beechworth, Rutherglen and Mansfield among regional centres welcoming visitors.

The Victorian Government will provide Destination Gippsland and Tourism North East each with a \$200,000 grant to pay for a staff member to work directly with tourism operators and to coordinate campaigns, and to help harness e-commerce opportunities to connect with potential visitors.

The Government's 'Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery' program is one practical initiative that has won strong backing, with more than 150 organisations taking the pledge to hold conferences and events in regional Victoria.

The Government's tourism and events company Visit Victoria today confirmed it would hold a management team conference over two nights in Lakes Entrance within the next six weeks as part of the program.

Among other confirmed 'Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery' plans:

- The Victorian Trades Hall Council will run a 40-person strategy forum over two days at Merrijig in March.
- Cricket Australia will host a number of departmental meetings in both the North East and East Gippsland for two or more nights, for 20 people at a time.

For more details on 'Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery' go to businesssevents victoria.com/bushfirepledge.

Visit Victoria is rolling out advertising across television, print, radio and online using the slogan "A short visit goes a long way" to encourage Victorians to travel to all parts of the state.

Keep up to date at all times with current bushfire warnings and advice at emergency.vic.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula

"The most practical thing that ordinary Victorians can do right now to help these regions is to travel there and spend money there."

"It will not only create amazing memories for families and kids, it will also provide vital support to our bushfire affected communities as they recover and rebuild."

Quote attributable to Visit Victoria chief executive Brendan McClements

"Visit Victoria is proud to have signed up to the Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery program and we encourage businesses large and small to consider doing the same to help regional communities."

Media contact: Shaun Phillips 0407 553 763 | shaun.phillips@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP

Minister for Racing

Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events



Sunday, 2 February 2020

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY BOOST FOR VICTORIA'S REGIONAL EVENTS

The Andrews Labor Government will launch a special events booster fund to help kickstart the recovery of regions affected by the summer's devastating bushfires.

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula said that the dedicated Bushfire Recovery round of Regional Events Fund would deliver up to \$300,000 to help organisers to attract more people to events.

Events in 15 local government areas will be eligible for funding: Ararat, Alpine, Ballarat, East Gippsland, Glenelg, Golden Plains, Indigo, Mansfield, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Southern Grampians, Towong, Wangaratta, Wellington and Wodonga.

Applications for up to \$20,000 will require the support of either a local council or regional tourism board.

Visit Victoria will manage the program and applications will open this month, with a fast-tracked application process. An ordinary round of the Regional Events Fund open to all local councils will also commence soon.

Confirmation of the Bushfire Recovery events program follows a number of Labor Government initiatives aimed at helping local tourist operators and communities get back on their feet, including:

- The Business & Sport for Bushfire Recovery program, which has seen more than 185 organisations pledge to hold conferences and events in regional Victoria
- Grants of \$200,000 each for Tourism North East and Destination Gippsland
- Support for today's High Country Comeback farmers market, which runs from 11:00am-5:00pm at 351 Plummer Street, Port Melbourne.

Visit Victoria will spend up to \$2 million on marketing in coming months to support regional communities.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Martin Pakula

"Events provide a tremendous boost for local communities and we want to give organisers every opportunity to draw a bumper crowd to their town."

"There are so many options – in a couple of weeks we've got the Riverboats Music Festival in Echuca and a week later it's the Paynesville Music Festival on the Gippsland Lakes."

"March offerings include the Lost Trades Fair in Bendigo and ChillOut in Daylesford. North, south, east and west – there's an event for everyone in regional Victoria."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes

"The bushfires have had a massive impact on tourism across the state and we can all play a role by looking out for the next opportunity to head out into regional Victoria."

"The visitor economy supports tens of thousands of jobs in regional Victoria and we're backing the tourism industry so that it can recover as quickly as possible."

Media contact: Shaun Phillips 0407 553 763 | shaun.phillips@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Immediate Bushfire Clean-Up At Zero Cost To Communities

Sunday 19 January 2020 at 12:00 pm

Victorians who have had their homes, shops and sheds destroyed in this season's bushfires can have their properties cleaned up at no cost, so communities can start rebuilding as soon as possible.

Minister for Natural Disaster and Emergency Management David Littleproud and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville announced today the fast, fully-funded and far-reaching 2020 Clean-up Program.

The Victoria and Commonwealth Governments will jointly provide up to \$75 million for the program to demolish, remove and safely dispose of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

Insured and uninsured property owners won't be required to contribute to the cost of the program.

This eases the pressure on families who have endured the loss of property and cuts out complex red tape that could delay rebuilding or discourage participation. The voluntary program is open to all affected property owners.

Minister for Natural Disaster and Emergency Management David Littleproud said this is an important step on the path to recovery.

"We will come with you on that journey, giving you a helping hand and hope for the future."

"This is not just rebuilding homes and buildings, it's rebuilding lives and communities."

The Victorian Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville said the announcement means work can begin immediately.

"This is about clearing the debris, cutting red tape and reducing costs for the community, so everyone can start the important work of rebuilding as soon as possible."

"We're fully-funding this program and won't be sending the clean-up bill to affected Victorians who have already been through so much."

In addition, the Insurance Council of Australia has assured the Victorian Government that all savings insurers accrue from the Government-funded clean-up will be passed on directly to policy holders so they can use those funds to help rebuild their lives.

Grocon, which undertook the 2015 Wye River bushfire clean-up, has been selected to undertake the 2020 clean-up program and will be available on the ground as soon as Victorians register.

Grocon will prioritise local contractors to destroy, remove and dispose of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair by bushfire, including residential, commercial and public buildings, and out-buildings such as sheds.

The removal of fencing, trees and vehicles may also be included where it is necessary for the safe clean-up of buildings.

Property owners are encouraged to register for the 2020 Clean-Up Program at <https://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria> <<https://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria>> or by phoning **1800 560 760**.

In January 2020, the Victorian Government announced a range of tax relief measures for people and businesses affected by bushfires.

<https://www.sro.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-organisation/what-we-do/2019-20-victorian-bushfire-response>

Tax/duty	Situation	Measures
Land tax	Property destroyed or substantially damaged.	Zero 2020 land tax for affected property.
	Property affected but not destroyed or substantially damaged.	Relief from 2020 land tax for affected property considered on a case-by-case basis.
	Property used to provide free accommodation to people displaced by bushfires.	Zero 2021 land tax for property used to provide free accommodation for over six months. Reduced 2021 land tax for property used to provide free accommodation for more than one month and less than 6 months (calculated proportionately).
Land transfer (stamp) duty	Purchase of replacement home because home destroyed in bushfires.	Relief of up to \$55,000 in land transfer duty (stamp duty) on a replacement home, equivalent to the duty on a \$1 million home.
		For replacement homes valued above \$1 million, the duty relief is capped at \$55,000 and the balance of the duty will be payable.
		Relief also applies to the purchase of vacant land on which a replacement home is built. People have 4 years to claim this relief.
	Purchase of commercial or industrial property in the following local government areas and alpine resort areas: East Gippsland, Mansfield, Wellington, Wangaratta, Towong, Alpine, Mount Buller Alpine Resort, Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, Mount Stirling Alpine Resort and Falls Creek Alpine Resort (state of disaster area).	A 50% concession on land transfer duty (stamp duty) applies to contracts of sale entered into on or after 27 January 2020 for the purchase of commercial or industrial property in the state of disaster area. There is no limit to the number of times a person can claim this relief.

Tax/duty Situation

Measures

		Note, this concession for the state of disaster area applies for contracts of sale entered into on or after 27 January 2020 and before 1 January 2021. For contracts of sale entered into on or after 1 January 2021, the 50% duty concession on commercial and industrial property is available across all of Regional Victoria.
Motor vehicle duty	Purchase of a replacement Victorian registered motor vehicle by a person because vehicle was destroyed in a Victorian or interstate bushfire. Purchase of more than 2 replacement Victorian registered motor vehicles by a person because more than 2 vehicles were destroyed in Victorian or interstate bushfires.	Relief of up to \$2,100 per vehicle on up to 2 motor vehicles, including farm vehicles. For replacement vehicles valued above \$50,000, the motor vehicle duty relief is capped at \$2,100 and the balance of the duty will be payable. This relief must be claimed before 1 April 2022. This relief does not apply to companies. Relief applies on 2 motor vehicles (see above). Relief for additional vehicles to be considered on a case-by-case basis.
Payroll tax	'Regional employer' whose principal place of business is located in the following local government areas and alpine resort areas: East Gippsland, Mansfield, Wellington, Wangaratta, Towong, Alpine, Mount Buller Alpine Resort, Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, Mount Stirling Alpine Resort and Falls Creek Alpine Resort (state of disaster area). Employer affected by bushfires but not eligible for automatic relief (see above).	Payroll tax for regional employers whose principal place of business is located in the state of disaster area applies at the reduced rate of 1.2125%. Note, this concession is available from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2021. From 1 July 2021, the reduced rate of 1.2125% applies to all regional employers. Relief considered on a case-by-case basis.