

Connected & Vibrant Communities Supporting local connections, volunteering, clubs, inclusion, events, and wellbeing “Without our sporting clubs, as communities, we wouldn’t have anything left.” — Shane O’Shea. “Sport brought people back together faster than any service or policy ever could.” — Shane O’Shea. “If you lose sport in country towns, you lose connection — and if you lose connection, you lose community.” — Anthony Judd. “Getting back on the court, back on the field — it’s about saying, ‘we’re still here, and we’re moving forward together.’” — Shane O’Shea. **Volunteering & civic pride** “Most volunteers in rural towns wear about six different hats — and without them, things just wouldn’t happen.” — Rohan Brown. “Without volunteers, none of this happens — it’s the heart and soul of every rural town.” — Danny Forrest. “It’s not just the players — it’s the volunteers who run the canteen, the scoreboard, the gate. They are just as important to the team.” — Shane O’Shea. “Supporting and thanking volunteers must be a recovery priority.” — Wendy Laffin **Young people’s connection & leadership** “When young people are part of creating solutions, they grow stronger and feel more hopeful.” — Julie Slater. “If you want young people to stay or come back, you have to give them something to belong to.” — Anthony Judd. “Positive adult role models are critical to how young people see their future.” — Julie Slater. “If young people have a great experience growing up here, they’ll remember Buloke as a positive place — and be more likely to come back.” — Simone Christie **Events as anchors after disaster** “When the show was cancelled, it wasn’t just about missing a day — it was missing a whole year’s worth of community spirit.” — Wendy Laffin. “The smiles you see when sport comes back — they say it all. It’s not just a game, it’s life coming back.” — Anthony Judd. “Sometimes it’s not about talking about floods — it’s about talking, laughing, reconnecting, and feeling normal again.” — Angela Carey **Inclusion & accessibility** “We’re (Donald Learning Centre) not just a centre — we’re a second home for a lot of people when things get tough.” — Charmaine Delaney. “Accessible housing was a real challenge — there just wasn’t anything available immediately during the floods.” — Naomi Mills. “The Good Feed is such a good scheme — we have fun, we talk, and it makes a big difference to everyone’s lives.” — Jeanette Wood **Creative recovery & wellbeing** “The birdhouse project showed us that we can extend beyond just functional work — we can be part of community creativity too.” — John Kumm. “Resilience comes from stronger community connection — it’s about nurturing what’s already good and empowering people to move forward.” — Karen Corr. “We’re not just bouncing back — we’re bouncing forward through innovation and grit.” — Fiona Best. “Research and readiness are now part of farming — because weather won’t wait for us to catch up.” — Fiona Best. “When the pressure isn’t quite on, it’s the time to invest and plan for the future.” — Fiona Best. “Floods have changed — and so must our information. Land has shifted, and our models must reflect that reality.” — Camille White. “One good rain away from a bumper year — and that changes everything for everyone.” — Tim Grenda **Roads for the future** “The road network is the lifeline of country communities — if it’s broken, so is the community connection.” — Shane O’Shea. “Fixing roads isn’t just about cars — it’s about keeping our clubs alive, our kids engaged, and our towns connected.” — Jenna Allen. “Our roads were built for seven-tonne Bedfords — now we have B-doubles and caravans. Without betterment funding, we’re rebuilding the past, not the future.” — Dan McLoughlan.



Community Recovery Report

October 2022 Flood

“Every pothole, every flooded road becomes a danger if we don’t fix them fast enough.” — Glenn Weir. “Emergency works are slow — full rehabilitation is a long haul, and we rely heavily on external funding.” — Dan McLoughlan. **Environmental recovery & floodplain management** “Listening to locals and working with agencies like the CMA was crucial — it helped return the water to its natural flows and protect more homes.” — Dan McLoughlan. “Every flood teaches us something new — our faster E. coli testing now gives councils 24–48hr turnarounds for better community warnings.” — Paul Ratajczyk. “If a septic system floods, it can expose sewage—so we work with councils to manage the risks and protect public health.” — Paul Ratajczyk. “Advocacy for updating flood models will drive better mitigation and emergency planning.” — Camille White **Mental health & emotional recovery** “Six months down the track, you start feeling weird — headaches, grumpiness — and wonder why you can’t face the paddocks.” — Janet Stafford. “After a disaster, you enter an endurance phase — people use energy reserves they didn’t know they had, but it doesn’t last forever.” — David Younger. “Talking with a mate or another farmer can make a world of difference — it doesn’t always have to be a professional.” — David Younger. “Recovery for young people isn’t separate from community recovery — it’s central to it.” — Julie Slater **Future planning & resilience thinking** “We’re not just replacing what was lost — we’re thinking about what communities will need in 10, 20 years’ time.” — Trevor Rumbold. “If communities invest in their young people, they’ll get that investment back — with interest.” — Kate Alday. “Infrastructure rebuilds must embed accessibility — if we get it right, we build stronger, smarter, fairer communities.” — Michael Bleasdale. “Recovery isn’t just about getting back on your feet — it’s about standing stronger for the next challenge.” — Jo Beard **A Thriving Economy** “Our store became the place where everyone came — for news, for support, for community.” — Sam Grenda. “Even small signs can make a difference — they make you stop and think before you drive.” — Keely Allen. “One young photographer captured their town’s history through their own project — it’s about helping people act on what matters to them.” — Karen Corr. “Sometimes it’s the smallest things — a seat at the table, a smile, a meal — that make people feel seen and valued again.” — Malinda Schultz. “In Culgoa, you don’t stay strangers for long — our community is built on real conversations and warm welcomes.” — Sam Grenda **Agriculture, food security, & economic innovation** “One good rain away from a bumper year — and that changes everything for everyone.” — Tim Grenda. “Recovery isn’t just about getting back on your feet — it’s about standing stronger for the next challenge.” — Jo Beard. “Resource centres adapt quickly to emerging needs — thinking outside the box and making it happen with limited funds is what rural communities do best.” — Charmaine Delaney. “Flood recovery is a marathon, not a sprint, and emotional exhaustion often sets in months after the crisis.” — Jo Beard. “The Good Feed is such a good scheme — we have fun, we talk, and it makes a big difference to everyone’s lives.” — Jeanette Wood **Youth leadership & workforce of the future** “When young people are part of creating solutions, they grow stronger and feel more hopeful.” — Julie Slater. “If you want young people to stay or come back, you have to give them something to belong to.” — Anthony Judd. “Even though I’m away for uni, I know I’ll come back and contribute — that’s the plan.” — Kate Alday. “Youth engagement in disaster planning builds pride and connection, reinforcing that young people are essential contributors to rural strength.” — Fletcher Holmes Brown. “Localised road safety education needs to be ongoing, especially after natural disasters that damage infrastructure and heighten risks.” — Olivia Driscoll **Innovation & partnerships** “Creative partnerships are essential to making regional communities more sustainable after repeated natural disasters.” — Fiona Best. “Programs like CHARTSEC provide critical early exposure to safe driving principles, especially for young or first-time drivers.” — Brett Schofield. “Neighbourhood houses are the beating hearts of our small towns — always open, always adapting.” — Kayleen Cossar. “Goodwin Village’s flood preparedness practice builds community confidence and strengthens local emergency readiness.” — Anthony Hogan. “Peer learning shows community members that they are not alone — shifting from ‘I’m alone’ to ‘we’re in this together’ is powerful.” — Karen Corr

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY:

Buloke Shire Council acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Wamba Wemba people as the traditional owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and value their ongoing contribution to our heritage and our community.



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The Cover: carries the voices of recovery - unfiltered, honest, and shared by the people who lived it. Each quote is drawn from The Paddock: The Goals, Buloke Shire Council’s multi-award-winning vodcast — a deeply insightful community-led account of post-disaster recovery, told in their own words.

This evaluation report captures the full scope of social recovery initiatives delivered following the October 2022 flood event in Buloke Shire under DRFA Category C: AGRN 1037. It includes:

- Community Recovery Hubs Program
- Community Recovery Officer Program

It also documents complementary recovery workshops delivered by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), as well as the Council Flood Support Fund, funded separately to support community wellbeing.

SUMMARY

This report presents an evaluation of the community-led recovery efforts delivered in response to the October 2022 flood event in Buloke Shire. More than a review of programs and deliverables, it is a reflection on people, their strength, stories, and the legacy they leave behind in the landscape of recovery.

Capturing outcomes across two key funding programs: the Community Recovery Hubs Program, Community Recovery Officer (CRO) Program, this report brings together the learnings, challenges, and achievements that shaped Buloke's approach.

The CRO program was strategically leveraged to complement the Hub Program, as it provided greater scope for staff resourcing, allowing officers to respond flexibly to a wider area.

The aim is not only to account for what was delivered, but to learn from what was felt, heard and experienced across Buloke's communities. This process provides valuable feedback on how future recovery efforts can be strengthened. It leaves behind more than just a report and creates a record that:

- Honours the voices of Buloke residents, including farmers, families, businesses, support agencies and frontline workers;
- Informs future emergency and recovery planning with real, lived experiences;
- Builds resilience across Buloke, ensuring that future responses are more connected, compassionate and effective than the last.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This evaluation report captures the full scope of social recovery initiatives delivered following the October 2022 flood event in Buloke Shire under DRFA Category C: AGRN 1037.

It centres on:

- Community Recovery Hubs Program
- Community Recovery Officer (CRO) Program

It also documents complementary recovery support from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), distribution of United Churches Fund vouchers, as well as the Council Flood Support Fund (CFSF), funded separately to capture unmet needs, ensuring no community was left behind.

The delivery of the two core programs was intentionally intertwined. The CRO program provided a backbone for outreach and engagement, enabling more locally responsive satellite Community Recovery Hub initiatives to extend their reach and depth. This structure was particularly critical due to the sheer 8000km² size of Buloke and the wide geographical spread of impacts. The satellite model allowed for more tailored and accessible engagement, responding to the distinct needs and experiences of the community.

This evaluation directly references the Buloke Shire Council Recovery Plan (Council, Buloke Shire, 2022), developed in response to the October 2022 floods, and the corresponding Buloke Shire Council Delivery Plan (Buloke Shire Council), which outlined key actions under each recovery pillar. It also draws upon and aligns with the overarching Loddon Mallee Regional Community Recovery Officer Evaluation Report, ensuring consistency in regional learnings and strategic insights. It also identifies what worked well and what could be improved. Lessons learned throughout this process, whether through formal evaluation or on-the-ground reflection and will inform future preparedness, policy and program delivery.

In an environment of increasing climatic volatility and service fragmentation, this report demonstrates what can be achieved when recovery is community-driven, flexible in delivery and underpinned by trust, inclusion and cultural safety.



COMMUNITY RECOVERY HUBS PROGRAM

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Community Recovery Hubs Program aimed to provide locally-led support for community recovery. Its key objectives centered on community engagement, social wellbeing, and resilience building. Specifically, the program aimed to ensure that flood-affected residents had easy access to information, services, and emotional support within their own communities. A 6-month, part-time Hub Coordinator role supported these direct response activities.

It sought to actively engage community members in the recovery process by creating welcoming spaces for them to gather, share experiences, and drive local recovery initiatives. A core goal was to help restore social wellbeing; rebuilding the social connections and confidence that were disrupted by the floods; through inclusive activities and peer support.

The Hubs Program also focused on strengthening community resilience for the future, providing residents with opportunities to reflect, share knowledge and skills (for example, through emergency planning advice and wellbeing workshops) so that communities are better prepared for future emergencies.

The Hubs Program's objectives: to engage the community, support social/mental wellbeing, and build resilience, were designed in alignment with the broader goal of empowering locals to lead their own recovery.

METHODS AND DELIVERY

As Buloke Shire is geographically dispersed, rather than a single central recovery centre, a mobile satellite hub model was used. Recovery services and events were brought out to each community. For example, pop-up recovery hubs and drop-in sessions were held in various towns and local venues (community halls, neighborhood houses, etc.) on a rotating basis. This ensured support was accessible shire-wide and reduced barriers for residents who might not travel far for help. The Recovery Team often went to the community instead of expecting the community to come to them. Notably, they delivered vital recovery information at already-scheduled community gatherings.

This approach, embedding recovery outreach into existing events, meant piggybacking on local activities (like service club meetings, markets, or school events) to reach people who had full calendars and might not attend dedicated recovery meetings. As an example, Council's recovery staff joined local Probus club meetings to discuss emergency preparedness and well-being tips, rather than hosting a separate new event.

OUTREACH

The Hubs Program placed a strong emphasis on meeting people where they were comfortable. Council's Community Recovery team members supported community events, offering information, listening to concerns, and providing referrals. They collaborated closely with local groups and venues. During one activity the team partnered with two Neighborhood Houses at Sea Lake and Wycheproof to run youth-oriented "Level Up" gaming event as a recovery activity, recognising that engaging young people through their interests could help rebuild social connection. These events drew over 60 attendees and created a fun, supportive environment for youth, with fruit-based milk shakes and healthy snacks, illustrating how non-traditional activities were used to foster community cohesion and recovery.

Across the shire, the Hubs hosted a variety of activities: practical drop-in sessions with information on grants and rebuilding, informal coffee catch-ups for emotional support, creative programs like art workshops and storytelling sessions, and educational forums on preparedness. All these delivery methods were trauma-informed and community-driven. The schedule and content of Hub activities often responded to community requests and local leaders' input. By using familiar local settings and existing networks, and by offering diverse programs (from emergency planning demonstrations to community arts and "Buloke's Best Lawn" competitions), the Hubs Program achieved broad reach and kept community members engaged in a positive recovery process.



EVIDENCE AND EVALUATION

To assess the effectiveness of the Community Recovery Hubs Program a range of evidence and data was collected. Participation metrics were tracked at events, feedback from community members engaged, and demographics of participants, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of community engagement. The team maintained internal tracking forms documenting these figures and noting which towns or groups had been reached, helping identify gaps in outreach. They also logged the types of inquiries and support needs raised by residents at the hubs (such as housing, mental health, farming recovery), which allowed evaluators to see what issues were most prominent and whether the program was addressing them. Participant feedback was central to the evaluation. They gathered feedback from participants through surveys, comment cards, social media and informal conversations at the hubs. Many community members expressed appreciation for having a local place to ask questions and “not feel alone” in recovery.

The evaluation report integrates direct quotes from residents to illustrate program impact. The cover of this report is one such example, featuring key quotes extracted from 40 vodcast episodes and filtered through recovery frameworks and Buloke Shire Council Plans. The award-winning vodcast series “The Paddock: The Goals”, initiated as part of recovery outreach, captured local reflections and stories from the post-flood period. In one episode, participants highlighted the importance of new social outlets (like online gaming groups) for maintaining a sense of belonging after the flood, underlining the value of the hubs’ focus on social connectivity. Such personal accounts have been quoted in the evaluation to give voice to the community’s experience of the Hubs program.

INTERNAL REPORTING

The Community Recovery Team produced regular internal reports summarising Hub activities, achievements and challenges. These reports, media releases and case studies serve as evidence of what was delivered. Additionally, the activities are measured against the program evaluation requirements from the funding bodies. This involved assessing outcomes against the original aims, such as did the program improve community wellbeing and resilience?

Preliminary evidence suggests communities reported feeling more connected and informed. The reflective tone of the evaluation also notes lessons learned, such as the benefit of partnering with trusted local organisations and the need for flexible delivery. By triangulating participation data, community feedback (including illustrative quotes), and documented outcomes, the evaluation of the Community Recovery Hubs Program provides a comprehensive picture of how this initiative contributed to Buloke’s social recovery and readiness for the future.



COMMUNITY RECOVERY OFFICER PROGRAM

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Alongside the Hubs Program, the Community Recovery Officer Program bolstered on-the-ground recovery coordination. This program funded dedicated Community Recovery Officers (CROs) to work within the community in the aftermath of the October 2022 floods.

The overarching aim was to enhance the Council's capacity to assist the community in the short to medium term recovery, while also building longer-term resilience. In practical terms, the Recovery Officers were appointed to support individuals and families impacted by the flood by being a consistent local point of contact for help.

They aimed to ensure that people in each town had someone who could listen to their needs, provide information on available assistance, and help navigate the often complex recovery process. Another key objective was to improve coordination among various recovery efforts. The CROs would liaise between council, state agencies, charities, and community groups, so that support services were better integrated and tailored to local needs.

The program also had a forward-looking objective: to build community capacity for the future. This meant that beyond addressing immediate recovery tasks (like helping residents fill out relief grant applications or arrange repairs), the officers would help communities learn from the disaster and strengthen their readiness and resilience (for example, by organising community emergency planning sessions or connecting volunteers). Ensuring locally-led recovery was at the heart of this program; by having recovery personnel embedded in Buloke's communities, the program aimed to empower residents and community leaders to drive their own recovery priorities with the guidance of the CROs.

METHODS AND DELIVERY

Buloke's CROs (three part-time Coordinators and temp Officers, supported by a Recovery Manager) were embedded within the community and council structure to ensure a highly localised approach. Rather than operating from afar, they lived in or routinely traveled across the affected towns, becoming familiar, trusted faces to residents. It was a fortuitous but unplanned outcome that the CROs were based around four of Buloke's major towns. This geographic spread enabled each officer to support a distinct part of the Shire while also collaborating across regions. CROs worked from local spaces such as town halls and Neighbourhood Houses to remain accessible and embedded in the communities they served. This embedded model meant the Officers could build one-on-one relationships with community and understand the nuanced needs of each community.

OUTREACH

A cornerstone of the CRO Program approach was regular outreach to flood-affected individuals and families. The CROs did not wait for people to seek help; they actively reached out via phone calls, door-knocks, and community visits to check on welfare and offer assistance. This proactive support included helping people access grants and services (like housing repairs, health services, or financial counselling), following up on their progress, and advocating on their behalf when obstacles arose.

The Officers effectively served as case managers for the community's recovery needs, guiding residents through bureaucracy and linking them with the right resources. They maintained close communication with Council's Senior Flood Recovery Manager and with state Emergency Recovery Victoria contacts to escalate any significant issues.

Importantly, the officers were not only present, but active contributors at community events and Recovery Hubs activities. E.g. attending Probus meetings or town gatherings mentioned earlier, not only to share information but also to hear community concerns firsthand while cleaning up dishes and packing up. This constant presence helped build trust; residents grew to know the recovery staff by name and felt more comfortable seeking help.

PARTNERSHIPS

CROs worked in collaboration with existing local networks to amplify their reach. Early in the program, they convened meetings with the coordinators of all Buloke Shire Neighborhood Houses and Resource Centres (community centers across different towns) to explore partnership opportunities. Through this collaboration, recovery activities were co-designed and community-led, ensuring projects were delivered in locally informed and place-based ways.

The Officers also coordinated with schools, health providers, and volunteer groups, embedding recovery support into the fabric of community life. This place-based, ground-up approach was refined by feedback.

Neighbourhood House and Resource Centre leaders requested involvement from the planning stage of recovery initiatives, emphasising their deep local knowledge to reach vulnerable or isolated residents. Following the 2011 flood event, Buloke Shire Council faced financial difficulties, leading to the closure of all front-facing offices to the public, except the Wycheproof head office. This significantly impacted the community by severing face-to-face connections, particularly affecting day-to-day activities and disenfranchising residents due to travel distances. These centres emerged as a legacy of the community's need for support and to solve problems independently.

“ We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Neighbourhood Houses, Resource Centres and their incredible staff, as well as Community Forums who have carried the torch and effectively provided support and direction for the delivery of these programs. ”

The Recovery Team responded to these local partners in co-designing activities and by respecting the established relationships they had in each community. The collaborative approach extended to organising outreach and workshops e.g. Recovery Officers helped facilitate community meetings (like the Culgoa resilience workshop funded by the hubs program) and supported towns in developing their own recovery action plans.

By serving as liaisons among various stakeholders, the CRO Officers ensured that recovery services were coordinated and tailored. When a resident's need exceeded what Council could directly provide, they would personally connect them to the appropriate agency or charity, often even arranging that agency's visit to the community. This agile working style allowed the CROs to address issues quickly and holistically, from practical problems (road access, debris cleanup coordination) to emotional support (simply listening to people's stories or organising community get-togethers for peer support).



EVIDENCE AND EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Community Recovery Officer Program draws on both quantitative data and qualitative evidence to determine how well the program met its objectives. Operational data collected by the Recovery Officers formed an important part of this evidence. The officers kept logs or tracking sheets of their activities in the Crisisworks database.

This indicates the program's effectiveness in linking people to support, a key intended outcome. The evaluation also reviews progress on recovery projects that the CROs were involved in. Many community recovery projects (several listed in the program's action plan) were coordinated or supported by the officers – e.g. community events like Buloke Youth Function or initiatives like the Men's Shed Biodiversity Trail.

Evidence of completion or advancement of these projects (documented through project reports, newspaper clippings and community updates) demonstrates the officers' contribution to broader community recovery goals.

Feedback was gathered informally from residents who interacted with the CROs, and through discussions with community leaders and partner organisations. A consistent theme in the feedback was the value of having a dedicated local recovery contact. Residents often shared that the personal support from "their" CRO made them feel heard and less overwhelmed. For example, a resident might report that the officer helped them fill out forms that they would have struggled with alone, or simply that knowing someone was checking in on them gave them peace of mind. These anecdotes have been included in the report as testimonials (with permission), putting a human face to the program's outcomes.

In addition, partner agencies provided feedback on how the collaboration was working. One piece of feedback documented in meeting minutes came from Neighborhood House coordinators, who noted that working collaboratively with the shire's recovery team could "achieve better community engagement in their local communities and better outcomes for Buloke residents". This insight not only evidences the positive impact of partnership (a core strategy of the program) but also helps identify improvements – for instance, the importance of early consultation with local groups.

The evaluation report adopts a reflective tone, discussing such lessons learned. It acknowledges that while the CRO Program was largely successful in extending support (evidenced by the high uptake of services and positive community response), there were challenges like ensuring no one was missed in outreach, and balancing immediate workload with long-term planning.

The CRO Program's effectiveness is effectively measured against the Hub Program objectives and outcomes. The fact that the CRO roles have been funded to continue into the medium term (beyond the initial emergency phase) is itself an indicator of success – it reflects recognition that ongoing locally-led support has been beneficial in Buloke's recovery.

RECOVERY PLAN

The Buloke Shire Council acknowledges the Jupagalk, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wamba Wemba people as the traditional owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke.

A major rain and flood event occurred in many parts of Northern and Western Victoria on and around mid-October 2022. Substantial rain fell in the Avoca and Richardson catchments that led to major flooding occurring throughout Buloke Shire. Mitigation efforts from Council, agencies and community lessened the impact for a majority of residential and commercial properties and critical infrastructure assets, however, significant impacts were still felt by the community, particularly our farming community. Council will continue to support the Buloke community through their recovery.

OUR VALUES:

Throughout recovery Council will continue to uphold our values:

- Transparency in decision making
- Taking responsibility
- Working collaboratively with partners
- Showing care and respect
- Accountability by actions
- Being responsive and timely

NATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR DISASTER RECOVERY:

Disasters can deeply impact lives and livelihoods. These principles guide our efforts, our approach, our planning and our decision making.

- Understand the **CONTEXT**
- Recognise **COMPLEXITY**
- Use **COMMUNITY LED** approaches
- COORDINATE** all activities
- COMMUNICATE** effectively
- Recognise and build **CAPACITY**

SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY

Planning and delivery of recovery efforts will be organised around five lines of recovery with the community at its heart to achieve truly community-led recovery outcomes.



RECOVERY OUTCOMES:

People are safe and secure
 People are healthy and well
 Communities are cohesive and people connected

Aboriginal culture is valued and respected
 Aboriginal trauma is addressed and healing is supported
 Aboriginal cultural safety is promoted
 Aboriginal participation and ownership is promoted

Natural environments are healthy, resilient and biodiverse
 Natural environments have high levels of amenity
 Natural environments are productive and accessible

Industries and Businesses recover and are stronger
 Employment opportunities are accessible
 Local businesses and communities are resilient

Utilities and transport routes are restored and resilient
 Commercial and agricultural infrastructure is rebuilt and improved
 Residential property is rebuilt and improved
 Public infrastructure is relevant and of high quality

COMMUNITY RECOVERY SNAPSHOT



45 Recovery programs delivered:



96 Buloke Community Recovery Events/Initiatives



24 Community Events/Initiatives (funding contributed or support in kind only)



2 Online Support Workshops



11 Advocacy Initiatives



2 Access Transport Initiatives (courtesy bus services)



40 Online support and information vodcasts

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

While the total investment of the Community Recovery Program benefited the community, a portion of the work or expertise was supplied outside the shire. To ensure transparency, we've applied region-specific economic multipliers to reflect the varying levels of local economic contribution.

- local economic contribution (Pugalis & Tan, 2017).

REGION	MULTIPLIER RANGE	WHY IT VARIES
Buloke Shire	2.0-2.5	High local spend, wages and reinvestment.
Nearby Shires	1.5-2.0	Some local benefit, but partial leakage.
Regional	1.3-1.8	Broader regional benefit, less direct.
Metro/ External	1.0-1.3	Minimal local reinvestment; higher leakage.

WHERE WERE THESE PROGRAMS DELIVERED?

LOCATION	BULOKE COMMUNITY RECOVERY EVENTS/INITIATIVES	SUPPORTED COMMUNITY EVENTS/INITIATIVES
Berriwillock	4	1
Birchip	12	4
Charlton	22	3
Culgoa	6	2
Donald	19	3
Nandaly	5	2
Nullawil	4	0
Sea Lake	9	4
Watchem	2	1
Wycheproof	13	4
Shire-wide	10	3
Total	106	27



Community Recovery Spend
\$1,051,487.59

This investment supported a range of recovery initiatives across Buloke Shire. Notably, staff engaged in the delivery of these programs lived locally, ensuring that the additional economic benefits extended directly into the community. This approach not only strengthened local capacity but also reinforced community trust and responsiveness throughout the recovery process.

COMMUNITY BENEFIT

The figures in the table reflect the direct investment including expenditure on printing, catering, supplies, venue hire, and external facilitation support. This spending represents a tangible community benefit, ensuring that recovery funds were circulated within the local economy. This demonstrates a strong commitment to investing locally, with 69% of the total recovery value spent within Buloke—supporting local businesses, services and community infrastructure.

LOCATION	MULTIPLIER RANGE
Buloke Shire	\$1,447,934.02 - \$1,809,917.53
Metro/External	\$111,599.03 - \$145,078.74
Nearby Shires	\$183,279.75 - \$244,373.00
Regional	\$121,855.57 - \$168,723.09
Total contributed value	\$1,864,668.37 - \$2,368,092.35

DISTRIBUTION OF RECOVERY SPEND ACROSS BULOKE SHIRE

Unlike previous flood events that impacted isolated communities, this recovery required a whole-of-shire approach. Recovery spending was intentionally distributed across Buloke, ensuring that towns, regardless of size or location, benefited from investment in local businesses and services. This included spending on printing, catering, supplies, venue hire, and facilitation support, reinforcing the principle of fairness and shared recovery (% below excludes wages and related expenses).

WATCHEM	0.03%
NULLAWIL	0.12%
BERRIWILLOCK	0.22%
NANDALY	0.36%
CULGOA	1.35%
SEA LAKE	8.24%
CHARLTON	18.31%
DONALD	22.07%
WYCHEPROOF	23.67%
BIRCHIP	25.62%

BEYOND THE DOLLAR: LASTING COMMUNITY BENEFITS

While a portion of the recovery investment was delivered by contractors outside Buloke Shire, the community gained enduring value beyond the immediate economic return. These qualitative impacts include:



SKILLS TRANSFER:

Local workers partnered with officers and trauma-informed facilitators, gaining hands-on experience and new capabilities.



CAPACITY BUILDING:

Community organisations strengthened their ability to respond to future challenges through collaboration and resource sharing.



LEGACY:

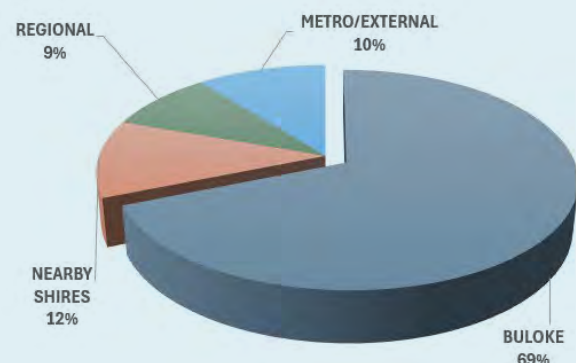
Assets now serve broader community needs, supporting events, services and emergency response.



SOCIAL CAPITAL:

Stronger relationships and trust were built between local stakeholders, enhancing resilience and future coordination.

These outcomes, though not captured by traditional economic multipliers, represent meaningful and lasting contributions to community wellbeing.



*% in pie chart includes wages and related expenses.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

GENERAL FEEDBACK ABOUT THE COORDINATION OF THE BULOKE FLOOD EFFORT.

- *John McConville (Donald)*

John expressed the importance of having local decision-makers who understand the long-standing history of flooding in towns like Donald. He recommended clearer communication and consistency in council engagement, noting that community efforts often filled the gaps left by delayed support systems.

“We knew the river better than the experts... if they’d just asked us first, we could’ve saved time and money.”

He also emphasised the need to value lived experience when planning mitigation efforts. His reflections suggested that while council support was appreciated, community knowledge was often underutilised.

- *Kayleen Cossar (Charlton)*

Kayleen highlighted how crucial mental health support and informal gathering spaces were in small towns, particularly when formal services were not immediately available. She acknowledged the strengths of the Hub program but urged more transparency in how priorities are set.

“Sometimes it felt like decisions were made without asking the people actually living through it.”

She also reflected on the fatigue experienced by volunteer leaders and how recovery planning must actively factor in the wellbeing and sustainability of community contributors.

- *Wendy Laffin (Charlton)*

Wendy noted the importance of physical presence from recovery teams in rural towns, particularly those that feel forgotten. She appreciated the events and outreach efforts but believed some were short-lived or repetitive.

“We don’t want just a visit; we want to be part of the solution.”

She encouraged more continuity in communication and requested better handover processes when personnel changed, to avoid community feeling like they’re starting over each time.

- *Sam Grenda (Culgoa)*

Sam spoke to the emotional and logistical fatigue of being repeatedly impacted by natural disasters and the strain it places on small communities. She noted that while immediate support was visible, long-term planning and updates often faded.

“It’s not the water that breaks you – it’s what’s left after it goes.”

She also suggested that more continuity in leadership and consistent messaging from Council would help prevent residents from feeling left behind once the crisis fades from headlines.

- *Kate Alday (Nandaly)*

Kate praised the responsiveness of local Community Recovery Officers who were from the community, acknowledging the value of local knowledge. However, she raised concerns about inconsistent follow-up after engagement sessions.

“There was a lot of talking, but not always follow-through.”

She suggested developing clearer accountability mechanisms for promised actions and making it easier for community members to track progress.

- *John Richmond (Birchip)*

John spoke passionately about the need for more accessible housing options in rural areas, particularly for people living with disability or those aging in place. His feedback underscored the critical link between physical housing design and flood resilience.

“We have to think about access and mobility—not just now, but if something like this happens again.”

He further reflected on the example of Birchip, noting that their community often took initiative where external support was slow to arrive. This self-reliance has created a resilient model, but he warned that such independence should not be mistaken as not needing assistance.

- *Donald Gibb (Road Safety Promotion Australia)*

Donald valued the collaborative spirit shown in the early phases of recovery but noted that communication channels dwindled over time. He encouraged ongoing relationships, not just project-based interactions.

“Recovery can’t be a burst – it has to be a commitment.”

He also advocated for skill-building opportunities tied to recovery efforts to support both community resilience and local employment.

- *Roberta Barry (Senior Sergeant VicPol)*

Senior Sergeant Roberta Barry served as the Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) during the October 2022 flood response. Drawing from her dual role as a community member and law enforcement leader, she emphasised the importance of local knowledge in emergency response and clear command structures.

“The uniform doesn’t mean I know more than the community—it just means I need to listen even harder.”

She praised the commitment of first responders and volunteers, but raised concerns about communication silos and the need for better resourcing of remote areas during peak emergency periods. Roberta also stressed the importance of embedding emergency preparedness into everyday community planning and advocated for recovery to prioritise long-term resilience over short-term optics.

CASE STUDY:

COMMUNITY CONNECTION DINNERS



CONTEXT:

Building on the momentum of existing community gatherings, these events provided an opportunity to share a meal and for the exchange of wellbeing support materials, wellbeing and preparedness health checks, and information updates about the October 2022 Flood Recovery. These gatherings were led by the community at established locations, strengthening community connections with Council and other support agencies, promoting collective action towards recovery and rebuilding.

COMPLEXITY:

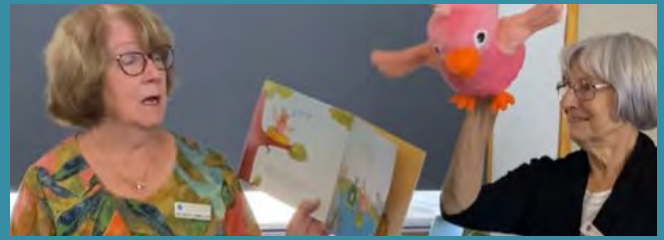
- Overcome transport barriers by going to where our people are.
- Support local business impacted by the October 2022 floods, by contributing to the economic recovery.
- Delivery of recovery information, such as the Red Cross Redi-plan booklets and inform groups of community recovery programs.
- Allowing stakeholders a chance to share their recovery experiences in a safe environment.
- Coming to together to share a meal and provide support face-to-face where needed.
- Foster a community-led initiative that is inclusive, encourages community collaboration and sharing.

COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH:

We reached out to local Probus clubs across the Shire, inviting them to consider us in their regular meetings at their usual time and venue, which incorporated a lunchtime meal. For towns without a Probus club, we were invited to present at their community morning tea gatherings. This approach proved highly effective, as it aligns with our guiding principle: “Go to them.”

RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing** – Connecting our communities through a shared meal and discussion, provided support materials and important contact information. This included Red Cross RediPlans, Wellbeing Toolkit, Recovery Basics, Parenting Coping with crisis, Helping Children and Young People Cope with Crisis, National Farmer Health Booklet, Mallee Family Care and Rural Financial Counselling Service, and Headspace referral.
- ✓ **Aboriginal culture and healing** – Cultural safety is prioritised, valued, and respected by embracing language that acknowledges and adapts to changes in the landscape. Rather than using terms like “emergency” and “disaster,” we focus on resilience, environmental adaptation, and spiritual connection, promoting participation and ownership in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner.
- ✓ **Environmental & biodiversity** – Informed of mosquito and JE Virus preparedness and management.
- ✓ **Business & economy** – Supported local cafes for lunch and/or morning tea, purchased support resources for the community.
- ✓ **Building & infrastructure** – Encourage use of community buildings and assets.



FACEBOOK META DATA:

Birchip Probus played host to vital Community Recovery initiative on natural disaster preparedness.

Last Friday, Birchip Probus played host to a vital Community Recovery initiative on natural disaster preparedness. Maureen Donnellon (narrator) and Lorna Litt (puppeteer) volunteered to weave the captivating children's tale of "Birdy and the very hot day". Storytelling not only captures our imaginations, but it also subtly reminds us of the things we can do to be better prepared.

Monday 25th March

Reach	Impressions	Interactions
1,253 Higher than typical	1,310 Higher than typical	25 Higher than typical
Reactions	Comments	
19 Higher than typical	5 Higher than typical	

FACEBOOK COMMENTS:



Lovely Idea Birchip Probus



What an asset to Birchip, Probus and CWA



Donald



Berriwillock



Culgoa



Birchip Watchem



Birchip Watchem





CASE STUDY:

THE PADDOCK RUN



2023 National Local Government Award for Disaster Preparedness

The Paddock Run contributed to Buloke Shire Council’s broader recognition, forming part of the award-winning suite of Paddock Initiatives that received the 2023 National Local Government Award - Disaster Preparedness 2024 LGPro Award for Excellence - Outstanding Small Rural Council Initiative.

CONTEXT:

In October 2022, Buloke Shire experienced one of the most damaging natural disasters in its history. More than half of the region’s agricultural land was inundated, hundreds of kilometres of roads were severely damaged, and residents were left isolated at the onset of the harvest season—arguably the most critical time of year for this dryland farming community.

Simultaneously, community fatigue was at its peak. Many residents were still grappling with the impacts of COVID-19, and significant service gaps across the region. The floods intensified an already fragile state.

Rural councils often depend on conventional means to communicate, but in Buloke’s case, these were unreliable during the flood recovery and harvest period. Conventional communication methods—social media, mail, email, and local papers—proved insufficient. Many farms lacked stable internet access, and physical mail often failed to reach properties. Residents were physically busy, riding on stress and adrenaline, focused on salvaging crops—not scrolling or researching on social media, or sorting through the mail.

As a result, vital recovery information, including access to financial relief, counselling services, and community grants, often went unseen. Council identified the urgent need for a hyper-local, low-tech, and socially grounded solution—one that would bypass inboxes and mailboxes, instead delivering vital information over the counter at trusted food outlets serving harvest crews, and between truckloads at grain receival sites, just before returning to their paddocks where the farmers were.

PARTNERS:

Rural Financial Counselling Service, Emergency Recovery Victoria, Mallee Family Care, Clinical Psychologist David Younger, National Centre For Farmer Health, Unbreakable Farmer- Warren Davies, 52 Buloke businesses, 15 grain receival sites.





CHALLENGES:

- Farmers and workers were focused on time-critical harvest activities and unlikely to seek out flood recovery services or read long-form communications.
- Critical information was often missed as mail was deferred until post-harvest.
- Internet access is patchy in areas, and local newspapers had ceased circulation during the Christmas-mid January period, creating an information vacuum across rural properties.
- Many residents had disengaged from government programs due to past experiences with complex applications or insufficient support. The emotional and logistical exhaustion post-flood compounded this disconnection.
- Stress levels were high at grain receival depots, where downgraded or rejected loads triggered frustration—often directed at young, frontline staff.
- Communities were fatigued, and while local champions remained committed, there was little capacity left for coordination or new initiatives.
- Historically, farmers have been reluctant to seek help, often viewing support as a “handout” rather than a hand-up, making it especially difficult for them to reach out during times of crisis.
- Without intervention, there was a very real risk that recovery grants and services would go unused—not for lack of availability, but for lack of awareness and access.



WHAT WE DID:

Colloquially known among harvest crews as the rural version of “Uber Eats to the paddock,” The Paddock Run emerged after floods inundated Buloke Shire’s farmland at the start of harvest in 2022. Recognising the gap in communication, Council distributed recovery information via 52 local food outlets and 15 grain receival sites, using printed cards paired with locally-made cookies. This initiative reached farmers during their breaks and in the paddocks, delivering vital support contacts for financial aid and mental health. Applications jumped from zero to 130 within months. The initiative rekindled a sense of connection, trust, and purpose, empowering local businesses and ensuring farmers received support without disruption to their harvest routines.



Each card included a QR code linking to additional flood recovery support, with clear information on mental health services, financial aid, and Council resources. Kooka’s Country Cookies, a local manufacturer, provided snacks distributed alongside the cards, creating a friendly, accessible point of contact and helping to de-escalate tensions at grain receival depots where load disputes were common.



Over
3,500
cards
were distributed
at



67 locations



Local businesses
became key players
in the recovery effort



Farmer applications for flood support increased from
0 to 130

“ These outcomes show that the initiative succeeded in engaging farmers when and where they were most reachable — not online, but over-the-counter or at the truck window, during a moment of pause in a physically and emotionally demanding season. ”



Information was received in a way that respected harvest pressures. The results were tangible. Local businesses became active players in the recovery process, and conversations about wellbeing emerged organically between staff and customers. The cards became a low-cost, high-impact tool for information sharing, proving that trusted networks and peer-to-peer communication remain invaluable in times of crisis.



CAST YOUR VOTE NOW! GO BULOKE! THE PADDOCK RUN FLOOD INITIATIVE DRIVEN BY THE BULOKE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN NOMINATED IN THE 2023 NATIONAL AWARDS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS CATEGORY FOR "THE PADDOCK RUN"



VOTE 1 PADDOCK RUN!

Reach

3,269

Higher than typical

Impressions

3,503

Higher than typical

Interactions

8

Higher than typical

THE PADDOCK RUN SUPPORTED BULOKE'S KEY COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND ALIGNED WITH THE COUNCIL PLAN 2021–2025 BY:

- Ensuring access to support services and encouraging uptake
- Distributing vital information in a practical, low-tech format during harvest
- Facilitating social reconnection and casual conversations between peers
- Strengthening ties between primary producers and local food outlets
- Recognising and easing the impacts of fatigue in a post-crisis environment

THE INITIATIVE CONTRIBUTED TO COUNCIL'S BROADER GOALS OF BUILDING COMMUNITY WELLBEING, FOSTERING INCLUSION, AND CREATING RESILIENCE BY:

- Leveraging existing relationships between businesses, farms, and community leaders
- Supporting mental health through proactive, accessible outreach
- Collaborating with organisations, government agencies, and service providers
- Embedding recovery messages in everyday interactions rather than formal settings

Local businesses played an instrumental role, not only distributing the cards and cookies, but also providing a friendly, familiar environment where community members could absorb important messages without pressure. This approach fostered natural conversations and normalised seeking support, achieving a community-led solution to one of the most pressing recovery challenges.



CONTINUED DELIVERY AND 2024 RETURN OF THE PADDOCK RUN

In November 2024, The Paddock Run returned in response to continued demand and evolving community needs. Council partnered with Warren Davies – The Unbreakable Farmer, David Younger, National Centre for Farmer Health and Mallee Family Care, extending the reach of the initiative across grain bunkers and silos once more, and also to the paddock as well. The reactivation of the initiative was a timely reminder of the region’s unpredictable climate and the need for ongoing, direct support.

The approach remained the same: meet farmers and harvest workers where they are. Staff at testing sites distributed postcards packed with flood and mental health support information, accompanied by locally-made Kooka’s Country Cookies. Local meal providers again included cards in takeaway bags, continuing the tradition of connection through shared effort and care.

This second round confirmed the long-term value and adaptability of the initiative, with Council reinforcing its award-winning communication model: short, tangible messages, hand-delivered with a sense of country practicality and hospitality.

“ The approach remained the same: meet farmers and harvest workers where they are ”



THE PADDOCK RUN IS BACK!

The Paddock Run 2024 reached **10,839** people on Facebook over three weeks.

The Facebook livestream from the Birchip Hotel on 7 December attracted **4,200 views.**

RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**

 - Delivered critical mental health and recovery information directly to farmers
 - Reduced stigma and encouraging help-seeking in a culturally sensitive, accessible way
- ✓ **Business & Economy:**

 - Activated over 50 local food outlets and suppliers in the recovery response
 - Strengthening ties between businesses and the agricultural workforce
 - Stimulating local spending with biscuits and printing sourced locally.
- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**

 - Maximised existing infrastructure by utilising grain receival sites and shopfronts as communication hubs
 - Responded to extensive road damage by adapting delivery methods
- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**

 - Minimised resource use by employing low-waste, paper-based cards with QR codes
 - Reused existing local delivery systems (meal bags, site check-ins) to reduce carbon impact
- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**

 - Reflected care for Country by working in rhythm with seasonal cycles and respecting place-based practices
 - Delivering support on Country with the “go-to-them” model mirroring Aboriginal relational values of meeting people where they are, fostering connection, and healing through grounded, community-led care.



CASE STUDY: **EXTERNAL WELLBEING SUPPORT**



Birchip Paddock Run Warren Davies

- David Younger Events
- Stronger Together: Building Community Recovery Knowledge
- Buloke Brews & Business Bytes
- “Just A Farmer” Community Film Screening
- Warren Davies – The Unbreakable Farmer Events
- Expand Your Impact: Empowering Ideas Across Buloke
- Resilient Women’s Event

CONTEXT:

In the immediate aftermath of the October 2022 flood event, Buloke communities rallied with grit, determination, and practical know-how. Neighbours helped neighbours and volunteers emerged from every corner. But as the adrenaline faded and the tasks piled up, the more complex emotional terrain began to surface. The post-acute phase of disaster recovery, typically around 12–16 weeks after the event, was when the full weight of loss and disruption began to land. It coincided with the end of the grain harvest and the onset of deep fatigue. Previously unseen cracks in communities, workplaces, and families surfaced as signs of disengagement and emotional overload. Community organisations, often the backbone of local resilience, found themselves stretched so thin that many clung to existing commitments—reluctant to accept new funding or opportunities simply because they couldn’t take on more.

PARTNERS:

David Younger, Just A Farmer – movie screening, Business Victoria Partners in Wellbeing Program, AI Group - Business Recovery Advisory Service, The Six C’s, The Unbreakable Farmer – Warren Davies, Make A Change, Fabian Dattner, Buloke Neighbourhood Houses and Resource Centres, Mallee Family Care, East Wimmera Health Service, Red Cross, Headspace (Swan Hill), National Centre For Farmer Health, Swan Hill Health, and Royal Flying Doctors.





COMPLEXITY:

Charlton in particular, has a long history of major flooding. More recently, floods in September and November 2010, January 2011, and September 2016 caused evacuations and power outages. Many residents expressed they felt unsupported by Council and had to lead much of their own recovery. That experience left a legacy of frustration and heightened expectations for stronger Council response this time. Acting on these past experiences, the Buloke Shire Council's Community Recovery team recognised the importance of reading the room—staying connected with community, picking up early signs of rising stress from new rain, storms, and impacts, and responding with timely, targeted, and compassionate support. While the October 2022 floods marked a major disruption, the true weight of Buloke Shire's recovery lay in the cumulative impacts that followed, leading to disengagement, fractured relationships, and heightened emotional volatility in once tightly connected communities.

- Added storm events, widespread damage to homes, roads, and farmland, with slow repairs prolonging disruption
- Agriculture sector faced intense workload and emotional strain, worsened by unpredictable seasonal conditions
- Community and Council leaders, juggling multiple roles, experienced burnout after years of continuous advocacy
- Many individuals faced grief, personal loss, and emotional strain from other challenges and isolation
- Rising financial pressure and poor access to mental health support deepened rural inequities
- Concerns over land use, consultation, and farming futures have fuelled anxiety and division

“ It is in these moments when words are hard to find, and community leaders themselves feel overwhelmed and fogged by fatigue, that external professionals with disaster experience become invaluable. Not because they come with all the answers, but because they can hold space, call it what it is, and give words to the things that's hard to say out loud ”

- Jo Postlethwaite *Buloke Shire Council Manager Community Recovery.*

DAVID YOUNGER EVENTS

Close consultation with key community groups helped recognise the critical point of disengagement. David Younger, a clinical psychologist and disaster recovery expert, was engaged to work alongside Council, communities, and individuals in navigating the emotional landscape of recovery. His involvement marked a turning point, not just in individual healing, but in how Council approached communication, leadership, and care in the months that followed.

- Targeted public-facing events to key community hotspots
- Served locally sourced food and refreshments to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere
- Encouraged informal conversation and authentic connection
- Provided opportunities for one-on-one specialist support
- Supported local businesses by reinvesting recovery funds into the region



Social media
promotional
reach was
1209
across all platforms

DFFH COMMUNITY RECOVERY FORUM – SOUTHERN BULOKE (CHARLTON) – JULY 2023



Attended by **28 residents** from Charlton, Donald, and St Arnaud, the forum provided a space to share experiences, identify ongoing challenges, and strengthen community-led recovery connections across the southern region of Buloke.

DFFH BULOKE SHIRE STAFF RECOVERY FORUM (CHARLTON) – JULY 2023



Engaged **60% of
Buloke Shire staff**

in reflective practice, shared learning, and wellbeing-focused recovery planning to strengthen internal capacity and support service delivery across the Shire.

DFFH COMMUNITY RECOVERY FORUM – NORTHERN BULOKE (SEA LAKE) – JULY 2023



Attended by **48 residents**

the session fostered connection, encouraged wellbeing conversations, and offered a space for community-led reflection and support.

CR-HUB SEA LAKE EDUCATOR'S FORUM – JULY 2023



Engaged **12 teachers**
from Sea Lake Community.

CR-HUB ONLINE BULOKE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP SESSION – JULY 2023



100% attendance

CR-HUB ONLINE COMMUNITY PODCAST PADDOCK THE GOALS – JULY 2023



Reached **82 viewers**
on YouTube

providing accessible recovery messaging and community storytelling through digital engagement.

CR-HUB AUSTRALIA DAY COMMUNITY EVENT (SEA LAKE) – JANUARY 2024



Attended by **68 residents**
from across the Buloke Shire.



FREE EVENT

Journey through the challenges of bushfires, floods, droughts and cyclones with sought-after, nationally renowned speaker and clinical psychologist and come out the other side feeling like you can take on anything!

DAVID YOUNGER

OR

Register now by calling
Top Cafe (03) 5070 1163

All Sea Lake & Nandaly Football Netball Club members and Guests welcome!

**27 JULY 2023, 12:30PM
TOP CAFE, SEA LAKE**

**27 JULY 2023, 7:30PM
40 COMPLEX DRIVE,
SEA LAKE**

BUILDING A BETTER BULOKE



“ My take-away...this is unlike past events focused on Charlton, this time it’s widespread. Support needs to reach more people and it may take longer for us all to get back on track ”

- Participant, Charlton.



RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**
 - Welcoming space to reconnect, reflect on shared experiences
 - Trauma-informed sessions supporting emotional recovery and leadership resilience
 - Normalised post-disaster stress and encouraged help-seeking through relatable language
 - Strengthened psychological safety across community and Council settings
- ✓ **Business & Economy:**
 - Engaged local venues as partners in mental health conversations
 - Increased social traffic to hospitality businesses hosting events
- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**
 - Utilised existing community venues (pubs, halls, clubrooms) as trusted wellbeing spaces
 - Reinforced the role of social infrastructure in community recovery
- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**
 - Addressed climate-related grief and land-based stress through emotional regulation tools
 - Linked mental wellbeing to farmers’ ability to manage environmental pressures
- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**
 - Promoted culturally respectful, relationship-based engagement
 - Supported inclusive dialogue and story-sharing consistent with Aboriginal healing values



STRONGER TOGETHER: BUILDING COMMUNITY RECOVERY KNOWLEDGE

– AUGUST 2023

As the community sought more information about Buloke's recovery approach, Council identified an opportunity to strengthen resilience by linking local efforts with new national reforms.

The Australian Disaster Recovery Framework, released in 2022, introduced a five-pillar approach: People & Wellbeing, Business & Economy, Building & Infrastructure, Environment & Biodiversity, and Aboriginal Culture & Healing. It was designed to build a more holistic and inclusive recovery system.

To bring these reforms to life at a local level, Buloke's Community Recovery team worked with experienced disaster responders, The Six C's, to deliver information and training sessions, followed by a pilot initiative to put the learning into action at Culgoa. As with previous approaches catering was organised for informal discussion:

“ Hats off to the Culgoa community for showing up. Our voice is important and valuable in developing the Culgoa Emergency Management Plan. This workshop is amazing. Our facilitators Sue and Matt are amazing ”
- Kerrie Barry, Culgoa.

HIGHLIGHTS:



Social media reach was 1564 people across all platforms

RECOVERY TRAINING SESSIONS:



2 face-to-face sessions (Donald and Wycheproof)



1 online session explaining new recovery structures and emergency roles



Attended by 19 community organisation representatives, including local health services

COMMUNITY RECOVERY PODCAST:



The Paddock: The Goals episode featured Sue Rondeau from The Six C's, capturing Donald's lived experience



Reached 50 views

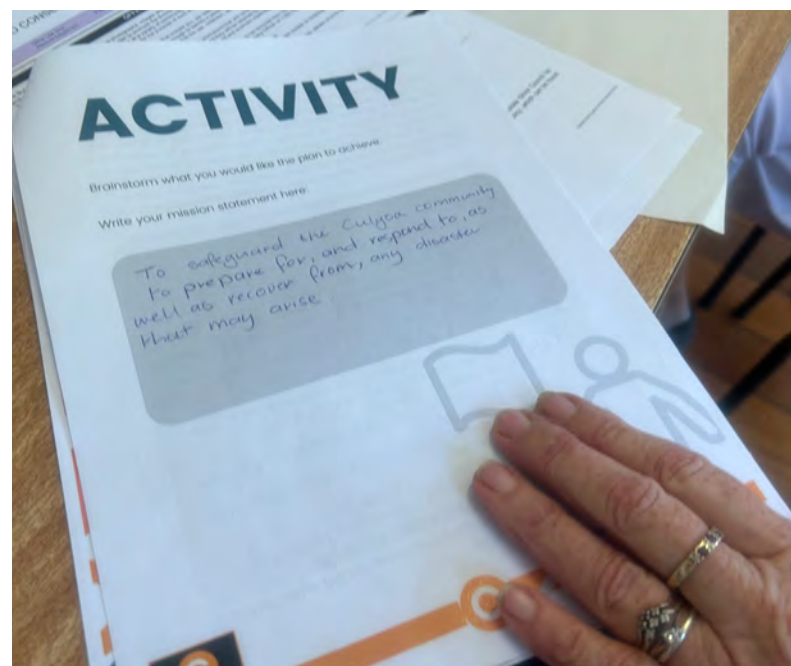
CULGOA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING WORKSHOP:



Connected national reforms to local planning after Tyrrell Creek flooding



Attended by 49% of Culgoa residents





RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:



People and wellbeing

- Built recovery knowledge and wellbeing
- Empowered community members to understand roles and processes in disasters



Business & Economy:

- Engaged local health services and organisations in recovery leadership
- Stimulated social interaction and collaboration through informal event catering



Building & Infrastructure:

- Strengthened understanding of emergency management structures at local venues
- Supported Culgoa's Emergency Management Planning post-Tyrrell Creek flooding



Environment & Biodiversity:

- Recognised local environmental impacts in planning discussions
- Fostered resilience planning to manage future environmental challenges



Aboriginal Culture & Healing:

- Elevated community voice and lived experience in recovery planning processes
- Respected place-based approaches by embedding local knowledge and collaboration



BULOKE BREWS & BUSINESS BYTES

– MARCH 2024

In addition to the October 2022 floods, Buloke’s community endured further extreme weather over the 2023 Christmas–Boxing Day period and again in February 2024. In Charlton, the post office had burned down just prior to Christmas, disrupting vital business and personal mail services. After reopening in a new location, it was again damaged in the February storm, along with other buildings along the main street and several kilometres of powerlines, also impacting power supply to Donald.

Against this backdrop of cumulative stress, Buloke Shire Council’s Community Recovery team partnered with local leaders and businesses to create Buloke Brews & Business Bytes. The four-week early morning pilot aimed to support the wider community, with a direct focus on the Charlton business community.

COMMUNITY-CENTRED:

- Hosted in a familiar, neutral venue where business owners could casually “place an order” for support
- A specially designed menu allowed discreet selection of services, making advice approachable and stigma-free
- Community Recovery Team acted as baristas, serving both coffee and connection to foster trust
- Specialist support was delivered via the Business Victoria Partners in Wellbeing Program and AI Group Business Recovery Advisory Service
- A private room at the Rex Theatre enabled confidential, one-on-one consultant appointments
- Contact details and service connections were provided discreetly to protect privacy
- Outreach appointments were arranged for businesses unable to attend in person
- Businesses contributed merchandise and props for a front window display, sparking curiosity and celebrating local enterprise
- Additional wellbeing support and concierge provided by Australian Red Cross (Charlton branch)

“ Welcome to Buloke Brews and Business Bytes, your morning sanctuary where the aroma of fresh coffee blends with the essence of business rejuvenation. We serve an invigorating menu of advisory services, each designed to awaken and enrich your entrepreneurial spirit. As the dawn breaks, allow us to present you with our handcrafted selection, tailored for those seeking a fresh start and robust growth with every sip. ”

“ Thank you to you and your team for the Buloke Brews and Business Bytes. It was encouraging to see a Council support the community so well. There have been a few referrals to business advice which is a really good sign. ”
- *Sharmi Cantwell Mental Health Clinician – Flood Response Partners In Wellbeing.*



Morning coffee sessions
from 7:30am-9:30am for 4 weeks



Launch presentation on first day



Sessions were fully booked in weeks 1–2; lower uptake later highlighted the need for early momentum and adaptive follow-up



Promoted Online:
Facebook posts reached
5785
people throughout
the campaign

SURVEY FEEDBACK:



82% of the 22 respondents were Charlton business owners



86% knew about the event beforehand



59% of respondents attended the event



Atmosphere and welcome rated **4.93/5 (very high satisfaction)**



Safe, confidential environment **rated 4.87/5**



92% were satisfied with business advice received



94% satisfied with business and wellbeing support access



93% satisfied with mental health counselling options



64% knew remote services (phone/video) were available



89% of remote service users were satisfied



68% felt inspired to collaborate, connect, and stay optimistic



100% were satisfied with the event overall



100% would recommend the event to others



- ✓ Some businesses too busy to attend during work hours
- ✓ Personalised visits to businesses were highly appreciated
- ✓ Flexible, evening after-hours options suggested for future events
- ✓ Strong praise for quality of business and community wellbeing support





RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:



People and wellbeing

- Normalised support-seeking through casual, stigma-free engagement
- Offered discreet access to wellbeing and business advisors
- Built trust through visible, friendly Recovery Team involvement as baristas
- Helped reconnect isolated business owners post-disaster



Business & Economy:

- Boosted business resilience via tailored advice
- Reconnected businesses through shared conversation and collaboration
- Encouraged self-reflection and change through informal expert access
- Promoted local enterprise with community-driven window displays
- Allowed confidential support without risk to reputation
- Catering provided locally
- Delivered outreach and refreshments to non-attendees



Building & Infrastructure:

- Activated the Rex Theatre as a trusted recovery hub
- Reinforced accessible, place-based recovery infrastructure



Environment & Biodiversity:

- Reduced travel and resource use through central delivery
- Used local catering and reusable materials
- Designed low-waste signage and printed tools



Aboriginal Culture & Healing:

- Reflected values of relational care, discretion, and “meeting people where they are”
- Modelled culturally respectful, quiet leadership and listening



“JUST A FARMER” COMMUNITY FILM SCREENING

– JUNE 2024

CONTEXT:

Set against a backdrop of grief, resilience, and rural identity, the “Just A Farmer” film tells the story of Alison—a woman navigating personal loss, farm management, and generational trauma. With one farmer dying by suicide every ten days, the emotional toll is staggering.

Buloke Shire Council partnered with health services and local organisations to host a special screening at Charlton’s historic Rex Theatre. The event served as both a gathering and a compassionate intervention—providing a safe space for the community to reflect, connect, and receive support. The film resonated deeply with everyone prompting open dialogue about mental health, loss, and the silent burdens often carried in farming communities.

- On-site clinicians and psychological first aiders from East Wimmera Health Service, Mallee Family Care, Royal Flying Doctor Service, Red Cross, Headspace, and Buloke Shire Council
- Distributed care packs containing support information and Red Cross Rediplans
- Buloke Neighbourhood Houses, The Rex Theatre, and local catering services — creating a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere
- Courtesy cars and bus services coordinated from eight towns — ensuring equitable access from Birchip, Berrillock, Charlton, Culgoa, Donald, Nandaly, Nullawil, and Sea Lake. This was coordinated by Buloke’s Neighbourhood Houses and ticket bookings managed by Charlton Neighbourhood House

INSIGHTS:



Recommendation of the film:
21 out of 22 survey respondents (95%)

said they would recommend the film to others (12 strongly agree, 9 agree). 1 person disagreed.



Impact on mental health awareness:
25 survey respondents strongly agreed that the film helped raise awareness of mental health in farming communities. 2 respondents were neutral.



Comfort with seeking support:

40 respondents (91%) reported feeling comfortable seeking advice or mental health support (24 strongly agree, 16 agree). 2 people were neutral and 2 disagreed.



213 attendees



Sold out within one-week



240 care packs distributed



**Widespread participation across
Buloke towns**



- ✓ Increased awareness of available support services
- ✓ Strengthened community connection through shared experience
- ✓ Reinforced the role of arts-based storytelling in trauma-informed recovery
- ✓ Effective in reducing stigma
- ✓ A catalyst for future mental health conversations



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES



#Community Recovery



RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**

 - Created a safe, supportive space to explore mental health through storytelling
 - Normalised conversations around suicide, grief, and trauma in farming communities
 - Connected attendees with on-site clinicians and mental health services
- ✓ **Business & Economy:**

 - Supported local caterers, theatre operators, and hospitality services
 - Stimulated regional participation and local spending through coordinated transport access
- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**

 - Activated The Rex Theatre as a central community hub for recovery dialogue
 - Used coordinated transport to improve access from remote towns
- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**

 - Highlighted emotional impacts of environmental stressors on rural life
 - Encouraged connection to land and identity through rural-based narrative
- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**

 - Reflected shared resilience and listening—values aligned with Aboriginal ways of healing and connection



WARREN DAVIES – THE UNBREAKABLE FARMER EVENTS

– SEPTEMBER 2024

CONTEXT:

Warren Davies delivered a series of events across six locations—Berrivillock, Birchip, Nandaly, Wycheproof and the Donald-Jeffcott Cricket Club—offering powerful insights grounded in his own lived experience as a farmer navigating floods, drought, mental illness, and recovery. He had previously visited Charlton at an earlier date.

In addition to community sessions, Warren Davies visited eight farms across Buloke, meeting farmers one-on-one in their own environment—shearing sheds, paddocks, machinery yards, and kitchens. These visits provided private, low-pressure moments for farmers to open up about their challenges, reinforcing the program’s commitment to meeting people where they are, both physically and emotionally.

These sessions were accessible, community-led, and tailored to resonate with local people, meeting them in their own spaces—from pub backrooms to paddocks. One session, livestreamed from the Birchip Hotel, received over 4,200 views, dramatically increasing reach and breaking down barriers around rural mental health.



Six town talks reached hundreds, many first-time participants in mental health conversations



8 in-person farm visits



5 grain silo site visits



1 Facebook livestream reaching 4,200+ viewers



Mallee Family Care – clinician support and follow-up referrals



Neighbourhood Houses for local facilitation



Widespread uptake of the **Unbreakable Wheel** tool in pubs, sheds, and homes



Fostered follow-up sessions, including Mallee Family Care “Cuppa and Chat” events



Opened conversations on grief, uncertainty



Prioritisation of staying well during ongoing agricultural stress



EXTENDED PADDOCK RUN TOUR

– DECEMBER 2024

As part of the 2024 Paddock Run tour, Warren Davies—The Unbreakable Farmer, joined the Buloke Shire Council Community Recovery team and the Mallee Family Care team on the ground, visiting five major grain receival sites across the region. These visits weren't formal speaking events but rather opportunities for authentic, boots-on-the-ground engagement. Warren connected with farmers and transport operators during their short breaks between deliveries, sharing brief but powerful insights drawn from lived experience.

“ Buloke’s Neighbourhood Houses identified and liaised with farm families in advance, ensuring Warren’s visits were welcomed, sensitive, and grounded in trust rather than simply showing up ”

His presence added depth to the initiative, bridging the gap between information delivery and emotional support. Whether leaning on a silo rail or sharing a smile over a biscuit, Warren’s relatable style sparked conversations that may not have happened otherwise—proving once again that timing, place, and trust matter just as much as the message. His involvement made the Paddock Run not only informative, but personal and deeply human.



UNBREAKABLE WHEEL OF WELLBEING AND COASTERS

– FEBRUARY 2025

CONTEXT:

As part of the initiative, Warren Davies partnered closely with Buloke Shire Council’s Community Recovery team to reimagine and adapt his existing Unbreakable Wheel of Wellbeing tool. Recognising that mental health conversations often begin in informal spaces—not clinics—the team worked collaboratively to ensure the tool was both accessible and practical for use across diverse community settings.

They co-designed a durable, wipeable version of the Wheel, making it suitable for installation in urinals, toilets, bar backs, and shared public areas—places where individuals might find a quiet moment for reflection. The laminated design ensured hygiene standards were maintained while keeping the messaging visible and approachable.

Additionally, the Recovery Team developed a takeaway bar coaster version, allowing the Wheel to serve as a subtle conversation starter over a drink or be taken home discreetly. These coasters provided a tangible, low-pressure resource to support ongoing self-assessment and mental health awareness, especially for those less likely to engage with formal services.



60 A3 posters
20 A2 posters

“ This is a very important intervention as it helps keep conversations going in familiar spaces, encouraging people to check in on themselves and others ”

- Terry Mathieson, proprietor of the Wycheproof Royal Mail Hotel.

11,000 coasters distributed



RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**
 - Normalised mental health discussions in accessible, local settings
 - Increased help-seeking behaviour through relatable storytelling and tools
 - Reduced stigma through lived experience
- ✓ **Business & Economy:**
 - Boosted local venue participation and reinforced their role as wellbeing spaces
 - Increased midweek trade in hosting pubs and clubs with local catering provided
- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**
 - Activated pubs, cricket clubs, and community halls as healing spaces
- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**
 - Linked land health with personal wellbeing in relatable terms
- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**
 - Promoted reflection, storytelling, and non-clinical healing—resonant with Aboriginal values
 - Supported local engagement through relational, place-based approaches



EXPAND YOUR IMPACT: EMPOWERING IDEAS ACROSS BULOKE

– FEBRUARY 2025

CONTEXT:

Building on previous success, Expand Your Impact returned to Buloke, delivering a fresh, practical series designed to help community members move beyond post-recovery fatigue and reignite their ideas, goals, and local projects. Unlike earlier trauma-focused initiatives, this three-part Lunch & Learn series focused on moving forward, helping participants step out of procrastination and into action. Delivered online by Make a Change Australia (Jumpleads), the sessions provided practical tools for vision building, project planning, storytelling, and collaboration.

“ I loved this program. I’m feeling so uplifted and excited for the future. Thank you so much Sharon, Karen, and Jumpleads and the input from other participants. ” - Participant feedback



33 registrations, including 18 participants from Buloke



15 participants attended at least one session



Delivered over three lunchtime workshops (February 18, 19, and 20) to fit around work and business needs



Communications campaign **reached over 50,000 people** across social media and email platforms



Facebook ads alone **reached over 6,300 people**

Workshop resources, worksheets, and networking opportunities provided to all registrants.

IMPACT

- Building confidence to start, structuring small ideas into action steps
- Crafting a compelling narrative, identifying audiences, and activating community support
- Building collaboration, connections, and next steps to sustain momentum

Participants described the workshops as “like a mini MBA,” providing practical momentum and a supportive peer environment. Many highlighted the confidence and clarity they gained as key outcomes.

ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES:

- Ongoing connections formed through resource-sharing and the Make a Change Facebook Group
- Participants gained access to future subsidised training and coaching opportunities
- Some participants are continuing their journey through Jumpleads’ Coaching for Change program

RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:



People and wellbeing

- Built participants’ confidence to move forward post-recovery
- Provided practical tools for wellbeing, connection, and resilience



Business & Economy:

- Supported business ideas, start-ups, and freelance enterprise development
- Offered practical skills for project planning and business activation



Building & Infrastructure:

- Strengthened social infrastructure by creating new community networks
- Linked individual projects to broader community recovery and renewal



Environment & Biodiversity:

- Encouraged projects addressing climate resilience and environmental initiatives
- Supported sustainable community-driven solutions linked to land and place



Aboriginal Culture & Healing:

- Created inclusive spaces for diverse voices and community-led action
- Respected and empowered individual journeys toward healing and contribution



RESILIENT WOMEN: EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES (CHARLTON)

– MARCH 2025

CONTEXT:

Led and delivered by the Buloke Neighbourhood Houses Cluster, the Resilient Women: Empowered Communities Free event was held at the Charlton Park Community Bank Conference Centre.

Supported through funding from the Community Recovery Hubs Program, this community-driven gathering celebrated and empowered women across the region, aligning with the broader aims of International Women's Day.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

- Welcome to Country: Rebecca Phillips, a proud Djaara and Pangerang woman, delivered a heartfelt Welcome to Country, incorporating meaningful music and reflections
- Keynote Speaker: Sophie Arnold, Executive Manager of the United Nations Association of Australia (Victoria Division), discussed the significance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, emphasising its relevance today
- Panelists: Hayley O'Callaghan, Associate Professor Monique Watts, Jenna Allen and Rebecca Phillips
- Featured Speaker: Fabian Dattner, renowned leadership expert and social entrepreneur, was a featured speaker

Fabian Dattner brought her national and international leadership expertise, sharing practical insights on courageous leadership, self-belief, and collective action. She encouraged participants to recognise their influence within their communities, regardless of scale. Her session combined storytelling, leadership strategies, and reflection, helping women explore their role in building resilience post-disaster. Fabian's contribution created a hopeful atmosphere, reinforcing that leadership is about action, service, and staying connected to purpose—not titles.



70 people attended from Buloke Shire (Birchip, Charlton, Donald, Wycheproof, surrounds). Attendees also came from Northern Grampians, Gannawarra, and metro areas. Strong representation from youth, leaders, health, volunteers, farming, business, and Council



Participants discussed gender equality, shared stories, and explored building resilient communities



Catering was provided free of charge to support participation and connection



Bus services were offered from all Buloke townships to ensure access





Breaking Barriers: An Event for All

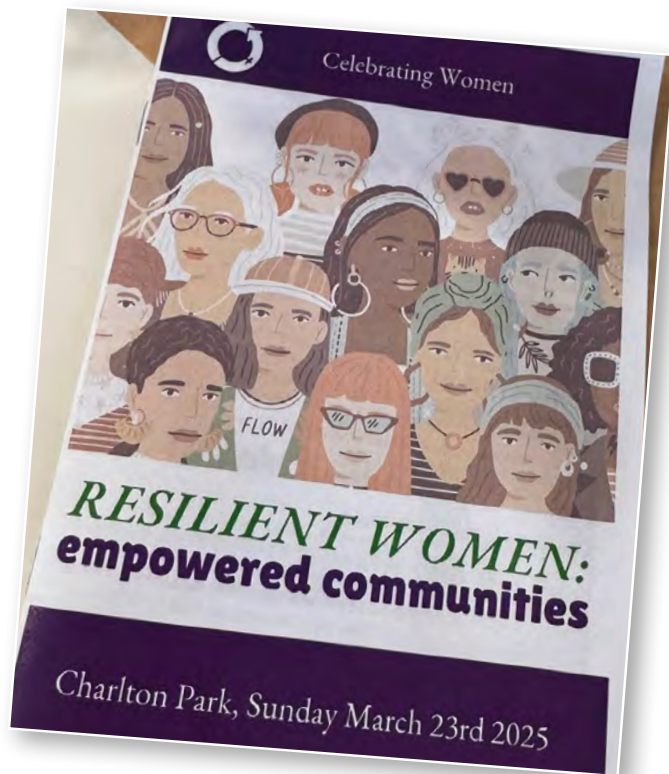
The Buloke Neighbourhood Houses invite you to an extraordinary event on Sunday, March 23, 2025, celebrating leadership, resilience, and the power of community.

This is an event for everyone – all genders, all ages, all abilities – because diversity is what makes our communities so strong and resilient. It's about celebrating the unique talents and experiences of every individual who brings their own story to the table.

Empowering a diverse leadership fabric has inspired these leaders across the globe. Through extraordinary leadership and innovation, they have tackled complex global issues, from climate change to social inequality, and their insights are shaping the future of our world.

Join us for a night of inspiration, networking, and celebration. We'll be featuring three keynote speakers, a panel discussion, and a live performance. The event will conclude with a networking dinner and a chance to connect with other community leaders.

Event Details: Sunday, March 23, 2025, 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM. Location: Charlton Park Conference Centre, 123 Main Street, Charlton Park, NSW. Tickets: \$50 per person. Bookings: www.buloke-houses.org.au/events



RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**
 - Empowered rural women to build confidence, leadership, and resilience
 - Provided a welcoming, inclusive space to foster mental and social wellbeing
 - Supported participation through accessible bus transport and free catering

- ✓ **Business & Economy:**
 - Featured leadership expert Fabian Dattner to build capacity for local leadership
 - Strengthened networking across sectors including business, agriculture, health, and education
 - Promoted future community-driven initiatives and personal enterprise ideas

- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**
 - Activated Charlton Park Community Bank Conference Centre as a key community venue
 - Strengthened use of social and civic spaces for community recovery gatherings

- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**
 - Distributed Allocasuarina (Buloke) trees through Landcare to promote environmental stewardship
 - Reinforced links between care for community and care for Country

- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**
 - Opened with a Welcome to Country by Rebecca Phillips, embedding respect for Indigenous voices
 - Honoured place-based cultural practices and strengthened inclusive community recovery



Funded by: Australian and Victorian Governments through the Community Recovery Hubs Program (CR-Hub), with additional support for David Younger events provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).





BULOKE
SHIRE COUNCIL

CASE STUDY:

THE PADDOCK: THE GOALS

2023
VICTORIAN
RESILIENT
AUSTRALIA
AWARD (LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
CATEGORY)

2023 FINALIST –
NATIONAL RESILIENT
AUSTRALIA AWARDS
2023 (LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
CATEGORY)

2024 LGPRO
AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE
OUTSTANDING SMALL
RURAL COUNCIL
INITIATIVE

CONTEXT:

In October 2022, Buloke Shire was heavily impacted by significant flooding, disrupting lives, communities, and vital harvest operations. Beyond the immediate physical damage, the emotional toll on rural residents was significant. Community fatigue was already evident after COVID-19, and the loss of sporting seasons and other community connectors during lockdowns had weakened critical social networks.

Recognising that sport is deeply woven into the cultural and emotional fabric of Buloke, Council identified an opportunity to leverage the 2023 North Central Football League (NCFL) season to rebuild morale, reconnect residents, and celebrate local resilience through authentic, community-led storytelling.

Something more personal, visual, and accessible was required – a project that celebrated people in their place, on their terms.

PARTNERS:

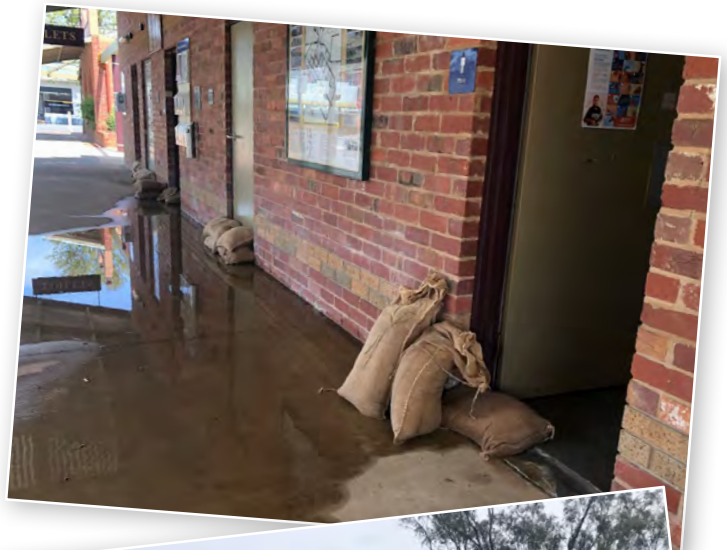
North Central Football League (NCFL), 50 local organisations and agencies, community volunteers, and local sports media identities.





CHALLENGES:

- Slow rural road recovery created frustration, compounding feelings of being forgotten
- Flood-damaged roads isolated residents, reducing youth participation and weakening connections
- Volunteer fatigue intensified as few carried the load while others withdrew involvement
- Farmers self-assessing themselves out of grants and hesitant to seek financial recovery support
- Young farmers needed targeted peer support
- Inclusive planning gaps emerged, especially for residents with disabilities and high support needs
- Sustaining emotional connection through sport and community dinners became critical for healing
- Sporting clubs becoming essential emotional hubs, reconnecting isolated communities
- Young people needed genuine roles, not just token involvement in recovery planning
- Nullawil faced the challenge of joining a new league to sustain identity
- Emotional fatigue was peaking and the real psychological strain was emerging
- Council's small team faced the challenge of covering 8,000km² for consultation storytelling
- Reluctance to travel meant Council needed to meet residents where they were located



WHAT WE DID:

Buloke Shire Council adapted its approach, recognising that traditional consultation would not reach flood-affected, fatigued residents across its 8,000km² region.

Council instead embedded itself within the rhythms of local footy, netball, and hockey clubs during the 2023 North Central Football League season, meeting people where they were — on sidelines, sitting in cars at the footy oval, or on couches at home. Some episodes were broadcast live, while others were released during Saturday events, capturing the energy and accessibility of community gatherings.

Council produced 10 vodcast episodes, each broken into four short quarters. Across the series, 64 guests; players, volunteers, farmers, business owners, service and agency leaders, and young people all shared their experiences.

The vodcast format (video podcast) allowed community voices to be seen and heard, making complex recovery topics like mental health, infrastructure, youth leadership, and financial support more relatable and accessible.

This approach directly celebrated local identity through the authentic lens of the people themselves.

Council captured real-time learning by meeting communities where they already gathered, breaking down engagement barriers, rebuilding connections, and creating a lasting digital record to guide future recovery efforts.



400
individual
stories captured across
10 NCFL clubs



40 quarters
of 10 episodes
each aligned with the
NCFL fixture



50 partner
organisations
and agencies contributed



Positive
audience
retention
with ongoing views months
after the season concluded



Community-led,
low-cost
storytelling
with high impact on social
capital and pride



Adopted by
Council
and partner agencies as a practical
education and training resource



2,704
cumulative YouTube
views



10,839
cumulative Facebook reach
across the project

WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID:

- “ Six months down the track, you start feeling weird — headaches, grumpiness — and wonder why you can’t face the paddocks. ”
— Volunteer, Charlton
- “ After the floods, the hardest thing was feeling isolated. The club gave us a reason to get out of the house again. ”
— Player, Sea Lake Nandaly
- “ It’s not just about the game. It’s about seeing each other every week — even if you’re having a bad week. ”
— Volunteer, Wycheproof Narraport
- “ Sport brought people back together faster than any service or policy ever could. ”
— Sports Commentator, Donald
- “ There were days when winning didn’t matter. Just pulling on the jumper was enough. ”
— Club President, Donald
- “ Local knowledge — shared over a beer on the bridge — told us more than a dozen satellite photos could. ”
— Community Leader, Culgoa
- “ Fixing roads isn’t just about cars — it’s about keeping our clubs alive, our kids engaged, and our towns connected. ”
— Player, Wycheproof
- “ When you tell your story, you find out you’re not alone. ”
— Junior Player, Wycheproof

“ We’re proud of our paddocks, our sports fields, and our people — this year showed how tough and caring we really are. ”
— Community Leader, Birchip Watchem



RECOVERY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED:

- ✓ **People and wellbeing**
 - Strengthened community resilience through authentic, inclusive storytelling
 - Normalised conversations about challenges, mental health, and recovery
 - Fostered pride, visibility, and morale after extended isolation
 - Digitally connected the community with others outside the region
- ✓ **Business & Economy:**
 - Boosted local community club visibility
- ✓ **Building & Infrastructure:**
 - Maximised the use of existing local sporting infrastructure as storytelling hubs
- ✓ **Environment & Biodiversity:**
 - Promoted sustainable practices by using digital-first storytelling with minimal physical resources
 - Respected place-based identity by capturing people in their environmental and community settings
- ✓ **Aboriginal Culture & Healing:**
 - Reflected relational values of gathering, storytelling, and care for Country
 - Supported intergenerational connection and community-led healing through shared sport and story



Case Study:

BULOKE YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY RECOVERY

CONTEXT:

Youth aged 0–24 make up 24.4% of Buloke Shire's population, with geographic isolation and limited public transport creating barriers to connection and involvement in recovery. Still emerging from the social impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns, local youth embraced new opportunities to reconnect. Rather than inventing new activities, familiar ones were prioritised, reimagined and brought to where young people were—easing the load on caregivers, avoiding centralised events, and embedding the essence of recovery: rebuilding, not replicating.



CHALLENGE:

- Limited designated youth infrastructure spaces
- Funding insecurity challenging long-term event planning
- Weather and harvest seasons disrupting scheduling
- Caregivers and volunteers experiencing post-crisis fatigue
- Long travel distances reducing access to local events
- Hidden mental health needs
- Cumulative trauma in some towns delaying activity reinvention
- Connectivity gaps hindering coordination across towns
- Events historically lacking adjustments for disability and access
- Neurodiverse-friendly supports not consistently available



WHAT WE DID:

First Buloke FReeZA Ball - Masquerade Theme (13-18 yrs)

Funding:

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Buloke FReeZA Program; Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Community Connection and Resilience Program; Birchip, Charlton, and Sea Lake Neighbourhood Houses.

The 2023 Buloke Youth Masquerade Ball was a landmark event, envisioned by young people to unite peers from across the Shire for an evening of celebration and connection—bringing formality and sophistication to youth dance events. Held at the Wycheproof Golf Club during the term two school holidays, the ball was a collaborative effort by Buloke FReeZA youth groups and Neighbourhood Houses. Buses were arranged from each town, food and drinks provided with 70 participants in attendance.

Ahead of the event, Buloke Shire Council secured DFFH funding for two creative recovery workshops in Charlton and Birchip, scheduled flexibly around students' commitments. These relaxed, inclusive sessions gave young people space to unwind, connect, and prepare—designing masks and decorations using provided materials, reducing participation costs and supporting self-expression in a calm, creative setting.



People & Wellbeing: Provided a safe, inclusive space promoting mental health and reducing youth isolation. Embraced the masquerade theme to encourage self-expression and celebrate diverse identities.

Business & Economy: Engaged local businesses for catering and decorations, supporting the regional economy.

Building & Infrastructure: Utilised Wycheproof Golf Club, Charlton Civic Hall, and Birchip Neighbourhood House highlighting their value as adaptable youth event infrastructure.

Environment & Biodiversity: Encouraged recycled materials and creative reuse; bus transport reduced the event's carbon footprint.

Aboriginal Culture & Healing: Connection to environment gumnuts and leaves materials from country provided

Sea Lake Tyrrell College Community Fun Day (all age groups)

Funding:

Australian and Victorian Governments Community Recovery Hubs Program, Woomelang Lions Club, Advance Sea Lake's Riordan Community Chest, and GrainFlow.

Partners:

Tyrrell P-12 College, CFA, Ambulance Victoria and Buloke Shire Council

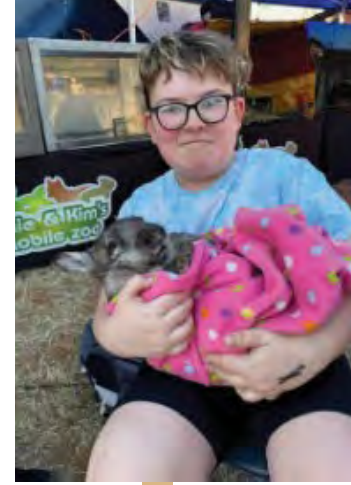
Context:

Seven Year 9 students from Tyrrell College successfully coordinated the Sea Lake Community Fun Day as their community project following a nine-week residential program at the Alpine School for Student Leadership. Their initiative brought over 200 people together in a vibrant, family-friendly celebration demonstrating youth leadership in action.

Held in October 2024, activities included, mechanical bull, bubble soccer, slot car racing, and a movie screening. Buloke Shire Council arranged funding support to include trauma-informed inclusive activities including pony rides and petting zoo.

Objectives:

- Foster social inclusion and community reconnection after regional disruptions
- Apply leadership and project management skills
- Deliver an inclusive, accessible event for all ages and backgrounds
- CFA and Ambulance Victoria for educational display
- Promoted via school, community networks, and social media



**Awarded:
2025 Sea Lake District
Community Event of the Year**

COMMUNITY

Fun day scoops student award

MICHELLE BRADY | FEB 14 2025



Cooper Kelly, Keira Barton, Zaida Tait, Taj Borlase, Archie Alday, Nate McClelland and Darcey Hodgson received an Australia Day award for organising the Sea Lake Community Event of the Year. Photo: contributed.

A GROUP of industrious Tyrrell College students have been honoured with a prestigious award for their exceptional efforts in planning and organising a community event for the Sea Lake district.



People & Wellbeing: Created a fun, inclusive environment that encouraged social interaction across age groups. Highlighted youth leadership and the importance of student voice in community development.

Business & Economy: Supported local services through vendor participation and catering.

Building & Infrastructure: Activated Tyrrell College for youth-led community events.

Environment & Biodiversity: Focused on low-waste event practices and outdoor community use.



Coping Strategies Through Storytelling

- Birdie's Playgroup Tour (0-8 years)

Funding:

Australian and Victorian Government's Community Recovery Hubs Program

Program Target Group:

Children, caregivers, educators, playgroup facilitators

Partners:

Local libraries and supported playgroups, Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Birdie Books and puppets.

Context:

In response to requests from youth who had experienced previous flood events, Buloke Shire Council's Community Recovery team launched a Buloke-wide early childhood education initiative through storytelling and creative connection. Delivered across libraries and supported playgroups, the Birdie's Book series provided children with age-appropriate tools to understand and cope with natural disasters, including heat, floods, storms, and fire. Fruit snacks were provided at each playgroup session at Birchip, Charlton, Donald, Wycheproof and Sea Lake. Excerpts from the books were also shared at Probus presentations across Buloke, who took up the opportunity to narrate with the hand puppets.

Objectives:

- Re-build early resilience through education and story-based learning
- Empower caregivers and educators with resources to guide difficult conversations
- Increase emotional literacy among young children in disaster-prone areas
- Facilitated informal discussions with parents and educators about preparedness and recovery
- Share additional recovery resources with families.

Impact:

- Reached young children and caregivers in all five major towns: Birchip, Charlton, Donald, Sea Lake, and Wycheproof.
- Created safe spaces for play-based recovery learning.
- Supported the normalisation of conversations about fire, flood, and emergency events in homes and schools.
- Supported Traditional Owner-led approaches to climate impacts.



"Educating our children about natural disasters is crucial in our ever-changing environment. These books are an excellent resource for initiating conversations and understanding about such events in a child-friendly manner"
- Buloke Shire Council Mayor
Cr Alan Getley

FB Post
Reach 1362

"It was a great presentation...we enjoyed being part of it. I miss storytelling. I have to wait for grandkids to come these days. Great idea to take your presentation to an audience too. Thank you very much for the contributions towards lunch too"
- Probus participant.

People & Wellbeing: Supported emotional literacy and resilience in young children through story-based disaster education.

Business & Economy: Strengthened local partnerships with playgroups, libraries, and neighbourhood houses and food was purchased in each town where initiatives were delivered.

Building & Infrastructure: Activated community spaces for early learning and recovery programs.

Environment & Biodiversity: Introduced young learners to environmental challenges and preparedness through age-appropriate narratives.

Aboriginal Culture & Healing: Incorporated stories that acknowledged country and connected children to land, promoting healing through calm, nature-based narratives and shared learning spaces.



Brickmaster Challenge

(10-13yrs)

Funding:

Australian and Victorian Government's Community Recovery Hubs Program

Partners:

Donald Primary, Donald St Mary's Primary and Donald High, Uplift Events

Context:

The Brickmaster Challenge was delivered in Donald at the town hall as a direct response to community consultation with local youth and recommendations outlined in Council's recovery plans. This creative building event, developed in partnership with schools, engaged 56 primary-aged children in an imaginative and inclusive activity designed to promote connection, confidence, and post-disaster healing.

Objectives:

- Provide a therapeutic, inclusive, hands-on creative experience for school-aged children
- Promote mental wellbeing through mindfulness and collaborative play
- Reinforce themes of resilience and recovery through symbolic building activities
- Encourage children to value what they have and explore how to build back differently, with creativity and care
- Community-led concept identified through youth consultation
- Delivered on-site with all materials and snacks provided, eliminating cost barriers for participation

Note: Due to caretaker period restrictions during Local Government elections, the activity was redesigned for closed local delivery in Donald only, with only internal promotion replacing the original plan for a shire-wide event with bused access.

Team-based tasks: Build a superhero vehicle, recreate a movie scene & your town of the future. Present collective build to the judges.

Impact:

- Children identified and recreated valued town landmarks
- Iconic sites like the river and services featured prominently – even a lifeboat
- Strengthened place-based connection and community pride
- Sparked meaningful discussions about local identity and belonging
- Being a teams event, it also fostered collaboration, communication, and shared problem-solving
- Strengthened peer relationships through cooperative building challenges
- Encouraged inclusive participation, where every child had a role
- Encouraged shared appreciation of familiar spaces through creative expression
- Incorporated disability, access needs and neurodiverse-friendly



People & Wellbeing: Fostered connection, creativity, and teamwork through hands-on, collaborative play.

Business & Economy: Involved local schools and partners in delivering a youth-led recovery initiative.

Building & Infrastructure: Utilised community facilities to deliver a flexible, locally-focused creative event.

Environment & Biodiversity: Encouraged appreciation of local landmarks and sustainable reuse of materials.

Aboriginal Culture & Healing: While LEGO was the primary material, the activity included conversations about place and local landmarks, fostering connection to Country and respect for cultural identity through storytelling and shared reflection.

Level Up: Game On

– Recovery Meets Gaming (aged 8-25yrs)

Australian and Victorian Government's Community Recovery Hubs Program

Partners:

Level-Up Events, Donald and District Pastoral and Agricultural Society Inc. Donald Pastoral Show, Charlton Show, Charlton Agricultural & Pastoral Society Inc., Wycheproof Neighbourhood House Christmas Promotion, Sea Lake Neighbourhood House

Context:

Following insights from The Paddock: The Goals vodcast series, Buloke Shire Council recognised the increasing importance of online gaming as a social lifeline and community, especially in geographically isolated areas. In response, Council's Community Recovery team developed the Level Up initiative—a series of trauma-informed gaming events designed to promote safe digital participation, social connection, and community recovery. The Level Up events were strategically integrated into community gatherings that had been disrupted by the October 2022 floods. Notably, the Donald & District Show was impacted by weather events leading up to the flood and the Charlton Agricultural & Pastoral Society Show was canceled due to flood impacts. Similarly, the Elders Mt. Wycheproof Cup Day was abandoned that year.

Events were delivered in partnership with community organisations and timed to complement existing events—enhancing rather than burdening the calendars of communities already experiencing event fatigue. By embedding gaming events into these revitalised community occasions in 2024, the initiative supported the broader recovery efforts and re-engagement of local youth.



People & Wellbeing: Fostered connection, confidence, and positive social engagement in a supportive, trauma-informed setting.

Business & Economy: Activated local Neighbourhood Houses and public venues, while highlighting Council's broadband advocacy and digital inclusion.

Building & Infrastructure: Utilised community spaces and supported infrastructure upgrades for online accessibility and engagement.

Environment & Biodiversity: Encouraged screen-time balance and physical wellness through ergonomic gaming guidance and breakout activities.

Aboriginal Culture & Healing: While not a central theme, the events respectfully acknowledged Country and supported inclusive participation, creating a space where cultural identity and community belonging could be expressed through shared play and connection.



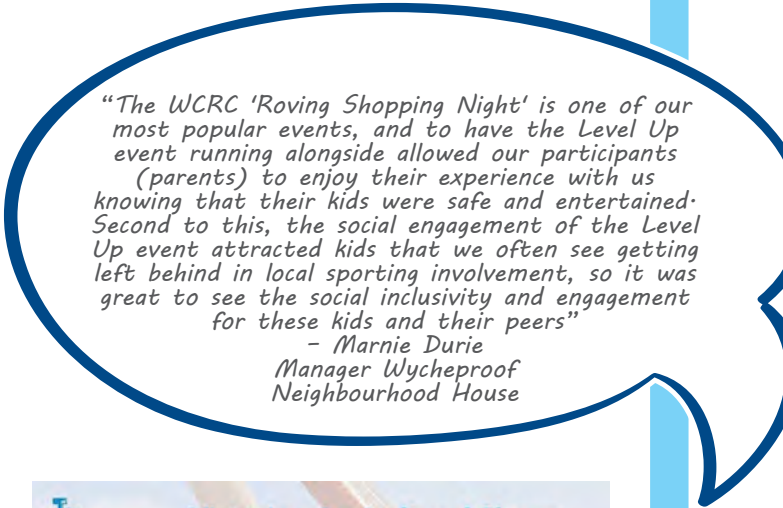


Objectives:

- Utilise gaming as a platform for connection, healing, and youth engagement
- Address mental and physical health aspects of online gaming
- Reduce isolation and support digital inclusion in rural communities
- Activities included multiplayer gaming, online safety workshops, ergonomic health guidance, and discussions about digital culture.
- Focused on ages 8-25, ensuring accessibility and relevance to a wide youth demographic.

Impact:

- Over 180 participants
- Provided a safe space for exploring digital identity and wellbeing
- Promoted cross-town participation and strengthened rural youth networks through gaming
- Reduced cost to participation as a free event
- According to the 2021 Census, Sea Lake's youth population aged 10-19 was 57. With over 40 attending the Sea Lake gaming event, this represents a significant turnout—highlighting strong engagement and the importance of youth-focused initiatives in the town.



The Donald & District Show was named a finalist in the Victorian Agricultural Shows 2025 "People's Choice Award"



CASE

STUDY:

Traditional Owner-Led

Creative Recovery

CONTEXT:

Challenged by distance, isolation, and repeated natural disasters, the Buloke community faces significant barriers to emotional recovery and connection. While sports and service clubs resumed quickly after the October 2022 floods, other community avenues did not. This created a clear need for face-to-face, culturally safe spaces.

CHALLENGE:

Traditional owner-led:

- Disconnection spiritually and physically
- Disrupted access to sacred sites and spaces
- Disruption to knowledge systems and healing practices
- Cultural trauma where country is damaged
- Recovery efforts beginning without meaningful consultation
- Inconsistent consensus-driven governance
- Under-resourced cultural leadership
- Recovery timelines in conflict with cultural rhythms
- Intergenerational impacts – transmission of knowledge to youth
- Repeatedly sharing trauma and cultural knowledge for the benefit of others
- Limited creative wellbeing access in remote areas
- No structured use of art for healing
- Few non-sporting social spaces in small towns
- Barriers for people with disability, carers, neurodivergence
- Geographic spread (8,000km²) limited local access
- No public transport in most areas
- Travel costs too high for many residents
- No trauma-informed recovery artists in Buloke/northern Victoria
- Poor connectivity for digital options



WHAT WE DID:

Buloke Shire Council participated in the Traditional Owner Flood Recovery Forums in Swan Hill, listening to the needs and advice of Traditional Owners and engaging in yarning with Elders. As a result, Buloke joined the inter-agency working group, becoming one of four rural councils represented alongside the City of Greater Bendigo, Macedon Ranges, and Campaspe.

To support place-based healing, Buloke Shire Council partnered with the Creative Recovery Network and were guided by Dja Dja Wurrung and Barengi Gadjin Elders to deliver a three-day trauma-informed creative arts facilitator training program in Charlton.

Structured around First Nations wellbeing principles, the workshop equipped over a dozen local, regional and Wotjobaluk, Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung and Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj artists to lead safe, inclusive creative recovery programs— establishing a first-of-its-kind skilled network in the region.

Workshops were intentionally designed as cross-town experiences, encouraging participants to travel, meet new people, and build broader community relationships.

- Delivery of 21 arts workshops using different mediums and 2 exhibitions
- Facilitated by 3 Traditional Owners and 5 local artists from Charlton, Donald, and Birchip.
- 172 face-to-face workshop participants, 86 visitors and 1455 indirect colour-in participants
- Activities for all abilities and age range
- Themes: reflection and storytelling, place-based identity, environmental walks, recycling and natural pigment creation.
- Distribution of wellbeing support materials
- Cross-town participation and strengthened social ties



*"This was more than just art—it was time to breathe, meet others, and be inspired again."
- Participant, Nandaly*

Buloke Shire Traditional Owners Map

To support children's mental health and connection to place, Buloke Shire Council collaborated with the artists to develop and distributed creative wellbeing colouring books in the lead-up to the summer holidays. These were shared across Buloke and with Dja Dja Wurrung, Barengi Gadjin and Wamba Wemba communities, helping overcome access barriers and bringing culture and calm where children are.



1455 COLOURING BOOKS DISTRIBUTED



1455 BOOK DISTRIBUTION NO.

DJA DJA WURRUNG	100
WAMBA WEMBA	100
BARENGI GADJIN	100
DONALD PS;	89
BIRCHIP P-12 (PRIMARY)	86
SEA LAKE NH	70
BIRCHIP NH	70
CHARLTON NH	70
DONALD NH	70
WYCHE NH	70
TYRRELL COLLAGE (PRIMARY)	60
DONALD LONG DAY CARE	50
DONALD KINDERGARTEN	50
CHARLTON PRIMARY SCHOOL	50
SEA LAKE KINDER & DAYCARE	40
CHALTON ST JOSEPH	37
WYCHEPROOF PS	35
CHARLTON KINDERGARTEN	30
ST MARY CATHOLIC PS SEA LAKE	30
BIRCHIP LIBRARY	30
DONALD LIBRARY	30
DONALD SHOPS	30
WYCHE SHIRE OFFICE	30
BIRCHIP LONG DAY CARE	25
BIRCHIP KINDERGARTEN	25
DONALD ST MARY'S'S	25
CULGOA HALL	20
WYCHEPROOF LONG DAY CARE	18
NANDALY	8
WYCHEPROOF KINDER	7

THE IMPACT:

- Growing Cultural Capacity
- Participants learned about Traditional Owner stories and connections to land
- Fostered truth-telling, cultural education, and moments of shared reflection
- Visions of Tomorrow coincided with the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations
- Workshops co-designed with community
- Stronger cross-cultural understanding and respect
- Environmental connection
- Shared healing through connection to Country
- Enduring partnerships built on trust
- Language revitalisation through community projects
- Cultural protocols respected in delivery
- Capacity building guided by Elders
- Non-tokenistic, place-based engagement
- Healing on Country activities prioritised



ECONOMIC STIMULUS AND LEGACY:

- Sparked new micro-businesses
- Artists now equipped to deliver programs beyond Buloke
- Catering sourced locally, supporting town economies
- Permanent cultural installations created, including:
 - Painted log at Birchip P-12
 - Men's Shed Biodiversity Trail
 - Permanent art installation at Sea Lake Neighbourhood House



THE PADDOCK: THE GOALS

Stories of Community, Recovery and Resilience in Buloke in the wake of the October 2022 Flood event





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Buloke Shire Council acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk people the Dja Dja Wurrung people and the Wamba Wemba people as the traditional owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and value their ongoing contribution to our heritage and our community.

THE PADDOCK: THE GOALS

The Paddock: The Goals is a community-driven vodcast series created in response to the October 2022 floods in Buloke Shire, celebrating resilience, connection, and recovery. Across ten episodes, it captures authentic voices from sporting clubs, youth groups, local businesses, health services, emergency responders, and creative initiatives, highlighting how rural communities adapt, rebuild, and grow stronger after disaster. Through storytelling, leadership, and shared experiences, *The Paddock: The Goals* reminds us that true recovery is about strengthening relationships, fostering local pride, and building a more connected future



DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
EPISODE 1 – BIRCHIP RECREATION RESERVE LAUNCH				
<i>The Paddock: The Goals</i> flood recovery vodcast series launches at the Birchip Recreation Reserve, capturing a unique moment of community spirit as two premiership teams — Nullawil, newly joined from the Golden Rivers League, and Birchip-Watchem, reigning North Central Football League premiers — faced off. With entire towns rallying together, it was an ideal opportunity to engage two strong communities exactly where they were.				
	18 Apr 2023	Episode 1 Quarter 1	How do local sporting clubs drive community resilience in rural towns after disaster?	16.52 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Shane O'Shea (Sports Journalist, Buloke Times), Wade Humphries (Nullawil Football Club), Brad Sharp (Birchip Football Club President)</i>	
	18 Apr 2023	Episode 1 Quarter 2	How can communities use lessons from drought recovery to strengthen resilience after floods?	9.4 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Fiona Best (CEO, Birchip Cropping Group)</i>	
	18 Apr 2023	Episode 1 Quarter 3	How can social recovery support services help communities heal six months after disaster?	7.23 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Janet Stafford (Red Cross Volunteer and Charlton Lead)</i>	
	18 Apr 2023	Episode 1 Quarter 4	How can financial and recovery support help rural communities rebuild after disaster?	13.05 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Dale Poyner (Local Accountant) and Dan McLoughlan (Senior Manager, Flood Recovery)</i>	
DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST

EPISODE 2 – ROADS, RECOVERY, AND RURAL RESILIENCE

The conversation continues from the Birchip Recreation Reserve, shifting focus toward critical rural infrastructure and the role it plays in community wellbeing.





Through discussions on road conditions, road safety, financial resilience, and youth support, the episode highlighted how essential services, infrastructure, and trusted adult networks are for recovery after a natural disaster.

	22 Apr 2023	Episode 2 Quarter 1	How does the quality of rural roads impact community connection and recovery?	13.43 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Shane O'Shea (Sports Journalist, Buloke Times) and Jenna Allen (Wycheproof-Narraport Netball Club)</i>	
	22 Apr 2023	Episode 2 Quarter 2	What more can we do to influence safe driving behaviours among young people?	16.04 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Donald Gibb (ROSPA) and Brett Schofield (CHARTSEC)</i>	
	22 Apr 2023	Episode 2 Quarter 3	How can businesses and primary producers be supported into long-term recovery?	8.52 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Jo Beard (Rural Financial Counselling Service)</i>	
	22 Apr 2023	Episode 2 Quarter 4	How can we support young people through the recovery journey?	11.08 Travis Fitzgibbon
			<i>Julie Slater (NCLLEN)</i>	

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 3 – YOUTH VOICES, SAFETY, AND FUTURE PLANNING

Celebrating youth leadership across Buloke Shire, with young voices front and centre this episode is filmed around the North Central Football League Round 2 events. It explores how young people are stepping up to promote safer driving behaviours, stronger community ties, and long-term resilience after the 2022 flood event. The conversations demonstrated that empowering youth, through inclusion, trust, and opportunity, is critical for the future of rural towns, and that recovery is as much about growing future leaders as it is about rebuilding what was lost.





	6 May 2023	Episode 3 Quarter 1	What post-flood lessons are emerging from celebrating Disability Pride Month? <i>Olivia Driscoll (Wycheproof P-12) and Chloe Jane (Birchip P-12)</i>	8.47	Bart Turgoose
	6 May 2023	Episode 3 Quarter 2	How can young people support each other to stay safe and connected on rural roads? <i>Chloe Jane (Birchip P-12), Savannah Nicholls and Keely Allen (Wycheproof P-12)</i>	8.47	Bart Turgoose
	6 May 2023	Episode 3 Quarter 3	How essential are strong community connections for disaster preparedness and resilience? <i>Ryan and Abby Sanderson (Sanderson Racing Team, Charlton)</i>	10.35	Bart Turgoose
	6 May 2023	Episode 3 Quarter 4	How do we inspire young people to take responsibility for strengthening rural community connections? <i>Kate Alday (Sea Lake, Biomed Student LaTrobe University and Tyrrell College former student)</i>	10.17	Bart Turgoose

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 4 – VOLUNTEERING, COLLABORATION, AND WELLBEING

In this episode we looked at the vital role of community volunteering, mental health awareness, and coordinated disaster response in Buloke's recovery journey.

Filmed around North Central Football League Round 8, the episode captured how local sporting clubs, emergency services, and community leaders contribute to social cohesion and resilience.

	10 Jun 2023	Episode 4 Quarter 1	Why is it important to have active and mentally healthy communities after disaster? <i>Shane O'Shea (Sports Journalist, Buloke Times)</i>	9.53	Travis Fitzgibbon
	10 Jun 2023	Episode 4 Quarter 2	What lessons have we learned from our coordinated flood response, and where are we now in recovery? <i>Senior Sergeant Roberta Barry (MERC) and Dan McLoughlan (Senior Flood Recovery Manager)</i>	16.37	Travis Fitzgibbon
	10 Jun 2023	Episode 4 Quarter 3	What makes people proud to live in Buloke and commit to making our communities great places to live, work, and play? <i>Danny Forrest (Donald Football Club) and Julie Coffey (Birchip Netball Club)</i>	21.33	Travis Fitzgibbon
	10 Jun 2023	Episode 4 Quarter 4	How are we building a better Buloke for future generations? <i>Trevor Rumbold (Senior Engineer Buildings and Open Spaces, Buloke Shire Council)</i>	11.22	Travis Fitzgibbon

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 5 – LISTENING, LEARNING, AND LEADING

Set against the backdrop of the Charlton Navy Blues home ground, Charlton Park, Episode 5 explored the critical role of local business, education, and grassroots leadership in Buloke's flood recovery. Highlighted are initiatives like the Donald Learning Centre's programs, support for disability inclusion, business resilience examples from other disaster-affected regions, and community-driven models for recovery, reinforcing the value of collaboration, education, and foresight in rebuilding stronger and more connected Buloke.

	19 Jun 2023	Episode 5 Quarter 1	How are young people leading innovation and learning to strengthen future flood resilience? <i>Fletcher Holmes Brown (Student Charlton P-12 College) and Ms King (Teacher, Charlton P-12 College)</i>	6.37	Jo Postlethwaite
	19 Jun 2023	Episode 5 Quarter 2	Why is active participation so important for rural community strength and recovery? <i>Anthony Judd (Charlton FC) and Rohan Brown (Donald Royal Blues FC)</i>	9.49	Jo Postlethwaite
	19 Jun 2023	Episode 5 Quarter 3	What leadership lessons emerged during the October 2022 flood event? <i>Buloke Shire Council Mayor Cr Alan Getley and John McConville (Donald 2000)</i>	9.41	Jo Postlethwaite
	19 Jun 2023	Episode 5 Quarter 4	How did the October 2022 flood impact local events and volunteers, and what does recovery look like for community celebrations? <i>Cr David Pollard (Rex Theatre) and Wendy Laffin (Charlton P&A Society)</i>	11.22	Bart Turgoose

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 6 – INCLUSIVE, MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Recorded as part of Disability Pride Month celebrations, Episode 6 explored the role of community leadership, resilience, and accessibility in recovery after the October 2022 flood event. The voices of local residents, service leaders, and clinical experts, reflect on practical lessons learned, the emotional journey of recovery, and the critical importance of social connectedness, community-driven leadership, and inclusive support structures.

	22 Jul 2023	Episode 6 Quarter 1	What post-flood lessons are emerging from celebrating Disability Pride Month? <i>Naomi Mills (Education Administrator, DCIRS Community Care) and Jeanette Wood (Donald Resident)</i>	10.23	Travis Fitzgibbon
	22 Jul 2023	Episode 6 Quarter 2	Why are neighbourhood houses and resource centres so important to community livability and flood recovery? <i>Charmaine Delaney (Manager, Donald Learning Centre)</i>	10.13	Travis Fitzgibbon
	22 Jul 2023	Episode 6 Quarter 3	How do rural communities successfully bounce back after disaster? <i>David Younger (Clinical Psychologist, Disaster Recovery Expert)</i>	16.19	Travis Fitzgibbon
	22 Jul 2023	Episode 6 Quarter 4	What is enabling local government, emergency services, and government agencies to work more cohesively to support communities? <i>Wayne O'Toole (CEO, Buloke Shire Council) and Angela Carey (Regional Recovery Director, North West Region)</i>	19.59	Travis Fitzgibbon

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 7 – STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Ten months after the October 2022 floods, Buloke Shire’s community spirit is driving recovery forward, through youth empowerment, men’s sheds projects, environmental protection efforts, and creative collaboration workshops. In episode 7, we showcase how practical grassroots initiatives, partnerships, and peer-to-peer learning are laying strong foundations for a resilient future.

	26 Aug 2023	Episode 7 Quarter 1	How are young people in Buloke connecting and creating meaningful relationships to combat feelings of isolation? <i>Emily Olive (Charlton P-12 College and Charlton Youth Group) and Simone Christie (Manager, Birchip Neighbourhood House, FreeZA Coordinator)</i>	14.54	Travis Fitzgibbon
	26 Aug 2023	Episode 7 Quarter 2	How do Men’s Sheds Strengthen Rural Community Connections? <i>John Kumm (President, Donald Men’s Shed)</i>	10.58	Travis Fitzgibbon
	26 Aug 2023	Episode 7 Quarter 3	How does EPA Victoria supports rural communities in environmental recovery after floods? <i>Paul Ratajczyk (Team Leader, Environmental Protection Agency)</i>	10.32	Travis Fitzgibbon
	26 Aug 2023	Episode 7 Quarter 4	How do community-led collaboration builds resilience and optimism after disasters? <i>Karen Corr (Director, Jumbleads)</i>	9.39	Travis Fitzgibbon

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 8 – HEALTH, HOSPITALITY, AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

This episode showcases how rural resilience is built through small actions and strong local leadership. Featuring voices from health services, emergency management, creative food initiatives, and digital connection, this episode explores how community well-being can be strengthened through collaboration, creativity, and preparedness. From flood recovery planning to online gaming networks and shared meals, these conversations demonstrate how rural communities innovate and care for each other across every age group and sector.





	2 Sep 2023	Episode 8 Quarter 1	How are local health services strengthening community resilience post-flood? <i>Mandy Hutchinson (CEO, Northern District Community Health)</i>	16:12	Jo Postlethwaite
	2 Sep 2023	Episode 8 Quarter 2	What are community and council roles during emergencies? <i>Sue Rondeau (The SixC’s Emergency Management Specialist) and Anthony Hogan (CEO, Goodwin Village Donald)</i>	23:26	Jo Postlethwaite
	2 Sep 2023	Episode 8 Quarter 3	How can sharing a meal rebuild community connection? <i>Malina Schultz (Creator of The Good Feed)</i>	9:59	Jo Postlethwaite
	2 Sep 2023	Episode 8 Quarter 4	How does online gaming foster social connection and community resilience? <i>Michael White (Online Gaming Specialist, Wycheproof Community Resource Centre)</i>	12:50	Jo Postlethwaite

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 9 – INFRASTRUCTURE, HOSPITALITY, EMERGENCY SERVICES

This episode explores how practical knowledge, strong community leadership, small business support, and agency partnerships helped rural towns navigate the impacts of the October 2022 flood event.

From the critical role of cafés and community gathering points to the complexities of rural flood recovery and road repair, these conversations showcase resilience, courage, and the lessons shaping future disaster preparedness across Buloke.

	9 Sep 2023	Episode 9 Quarter 1	How do environmental management and flood recovery expertise strengthen disaster resilience? <i>Camile White (NCCMA Floodplain Manager) and Dan McLoughlan (Senior Flood Recovery Manager, Buloke Shire Council)</i>	21:44	Jo Postlethwaite
	9 Sep 2023	Episode 9 Quarter 2	How does small business resilience shape rural recovery after floods? <i>Tim and Sam Grenda (Proprietors, The Mallee Bunker Café Culgoa)</i>	12:28	Jo Postlethwaite
	9 Sep 2023	Episode 9 Quarter 3	What lessons have we learned from council-led flood recovery efforts? <i>Dan McLoughlan (Senior Flood Recovery Manager, Buloke Shire Council)</i>	10:11	Jo Postlethwaite
	9 Sep 2023	Episode 9 Quarter 4	How do local policing and emergency services build rural community strength? <i>Antoinette Coobs (Leading Senior Constable Victoria Police, Culgoa)</i>	7:47	Jo Postlethwaite

DATE	EPISODE	GUEST(S)	DURATION (MINS)	HOST
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EPISODE 10 – REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the final episode of The Paddock: The Goals, ahead of the North Central Football League Grand Final, we reflect on Buloke Shire's flood recovery journey through the eyes of local leaders and community champions. This episode captures the resilience, innovation, and foresight that rural communities bring to recovery. With insights spanning recreation, agriculture, housing, and road safety, it highlights how rural leadership, local knowledge, and strong relationships are essential in shaping a thriving future.

	16 Sep 2023	Episode 10 Quarter 1	What lessons about rural community resilience are emerging one year on from the October 2022 floods? <i>Shane O'Shea (Sports Journalist, Buloke Times) and Mayor Cr Allan Getley, Buloke Shire Council</i>	9:33	Travis Fitzgibbon
	16 Sep 2023	Episode 10 Quarter 2	How do rural organisations collaborate for stronger recovery and connection? <i>Fiona Best – CEO, Birchip Cropping Group Kayleen Cossar – President, Charlton Neighbourhood House</i>	20:07	Travis Fitzgibbon
	16 Sep 2023	Episode 10 Quarter 3	How do local service organisations support inclusive flood recovery? <i>Michael Bleasdale (Executive Officer, Rights and Inclusion Australia) and John Richmond (President, Birchip and Wimmera, Avoca and Tyrrell St Vincent de Paul)</i>	22:02	Travis Fitzgibbon
	16 Sep 2023	Episode 10 Quarter 4	How does road safety leadership support rural communities after disasters? <i>Michael White (Online Gaming Specialist, Wycheproof Community Resource Centre)</i>	8:54	Travis Fitzgibbon

AN AWARD-WINNING COMMUNITY RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE SERIES

BULOKE SHIRE COUNCIL

THE PADDOCK: THE GOALS

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE 50 COMMUNITY GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND AGENCIES WHO PARTICIPATED IN AND SUPPORTED THE PADDOCK: THE GOALS:

Australian and Victorian Governments (Community Recovery Hubs Program)

Australian and Victorian Governments (Community Recovery Officer Program)

Birchip Cropping Group (BCG)

Birchip Football, Netball and Hockey Club

Birchip Neighbourhood House

Birchip P-12 College

Buloke Shire Council

Buloke Times (local newspaper)

Charlton Football, Netball and Hockey Club

Charlton Neighbourhood House

Charlton P-12 College

Charlton Park Community Bank Complex

Charlton Rex Theatre

Charlton Sanderson Racing Team

CHARTSEC (Charlton Traffic Safety Education Centre)

Connected Communities Program

Culgoa Mallee Bunker Café

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

Donald 2000

Donald DCIRS Community Care

Donald Football, Netball and Hockey Club

Donald Goodwin Village

Donald Learning Centre

Donald Men's Shed

Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV)

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA Victoria)

FReeZA (Buloke Youth Events Program)

Jumpleads NFP

North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA)

North Central Football Netball League

North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (NCLLEN)

Northern District Community Health (NDCH)

Nullawil Football and Netball Club

Partners in Wellbeing (Business Victoria)

Red Cross Victoria (and Charlton Branch)

Rights and Inclusion Australia

Rolln Media

Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

Sea Lake Football Netball Club

Sea Lake Neighbourhood House

SixCs Emergency Management

St Vincent de Paul (Birchip, Wimmera, Avoca, and Tyrrell branches)

Tyrrell P-12 College, Sea Lake

Victoria Police – Road Policing Command

Victoria State Emergency Service (VicSES)

Wycheproof Narraport Football Netball Hockey Club

Wycheproof Neighbourhood House

Wycheproof P-12 College



An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A paved road runs vertically through the center. To the left of the road, there are several buildings, including a large white structure and a smaller one. To the right, there are more buildings and a large green field. The background shows a wide, flat landscape under a hazy sky.

Culgoa

Community Emergency Management Plan

2025



Culgoa Development Group acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk people and the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the traditional owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and value their ongoing contribution to our heritage and our community.

The development of this plan was made available through the support of



Original developed with the assistance of The Six C's Group 2025.

Contents

- 1 Overview**
- 2 About Culgoa**
- 3 Hazards**
- 4 Objectives**
- 5 Local Priorities**
- 6 Key Issues & Vulnerabilities**
- 7 Values**
- 8 Emergency Contacts**
- 9 Culgoa Development Group members**

What is community based emergency management?

Community based emergency management is about working together to be safer and more resilient, without building greater dependencies on agencies, government and service providers. This includes being relatively independent and self-reliant, while drawing upon the connections and lifelines which support people and their community to function and survive.

It also provides opportunities for broader collaboration and collective action. This includes working together as part of the community to drive the design, implementation and review of integrated planning and engagement processes. Connections and relationships developed through these processes can be maintained and beneficial before, during and after emergencies.

Maturity in these processes can also assist to build overall community capacity and capability to better manage long term stressors and to cope with shocks, including future emergencies.

This approach is designed to support community led approaches and activities wherever possible.

Adopting this approach taps into the collective local knowledge, expertise and resources to build on combined strengths. Working together through these processes can assist to develop mutual goals and solutions while strengthening relationships and lifelines to be drawn upon in good times and during critical times of need.



Overview

Introduction

The Culgoa Community Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) has been developed by the local community and the Culgoa Development Group acknowledges all who have participated and contributed toward the development of this document.

This plan is managed and distributed by the Culgoa Development Group. All feedback and opportunities for participation to implement and progress the plan is welcome.

While every effort has been made to ensure that information in this document is correct at the time of printing, changes after the time of publication may impact the accuracy of the information.

The Culgoa Development Group is not responsible for any loss suffered in connection with the use of this document.

Aim

To empower the Culgoa community to prepare for, respond to and recover from any disasters that may arise.

2

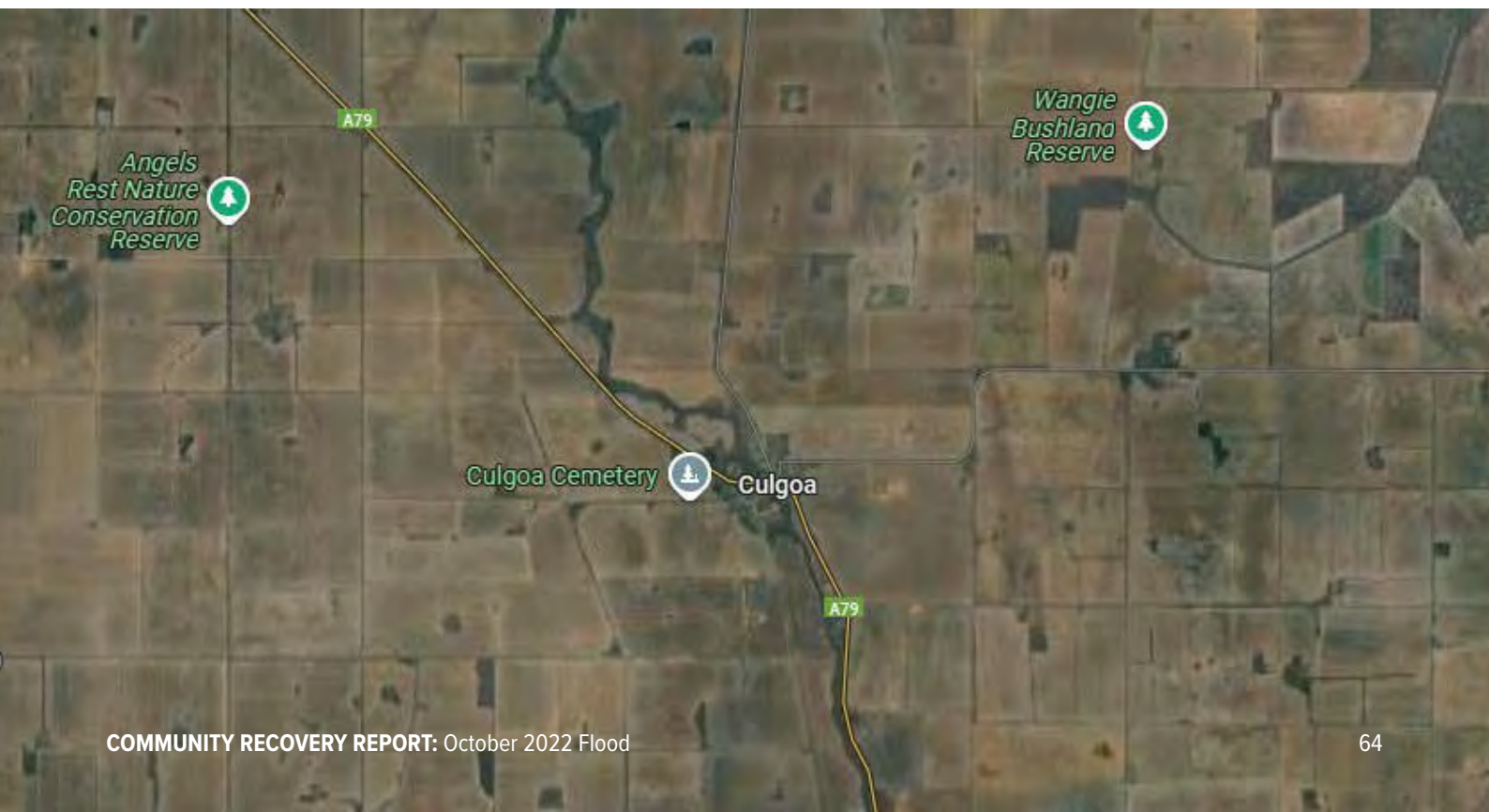
About Culgoa

Culgoa is a rural town located in the Mallee region of north-west Victoria, within the Buloke Shire Council. The town's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, with wheat and barley as the dominant crops, alongside some legume and oilseed production.

Culgoa has a strong community spirit, demonstrated by the formation of a community co-operative in 2003 to purchase and operate the local store when it faced closure. The store remains a vital service, providing newspapers, groceries, takeaway food, and internet access for residents. Along with the local hotel, it serves as a key gathering point where community members connect and support one another.

Situated on Tyrrell Creek, a distributary of the Avoca River, Culgoa is subject to the natural flow patterns of this ephemeral waterway, which only carries water after significant rainfall or flooding of the Avoca River. The town has been directly impacted by major flood events, most notably in 2011 and 2022, which caused widespread disruptions.

In addition to flooding, Culgoa is at risk of grassfires, severe storms, droughts, and extreme heatwaves—hazards that have shaped the community's ongoing approach to emergency preparedness and resilience.



Statistics

86 people



Male 62%
Female 37%



62 years of age
(average age)



23 families



70 private dwellings

Data



Mallee
Fire Weather District



Culgoa Local Flood Guide

From Kaneira to Culgoa

Meeting of the waters



Culgoa

3

Hazards



**Bushfire, Grass
Fire, Broadacre
Fire**



Heat



Drought



Flood



**Hazardous
Materials**



Storms



**Power
Outages**



Air Quality



**Animal/Plant
Biosecurity**

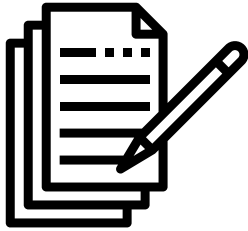


**Thunderstorm
Asthma**



4

Objectives



Administrative

Objective 1.

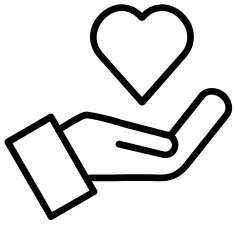
Propose this plan be accepted by the Culgoa Development Group.

Objective 2.

Develop the following health related information flyers:

- Thunderstorm Asthma
- Hazardous materials/chemical awareness, including definitions of placard symbols





Community connections

Objective 3.

Establish a dedicated Community Hub within Culgoa that can be used as a gathering point to not only provide respite during extreme heat and droughts, but build resilience for all emergencies.

Objective 4.

Share credible information with the community in multiple ways:

- Face to face
- Group via Whats App
- Noticeboard

Objective 5.

Install a disaster information board outside the Community Hub.

Objective 6.

Develop a “Welcome to Culgoa” pack (written and digital) that includes local risks and services.

Objective 7.

Develop a support workers network that conducts social events and provides information on services to support the supporters.

Objective 8.

Create a disaster preparedness mural that depicts local hazards and preparedness activities visually.

Objective 9.

Develop a list of residents and identify skills and equipment that could be used before, during and after disasters.

Objective 10.

Develop a community health & environmental awareness calendar.



Building Capacity & Capability

Objective 11.

Develop a community fire response plan.

Objective 12.

Develop a community flood response plan.

Objective 13.

Review the Council provided disaster preparedness box.

Objective 14.

Increase skills within the community.
Training to include:

- Awareness session on hazardous chemicals used, symptoms and treatments.
- Cyber scams and stealing of digital information information session.

Objective 15.

Conduct a bi-annual community disaster preparedness session that outlines how to prepare as an individual/family including a list of credible sources of information.

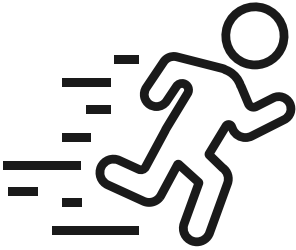
Objective 16.

Conduct an annual community exercise / drill to test the community response plans.



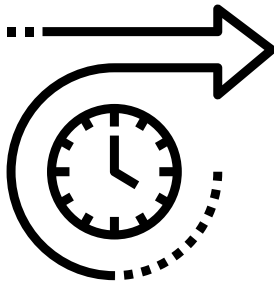
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Local Priorities



Short term goals

The short-term goals focus on strengthening community resilience by improving disaster communication, establishing a Community Hub as a central point for emergency support, and developing a resident contact list. Additionally, a welcome pack will be created for new residents, providing essential risk information to ensure everyone is informed and prepared.



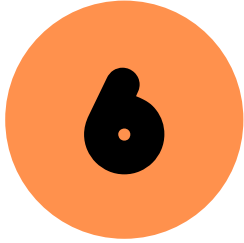
Medium term goals

The medium-term goals aim to enhance community skills and preparedness by offering a variety of information sessions on disaster resilience. A bi-annual disaster preparedness session will ensure residents stay informed and ready, while an annual event will provide vital support for carers, recognising their crucial role in community well-being.



Long term goal

The long-term goals focus on strengthening community resilience through ongoing initiatives. A disaster preparedness mural will serve as a visual reminder of local risks and readiness. A comprehensive fire and flood response plan will provide clear guidance for emergencies, while an annual community exercise will ensure the plan remains practical and effective, helping residents stay prepared.



Key Issues & vulnerabilities

Key issues & vulnerabilities

- Elderly and ageing population with lone person households
- Isolated community
- Town reservoir does not provide potable water
- Culgoa is located on the Tyrrell Creek, a distributary of the Avoca River. Tyrrell Creek off-takes from the Avoca River downstream of Charlton and continues through to Lake Tyrrell. The waterway is ephemeral only flowing after significant rainfall or Avoca River floods.
 - Tyrrell Creek Gauge at Warne is a manual gauge
 - If flooding occurs in Charlton, then it typically affects Culgoa 40-120 hours later.
- Potential closure of the Calder Hwy due to flooding.
- Whilst Culgoa has a fire brigade there was some concern with the age of volunteers.
- Culgoa does not have a local VicSES Unit, the closest unit is Wycheproof.



7

Values

“We value our community.”

“We acknowledge the countless hours people put into the community.”

“A town is nothing without its community.”

“Town businesses.”

“We value health.”

“Being connected.”

“A welcoming community.”

“Our voices being heard.”

“The opportunity to plan for the future.”

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

Action	Lead	Support	Due By	Complete	Comments
Develop a list of residents and identify skills and equipment that could be used before, during and after disasters.					
Review the Council provided disaster preparedness box.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hazardous materials/chemical awareness, including definitions of placard symbols 					
Share credible information with the community in multiple ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face to face Group via Whats App Noticeboard 					
Develop a community health & environmental awareness calendar.					

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

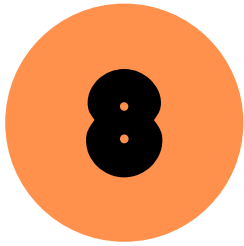
Action	Lead	Support	Due By	Complete	Comments
Establish a dedicated Community Hub within Culgoa that can be used as a gathering point to not only provide respite during extreme heat, droughts, but build resilience for all emergencies.					
Develop a "Welcome to Culgoa" pack (written and digital) that includes local risks and services.					
Install disaster information information board outside Community Hub.					
Propose this plan be accepted by the Culgoa Development Group.					

MEDIUM TERM OBJECTIVES

Action	Lead	Support	Due By	Complete	Comments
<p>Increase skills within the community. Training to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness session on hazardous chemicals used, symptoms and treatments. Cyber scams and stealing of digital information information session. 					
<p>Conduct a bi-annual community disaster preparedness session that outlines how to prepare as an individual/family including a list of credible sources of information.</p>					
<p>Develop a support workers network that conducts social events and provides information on services to support the supporters.</p>					

LONG TERM OBJECTIVES

Action	Lead	Support	Due By	Complete	Comments
Create a disaster preparedness mural that depicts local hazards and preparedness activities visually.					
Develop a community fire response plan.					
Develop a community flood response plan.					
Conduct an annual community exercise / drill to test the community response plans.					



Emergency Contacts

Agency	Phone Number	Website
Triple Zero	000	
VicEmergency	1800 226 226	emergency.vic.gov.au
VicSES	132 500	ses.vic.gov.au
CFA		cfa.vic.gov.au
VicTraffic		traffic.transport.vic.gov.au
Police but not the sirens	131 444	
Bureau of Meterology		bom.gov.au
Powercor Outages	13 24 12	
Poisons Information Line	13 11 26	
Nurse on Call	1300 60 60 24	
Better Health Channel		betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Buloke Shire Council	1300 520 520	buloke.vic.gov.au



WARREN DAVIES THE UNBREAKABLE FARMER

OUR WELLBEING IS A BIT LIKE A WHEEL.
SOMETIMES, WE NEED AN ALIGNMENT TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD.

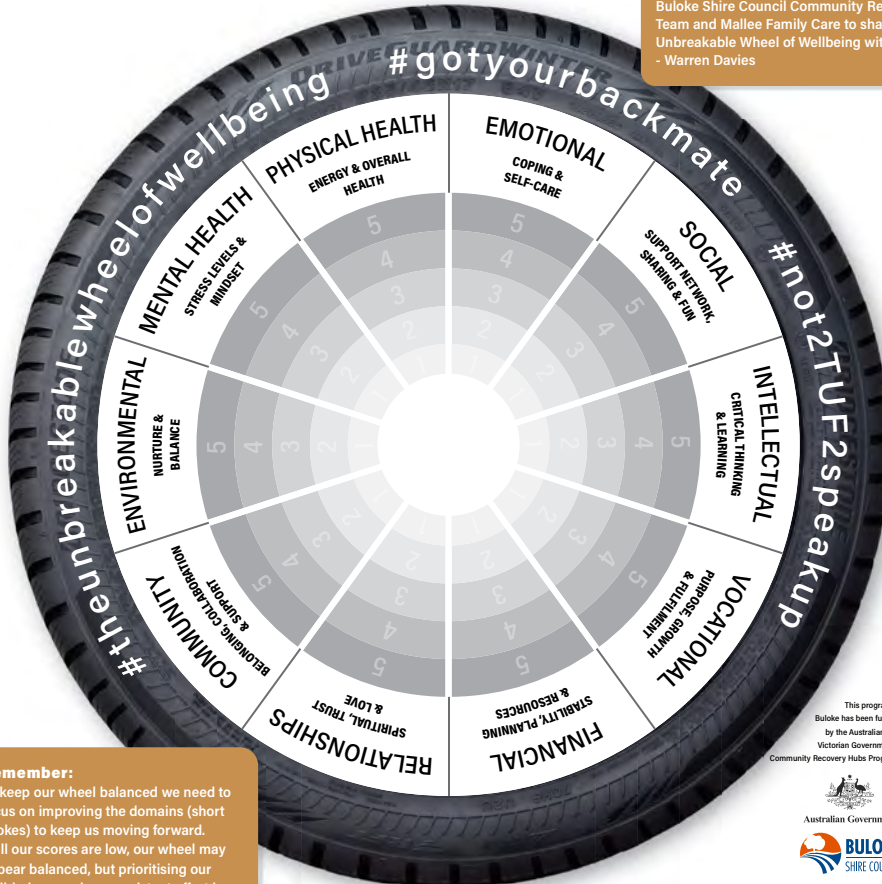


Life can feel unsteady when our wheel isn't balanced. Taking time to assess our wellbeing helps us stay on track. This exercise helps you check in with yourself and identify where you might need a little extra care.

Unbreakable Wheel of Wellbeing Exercise

1. Grade Yourself: For each domain, rate yourself from 1 to 5 (1 = needs work, 5 = excellent).
2. Mark your score: Focus on one domain at a time and mark your score on the wheel, starting from the centre, drawing a line moving outward to the rim (e.g. draw to the third line if you rated yourself a 3).
3. Connect Your Scores: Once all domains are scored, connect the external points for all domains to form your wheel's rim.
4. Take a look: Is your wheel round, triangular, or a bit wobbly looking?
5. Reflect and Adjust: Our goal is to create a more balanced wheel by focusing extra effort on the areas that need improvement in our lives, helping to make your wheel more even and rounded.
6. Check-in regularly: Look at the spokes of your wheel every few weeks or month.

"It has been great to team up with the Buloke Shire Council Community Recovery Team and Mallee Family Care to share my Unbreakable Wheel of Wellbeing with you."
- Warren Davies



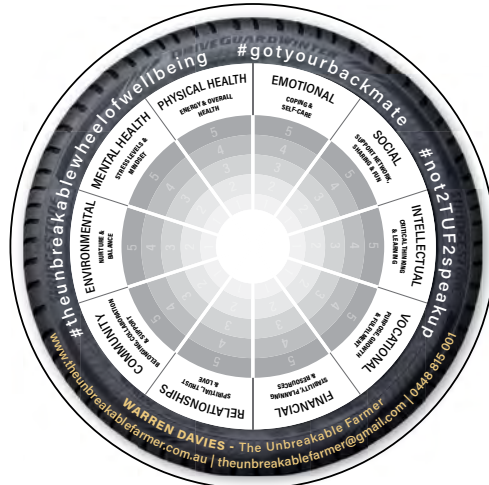
Remember:

To keep our wheel balanced we need to focus on improving the domains (short spokes) to keep us moving forward. If all our scores are low, our wheel may appear balanced, but prioritising our well-being requires consistent effort in every area to truly value and care for ourselves.

WARREN DAVIES
The Unbreakable Farmer

www.theunbreakablefarmer.com.au | theunbreakablefarmer@gmail.com | 0448 815 001

This program in Buloke has been funded by the Australian and Victorian Government's Community Recovery Hubs Program.



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This program in Buloke has been funded by the Australian and Victorian Government's Community Recovery Hubs Program.



Community and Wellbeing Activities Book

Buloke Shire

Traditional Owners Land Map



-  **Wamba Wamba Aboriginal Corporation**
-  **Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation**
-  **Barengi Gadjin Land Council**
-  **This land does not have a designated RAP but may still hold cultural or heritage significance.**



When you visit a Buloke Shire town, add a sticker to show where you've been! As you color each page, pop a sticker on the towns you explore in this book. Enjoy your adventure!

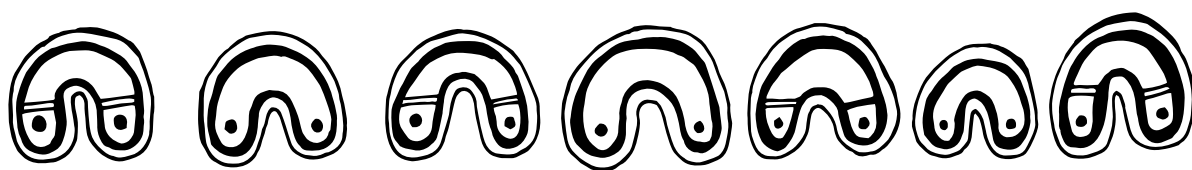
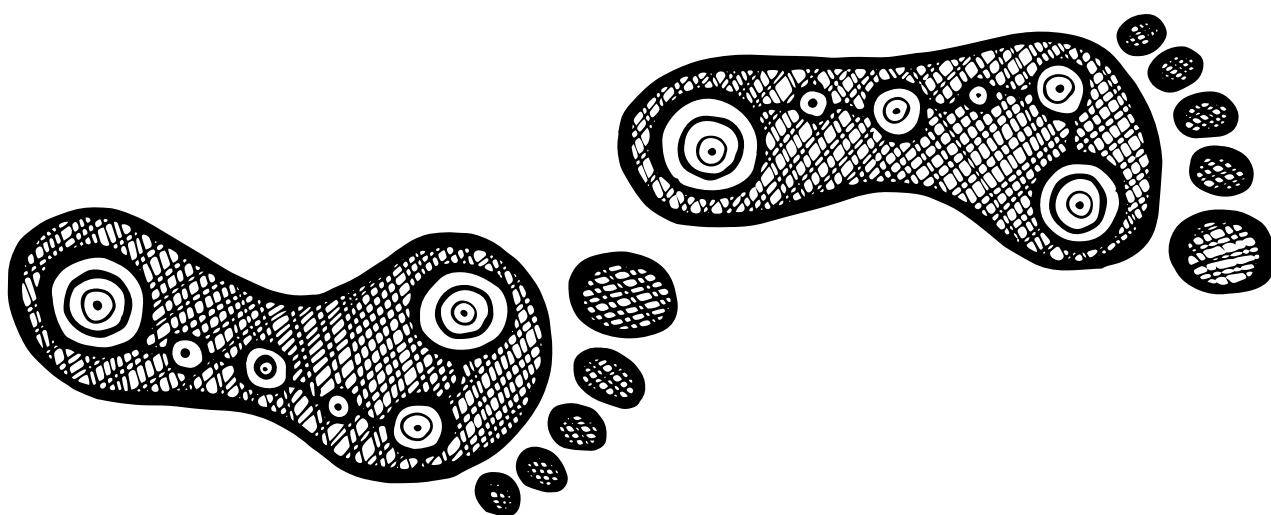
The Buloke Shire Council are excited to share our new "Buloke's Bearded Dragon - Community and Wellbeing Activities Book".

It's designed to help our young ones learn about and value our community through fun colouring and activities.

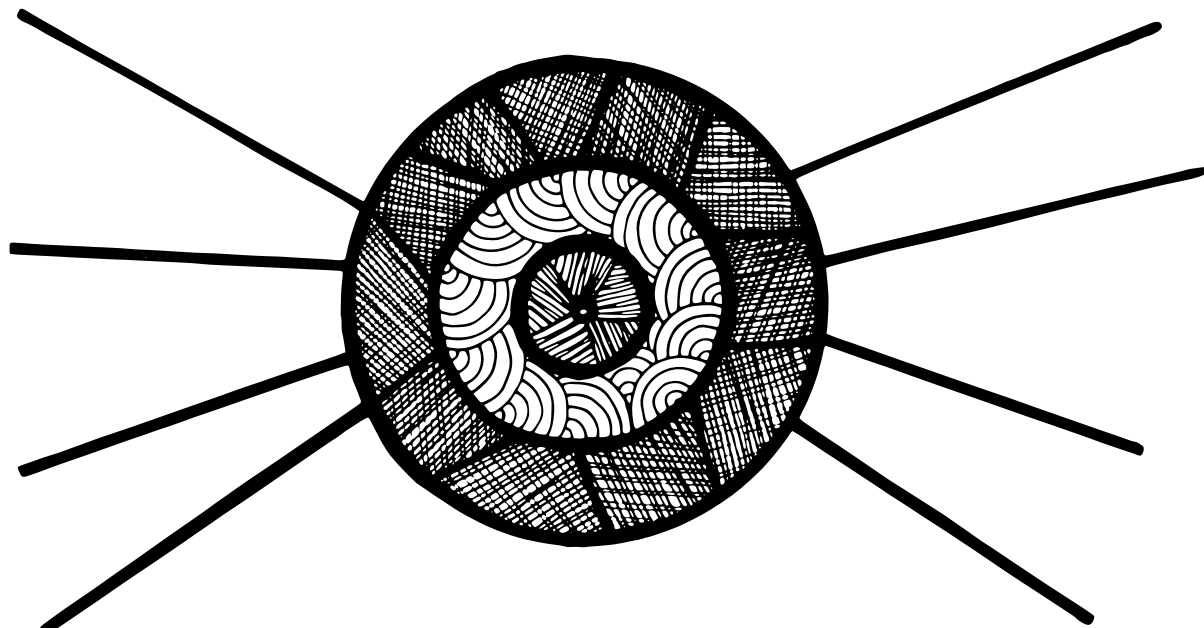
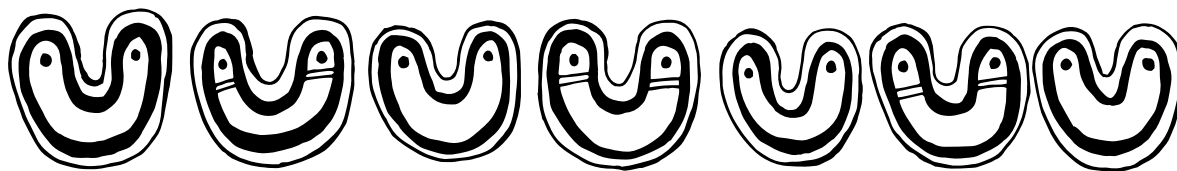
The future of our Buloke region lies in the hands of our young people. We're helping them grow into strong and caring community members by teaching them about our community's diversity and the importance of being connected to build a safe, inclusive, resilient, and thriving community.

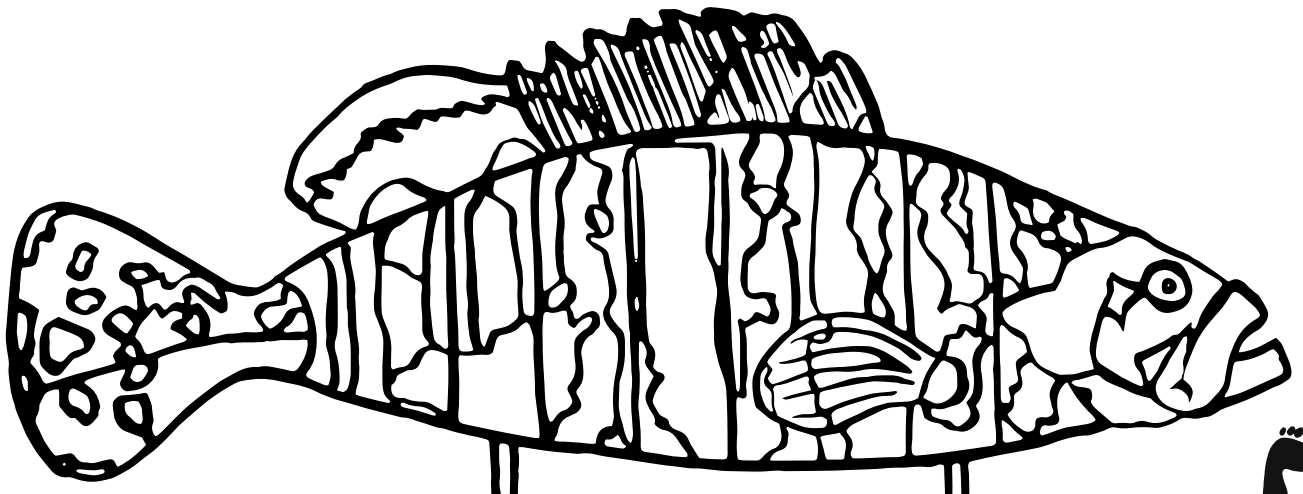
Knowing about different places and services in our Buloke community helps them to play a big part in community planning and also future preparedness for emergencies and recovery.

With this book, we're not just preparing them for tough times. We're also helping them become future leaders who care about everyone and make good decisions. We express our gratitude to the First Peoples - State Relations (Vic) for their guidance.

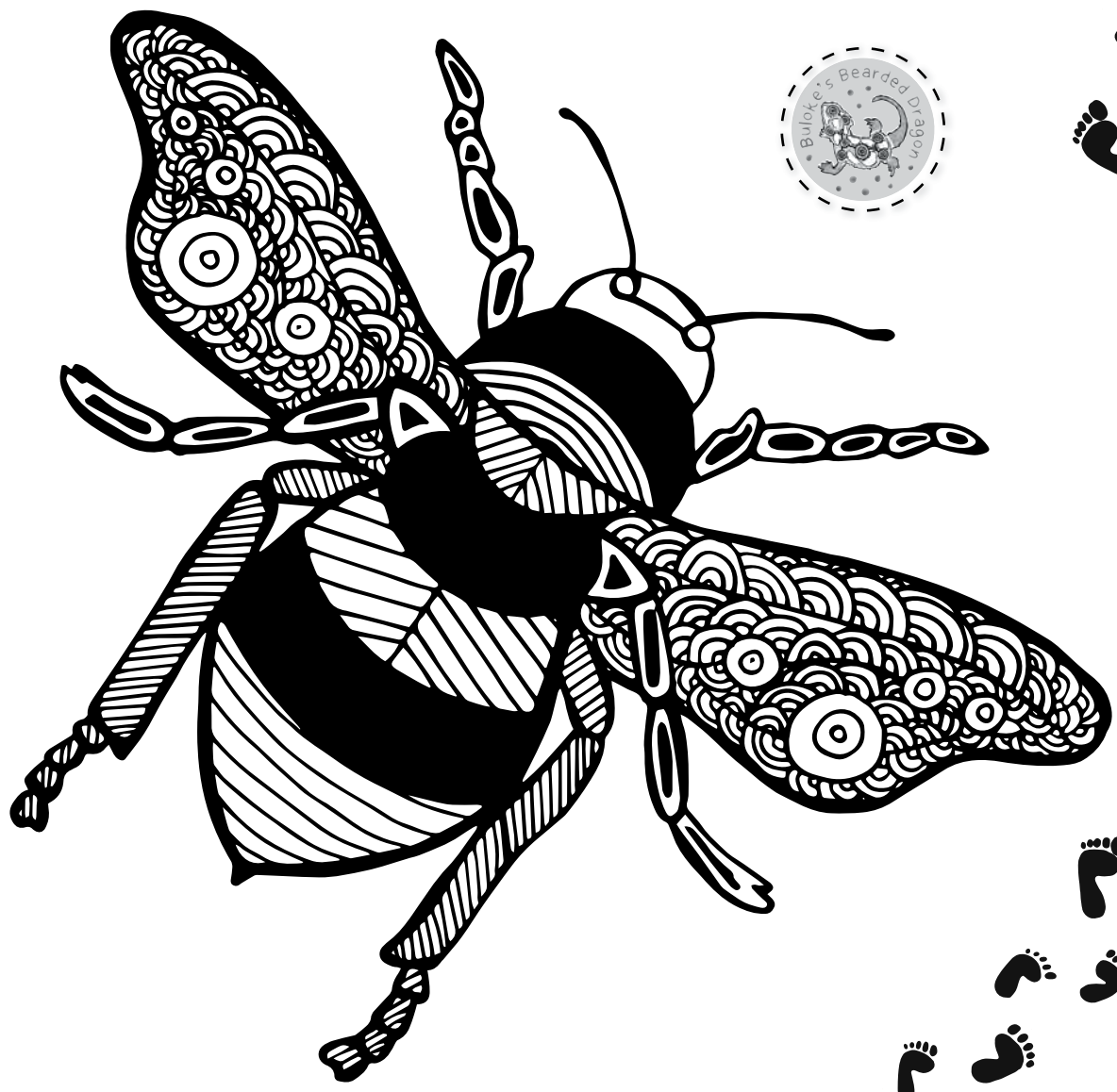


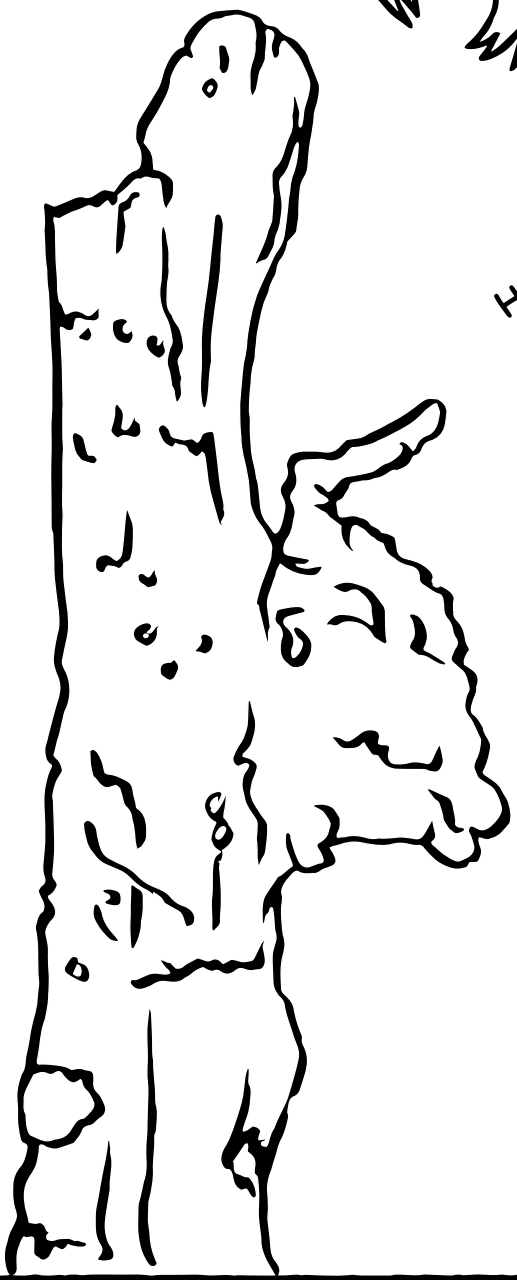
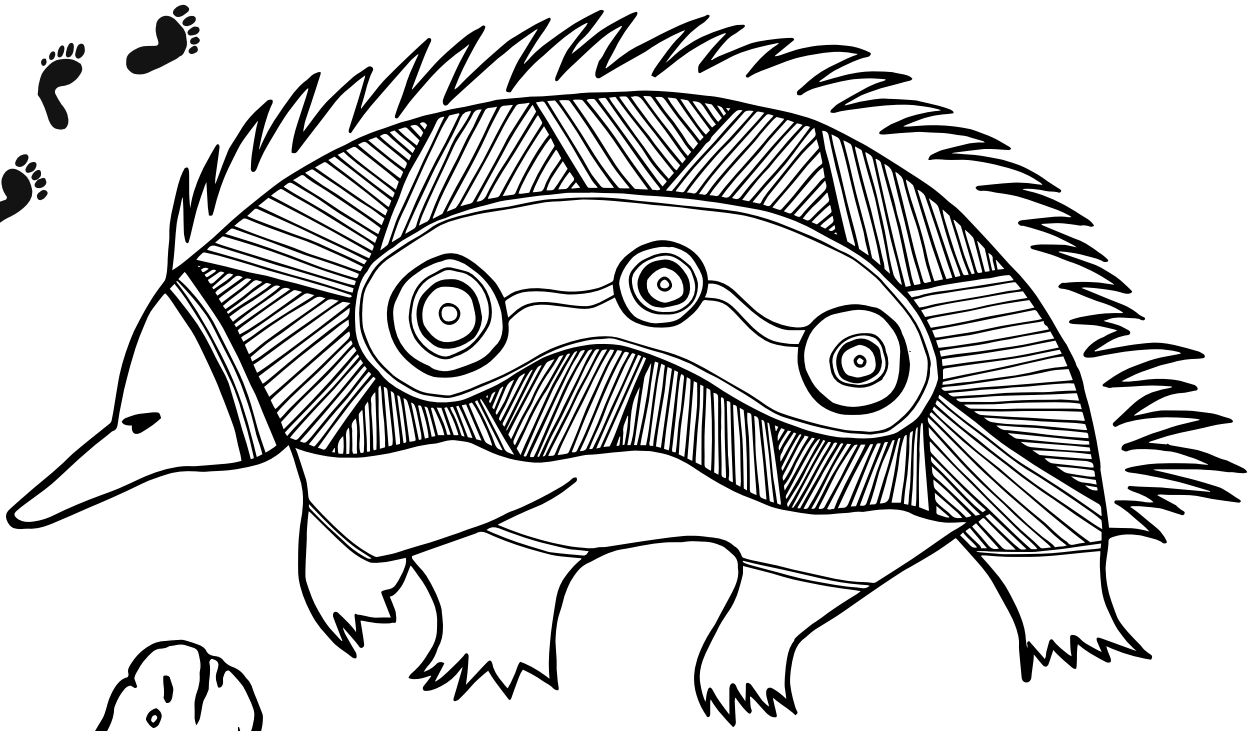
Buloke Shire Council acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk people, the Dja Dja Wurrung people and Wamba Wemba people as the traditional owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and value their ongoing contribution to our heritage and our community.





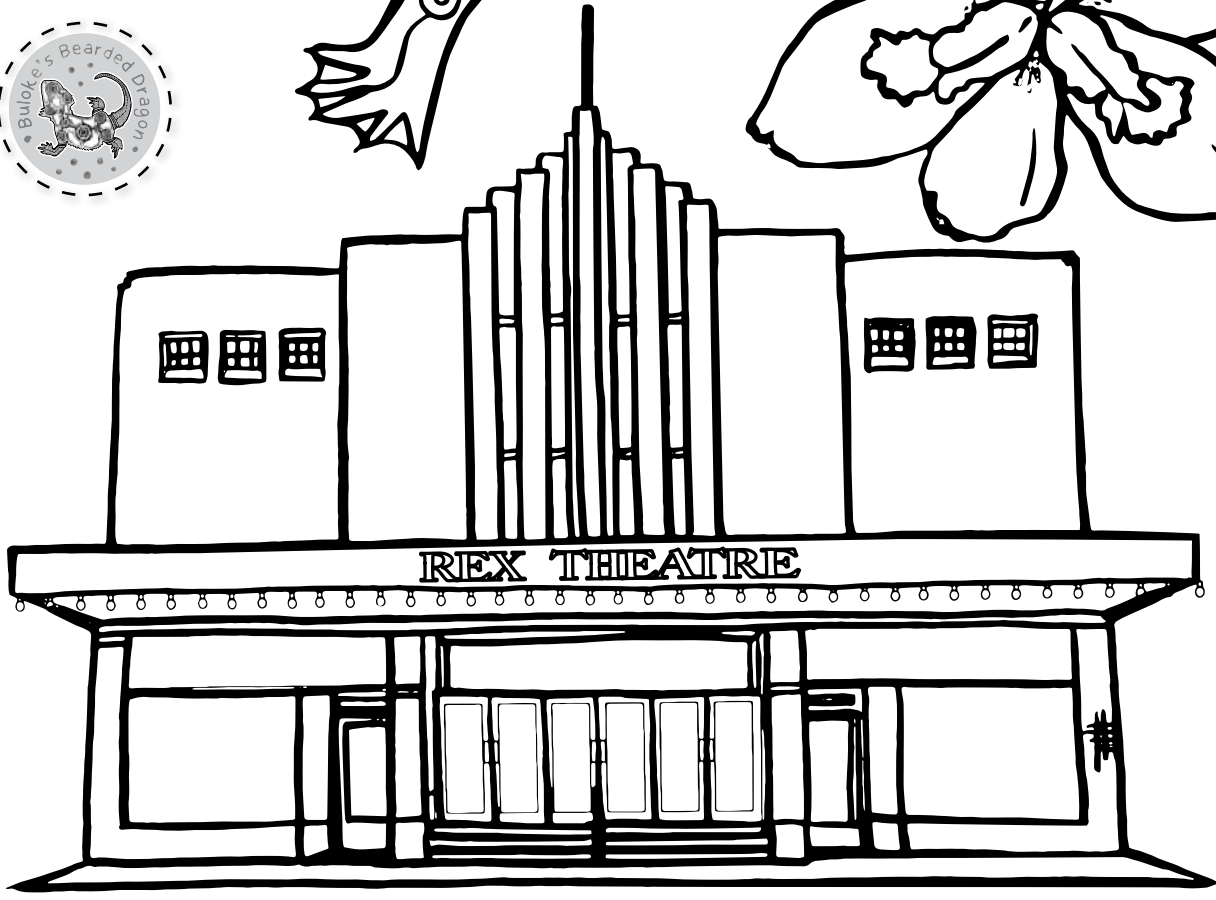
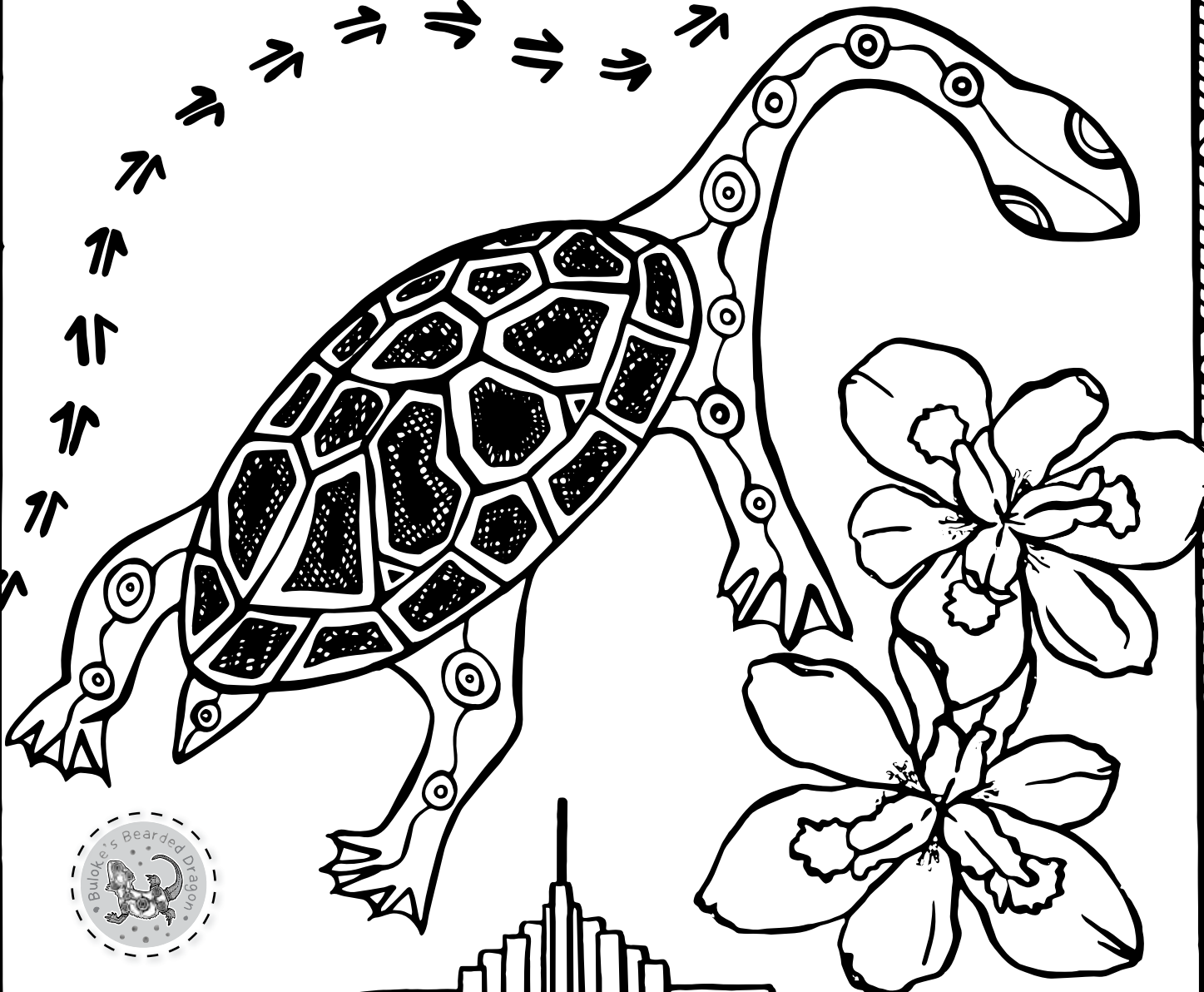
DONALD





Here's a challenge! Can you unscramble these animal names?

- MUE _____
- SMUSOP _____
- BAYBY _____
- LFBRITYEU _____
- ANONAG _____
- RAOGAKON _____
- URAKBOOKAR _____
- TOOCAKOC _____
- PEIMGA _____
- RGEAT NSKEI _____
- LETRUT _____
- TINSK GUB _____



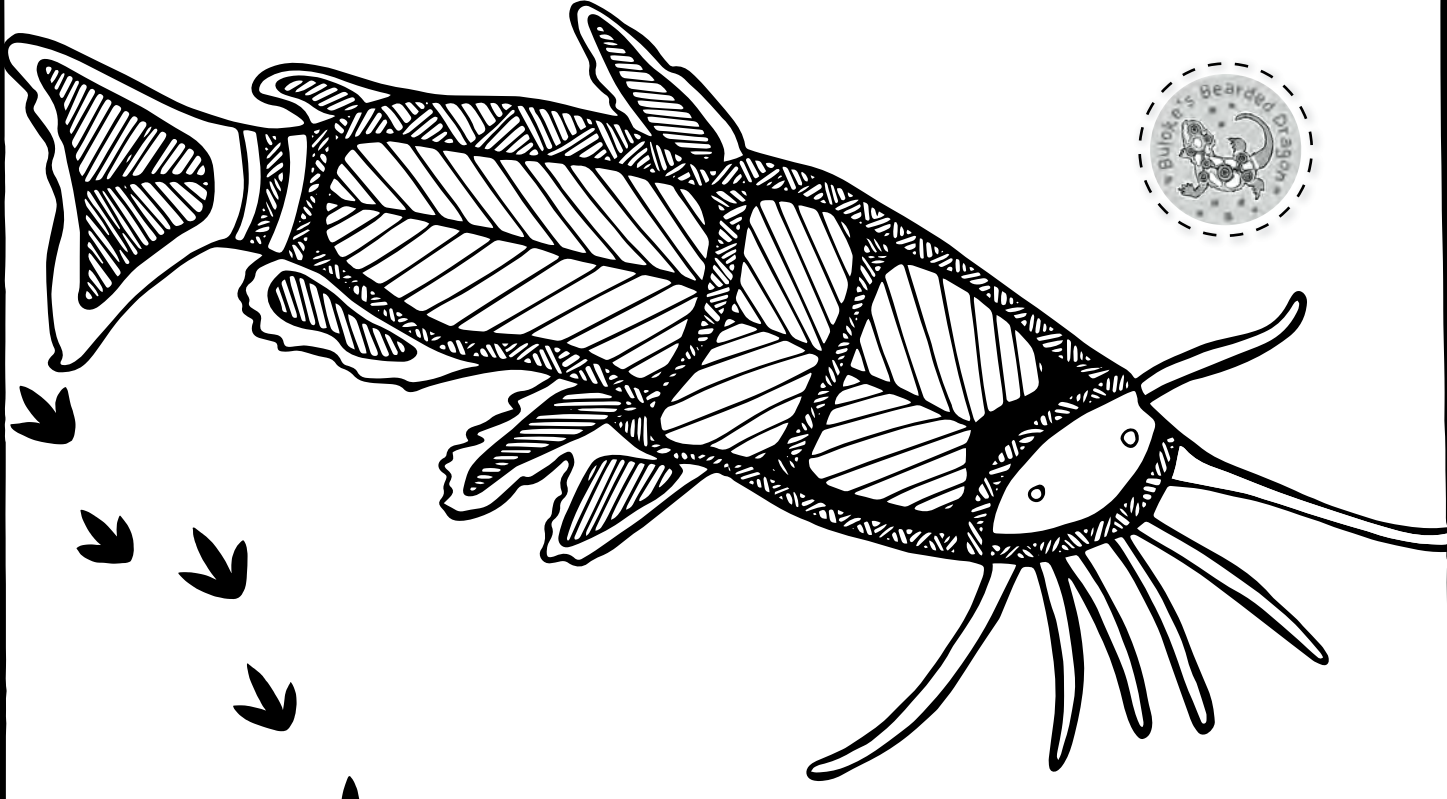
CHARLTON



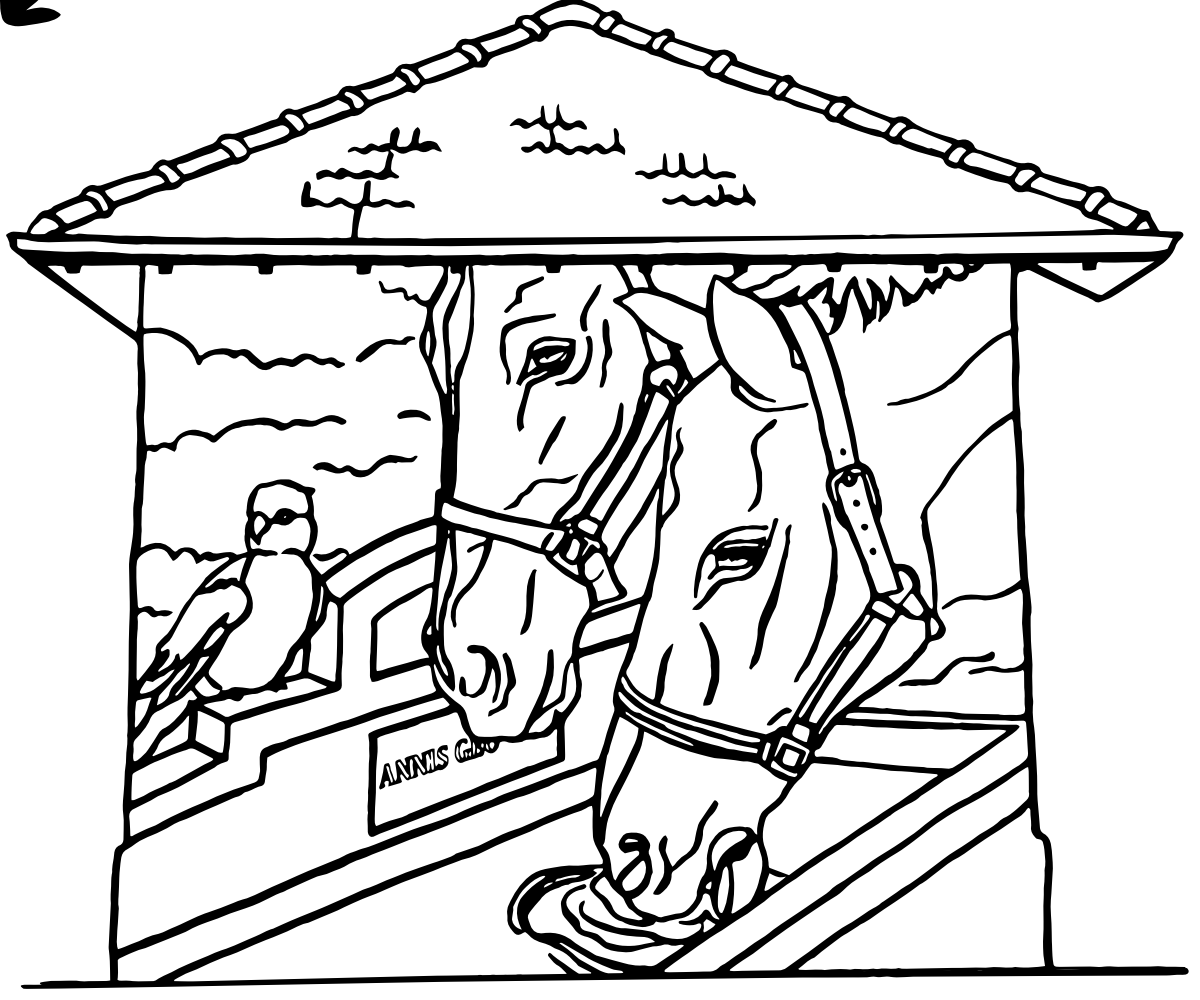
WHACKY WORD SEARCH

D G L H I M W U S Z L N G W
 O H O C O I A Y D X O A H Y
 N A P U H J C T E E P N N C
 A F S L B A G R W U S D C H
 L K D G C S R T A I D A E E
 D C A O D Q G L F N A L T P
 M P H A E L O V T M H Y R R
 B E R R I W I L L O C K S O
 I N U L L A W I L D N D A O
 R A L A W T D X U I K O Z F
 C E O O E C S W H L S I P H
 H F P L A H T S E A L A K E
 I N F P S E R L D C L S B O
 P L J A T M E O I K O W L A

BERRIWILLOCK	NANDALY
BIRCHIP	NULLAWIL
CHARLTON	SEA LAKE
CULGOA	WATCHEM
DONALD	WYCHEPROOF

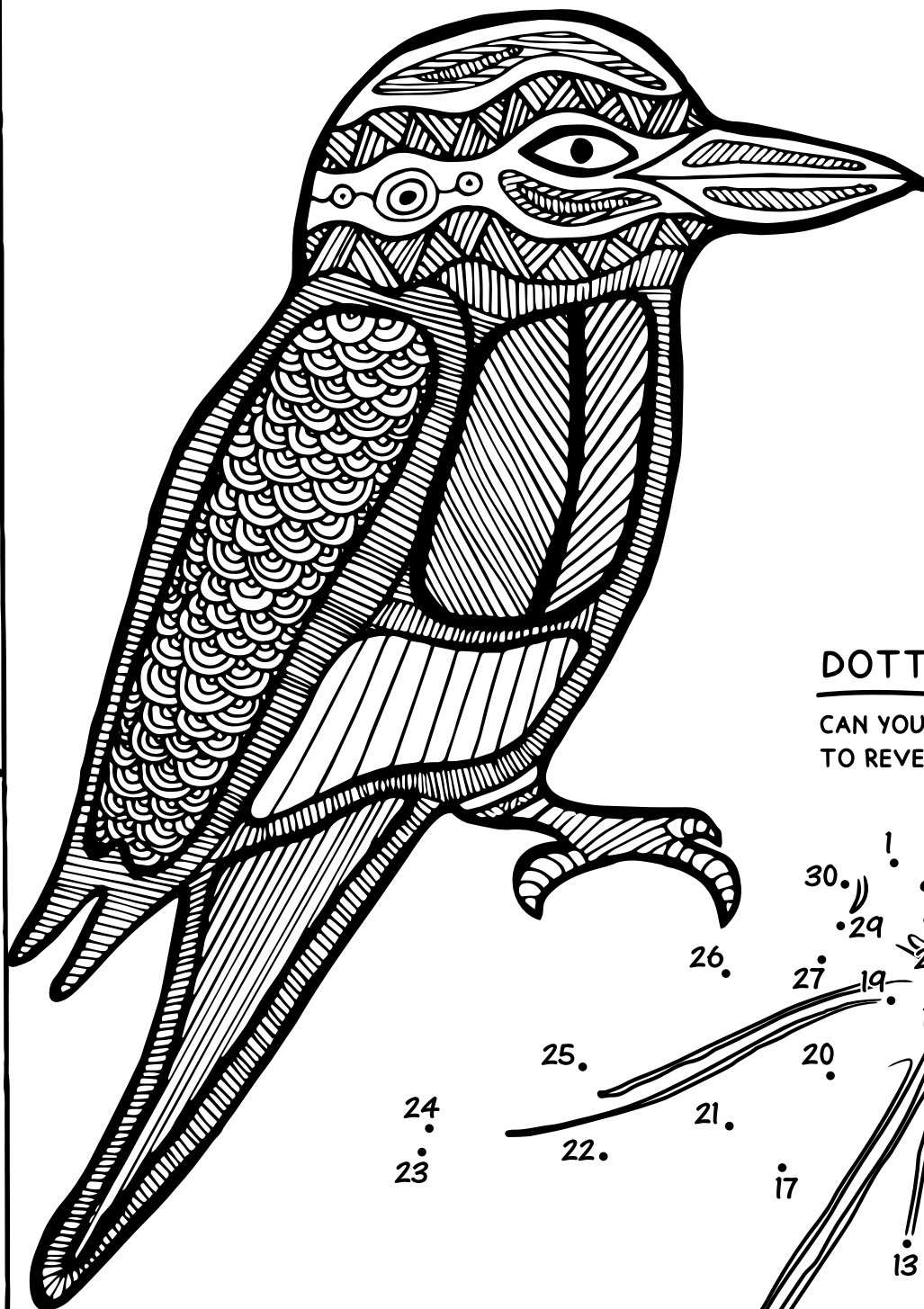


BIRCHIP



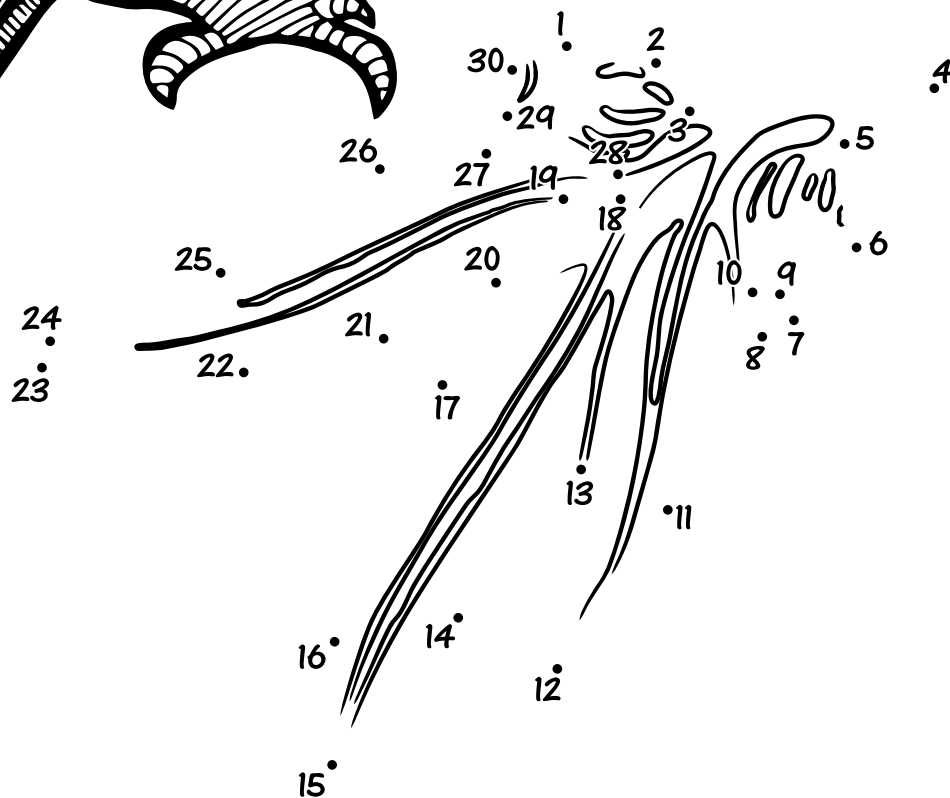


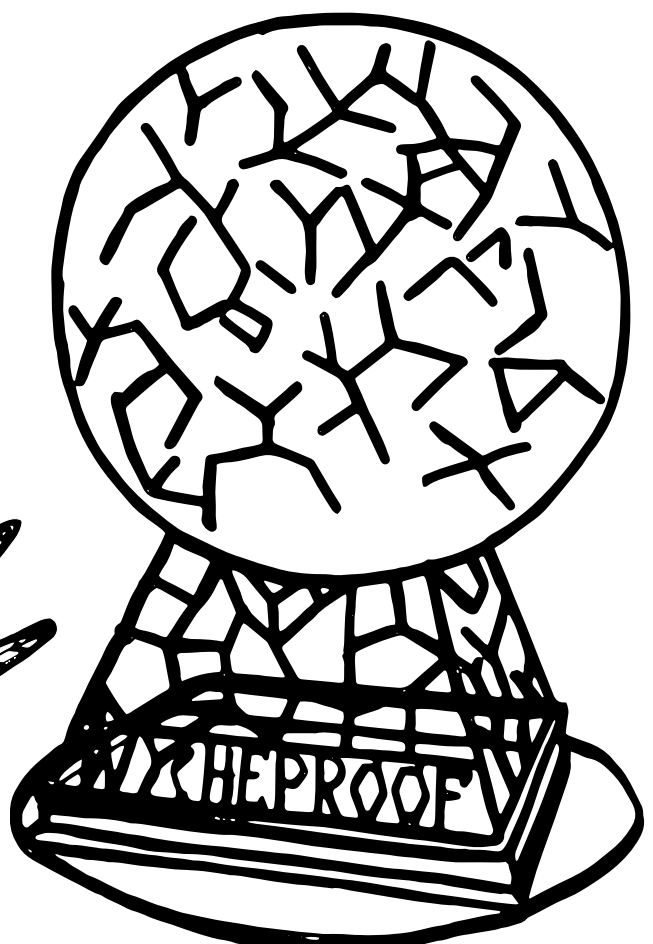
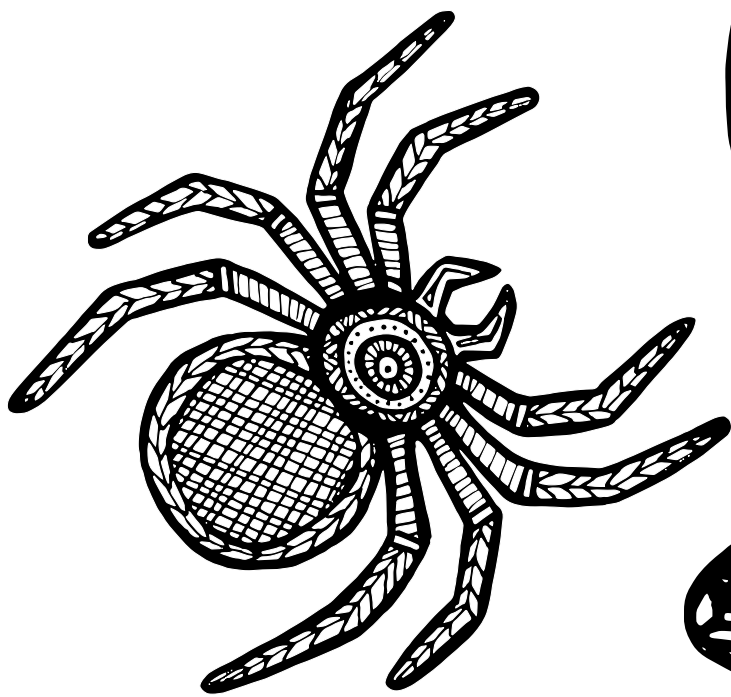
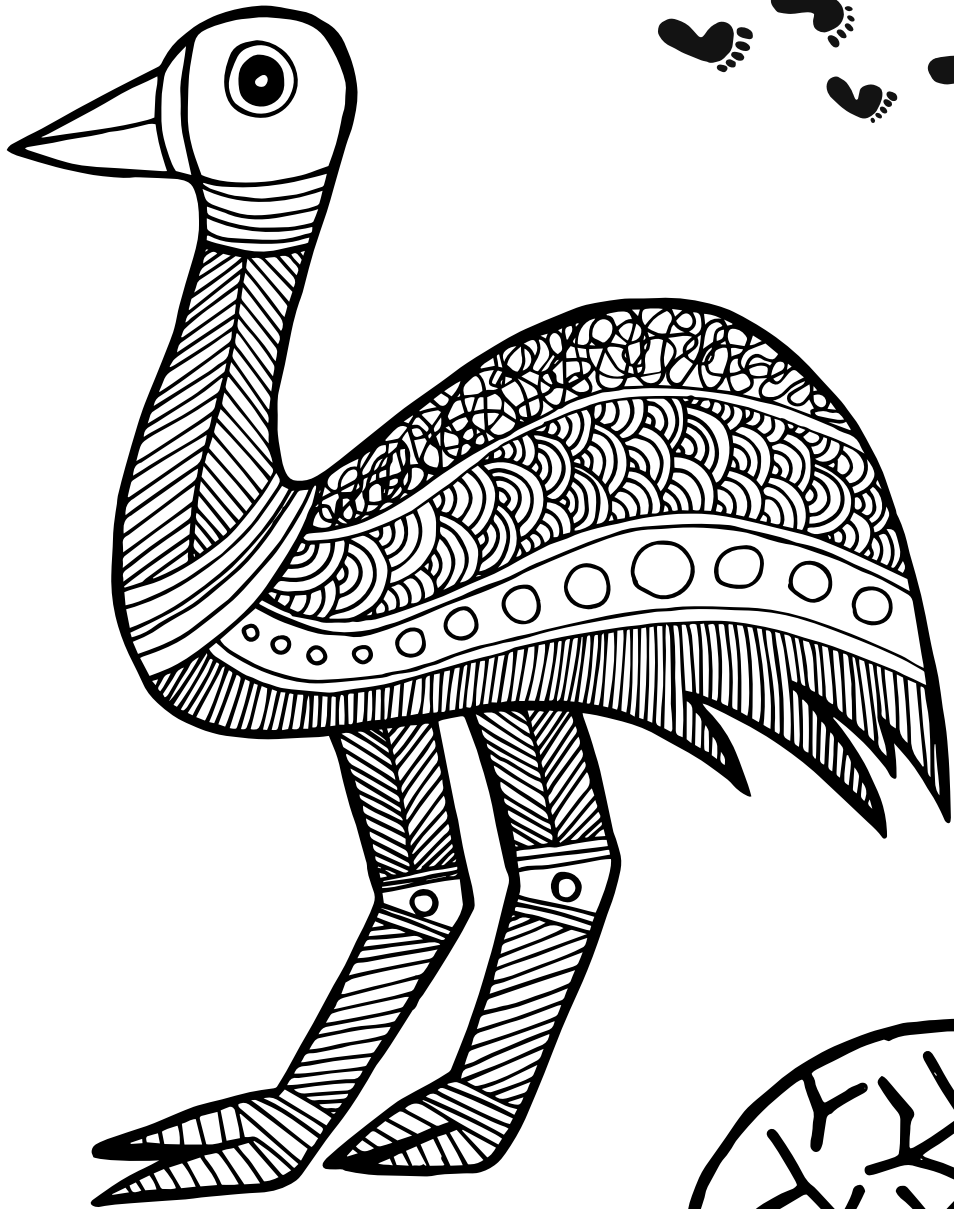
WYCHEPROOF

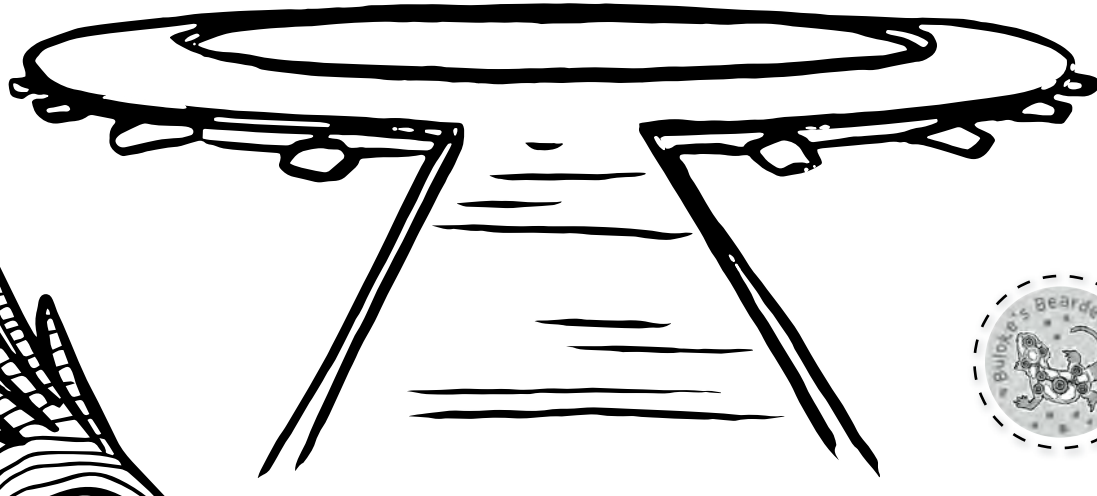
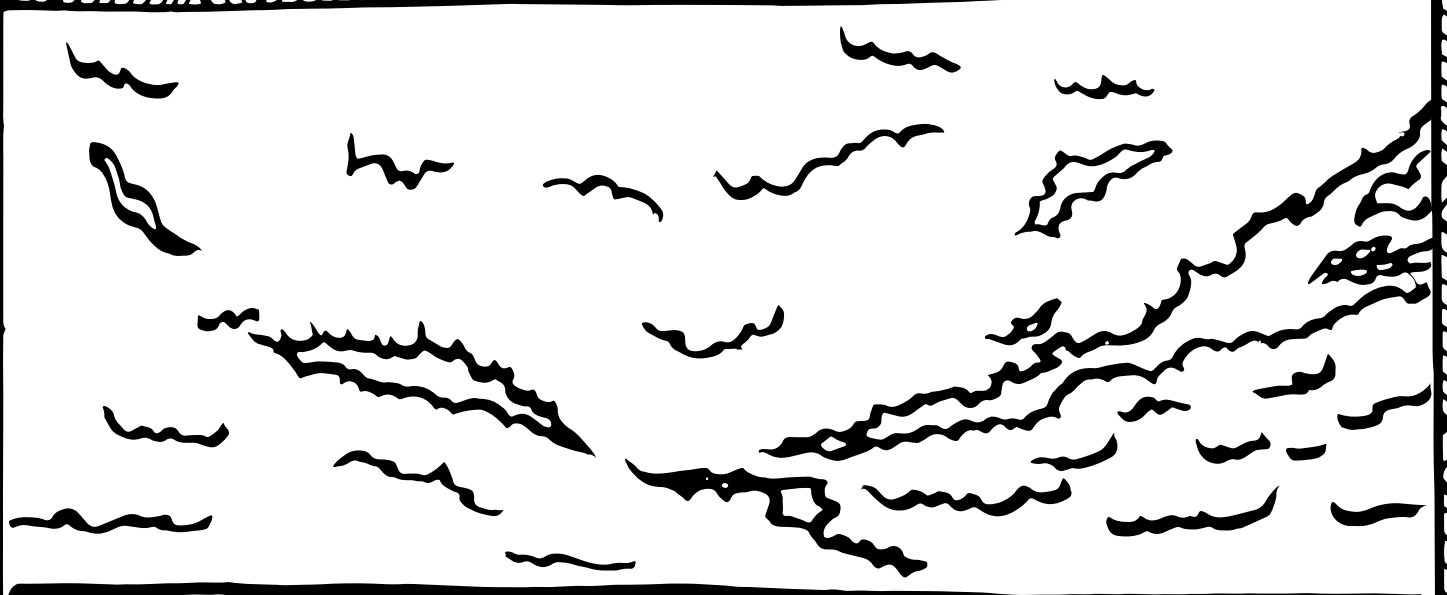


DOTTY DASH!

CAN YOU CONNECT THE DOTS TO REVEAL THE IMAGE?





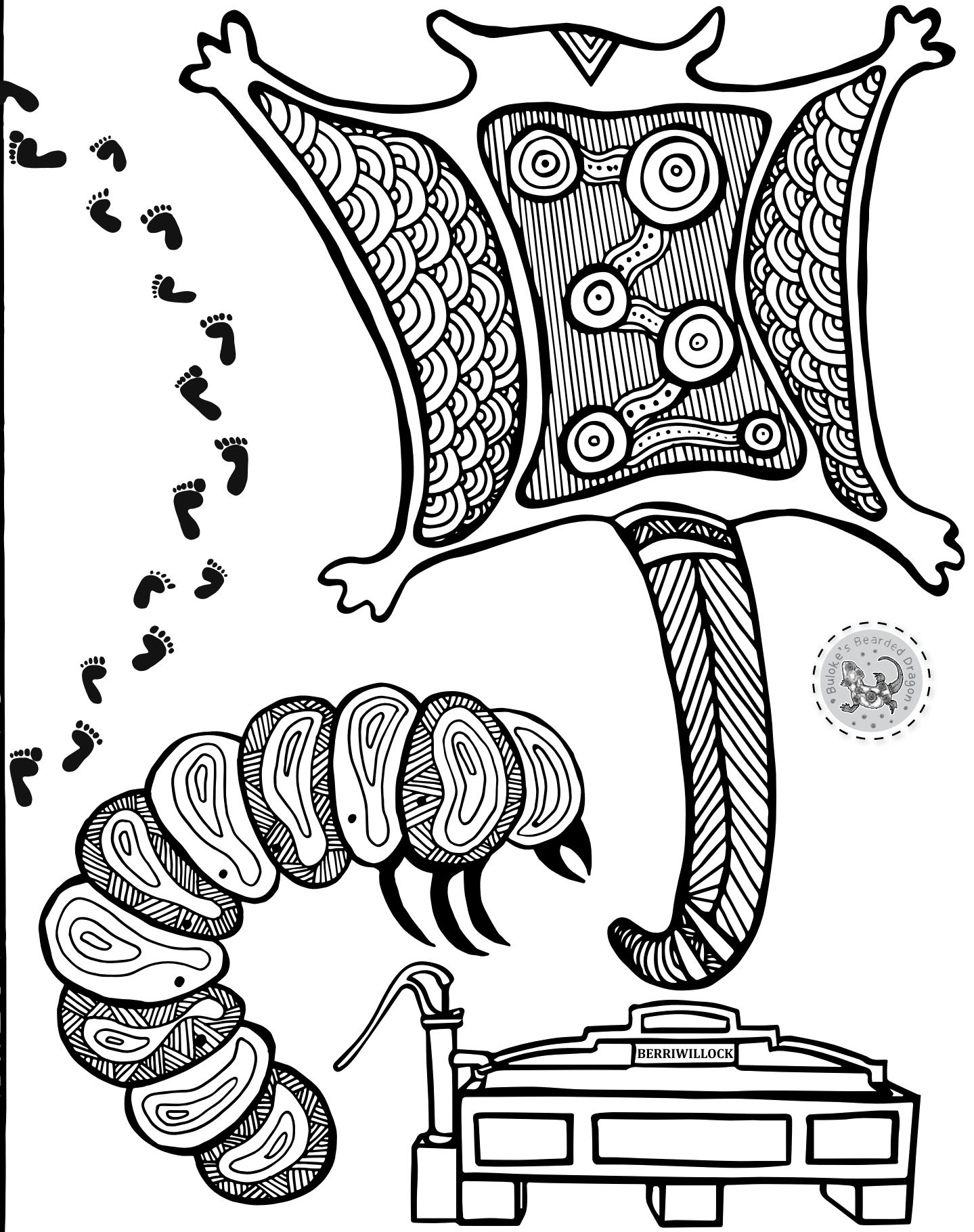


SEA LAKE



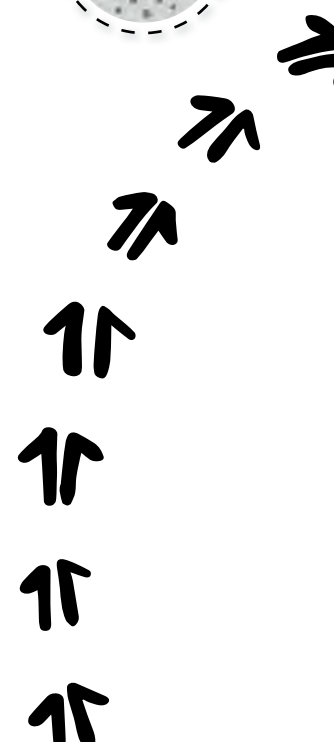
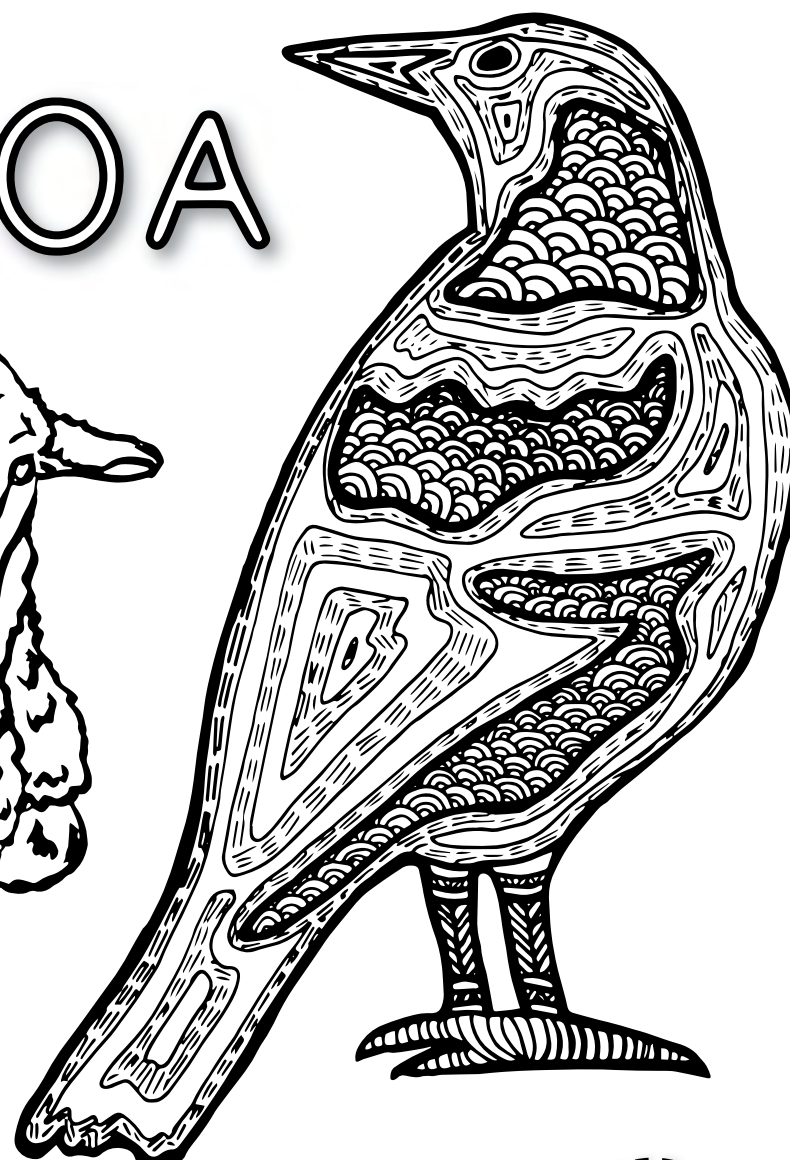
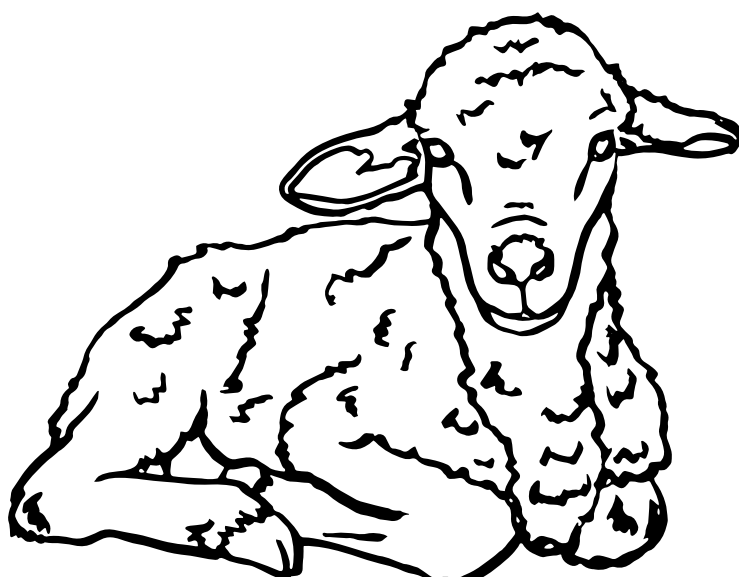


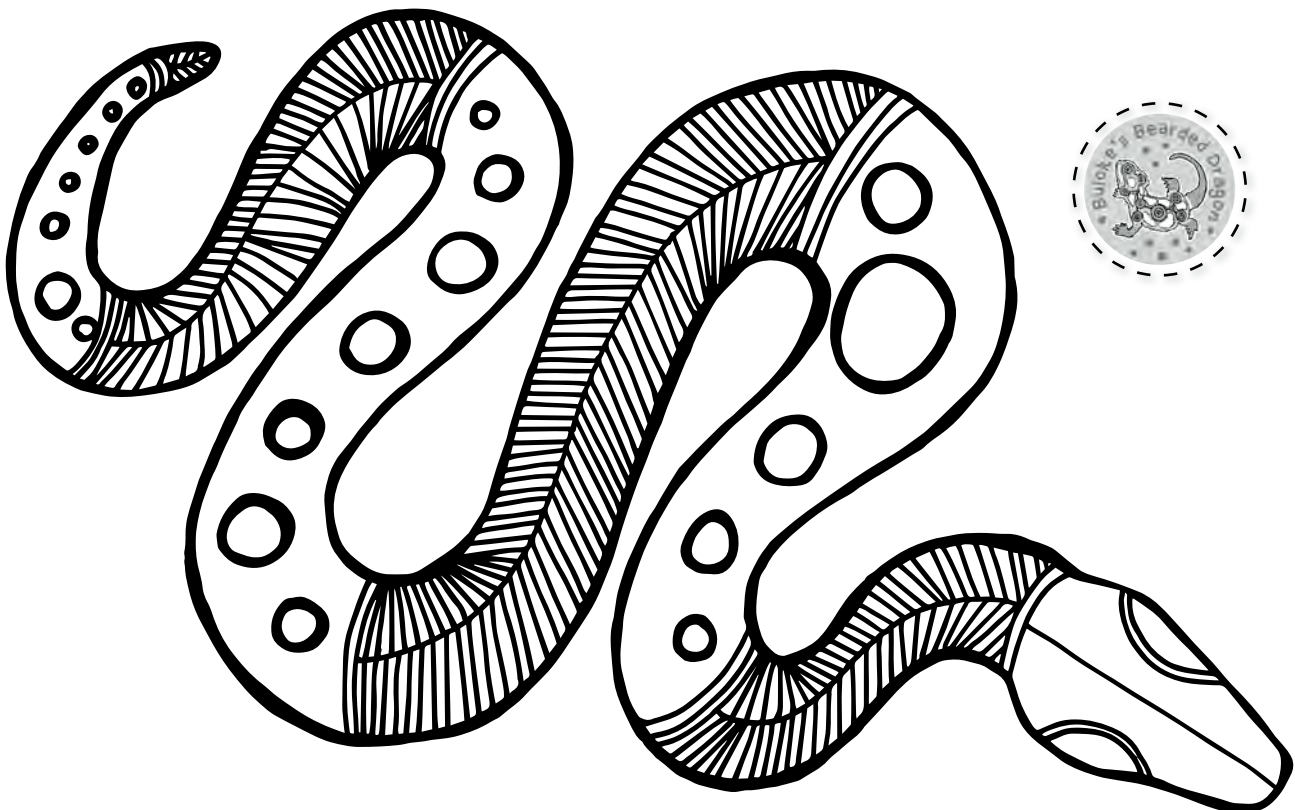
BERRIWILLOCK



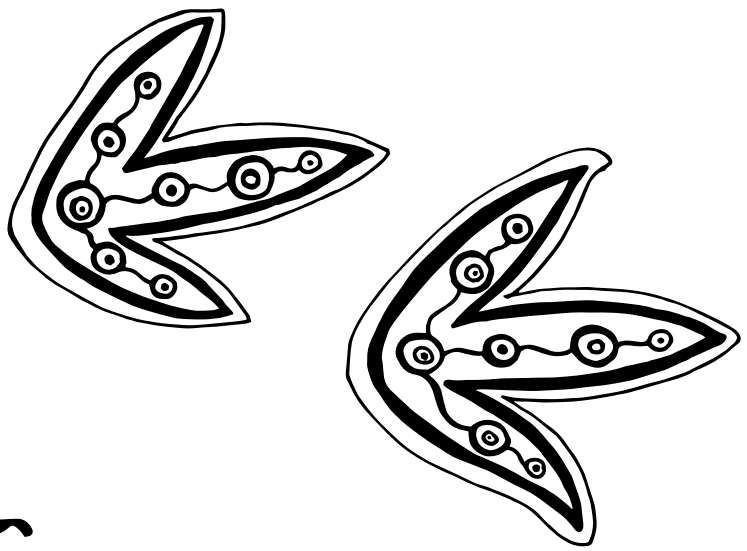
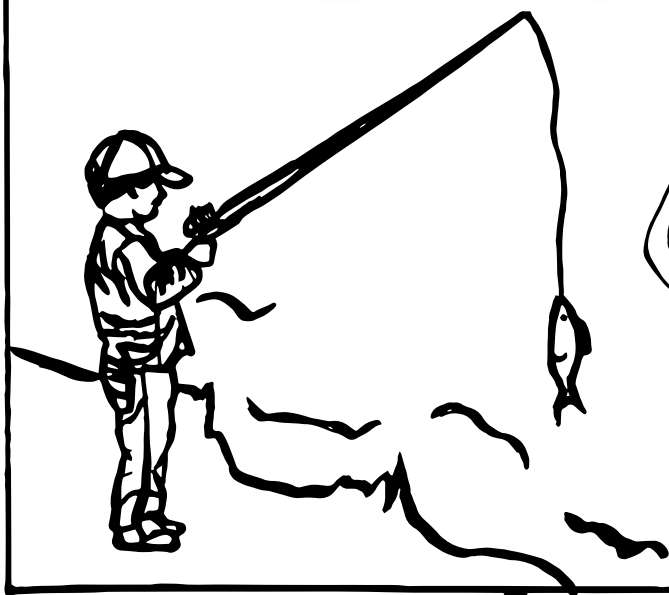
BERRIWILLOCK

CULGOA

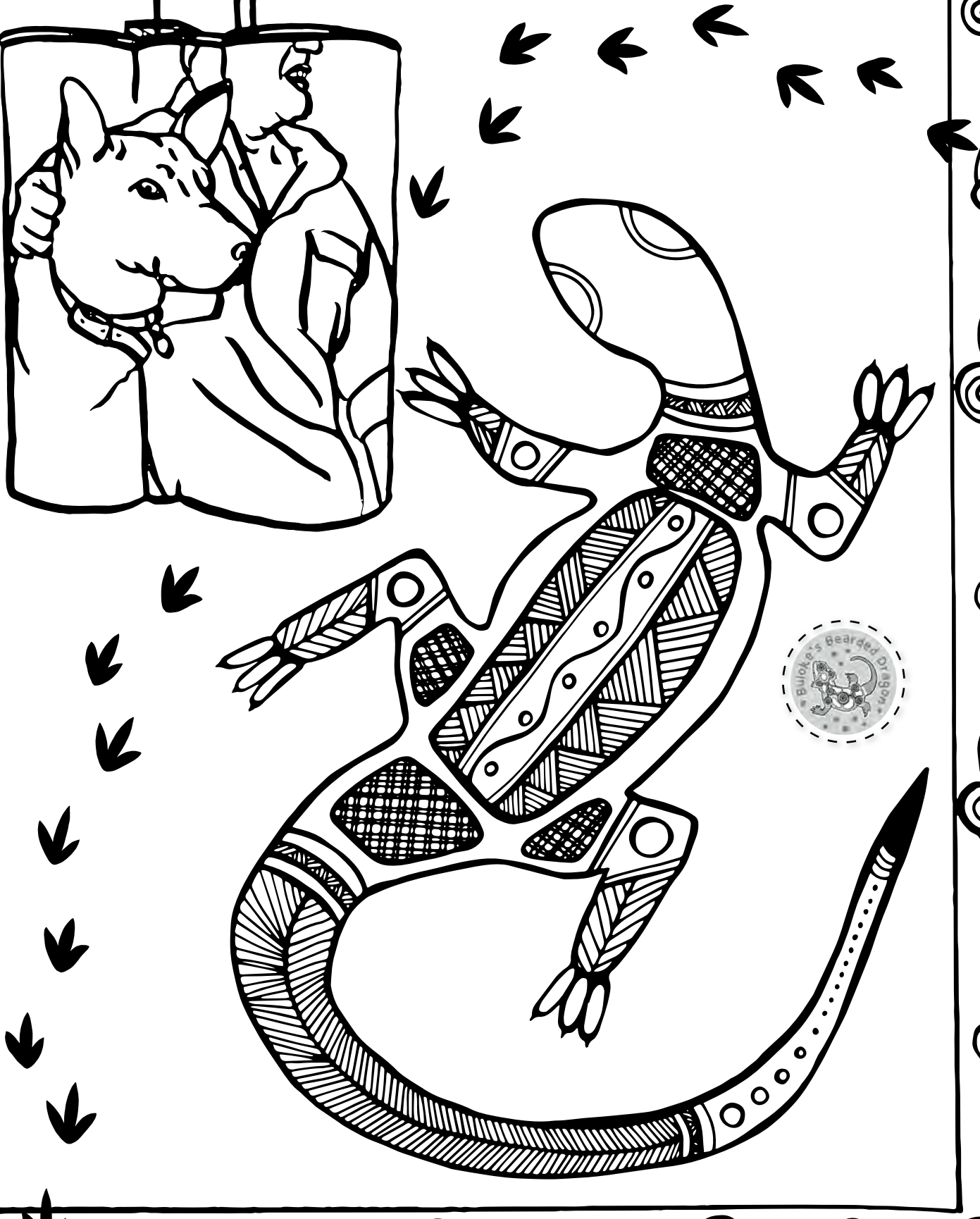
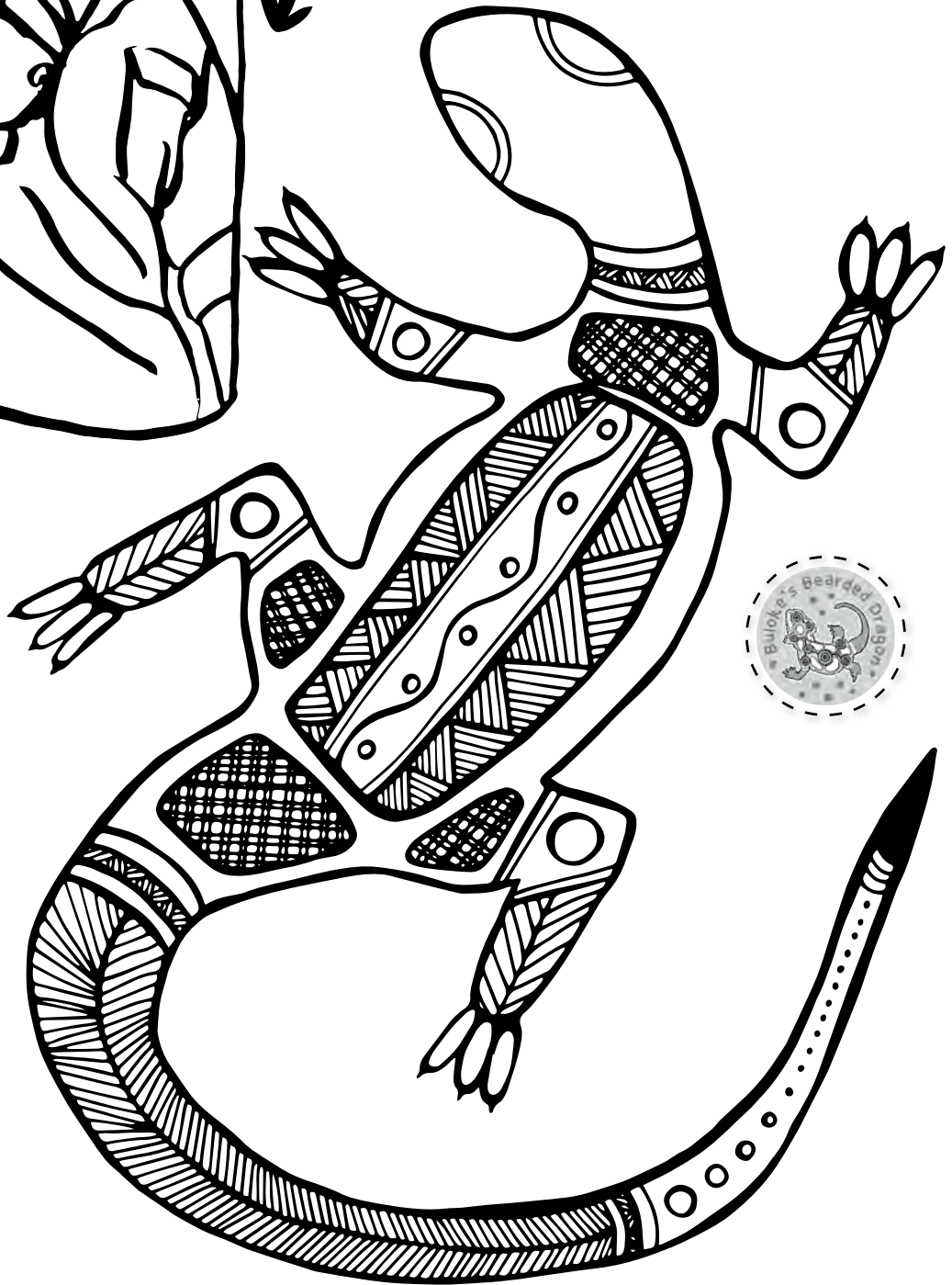




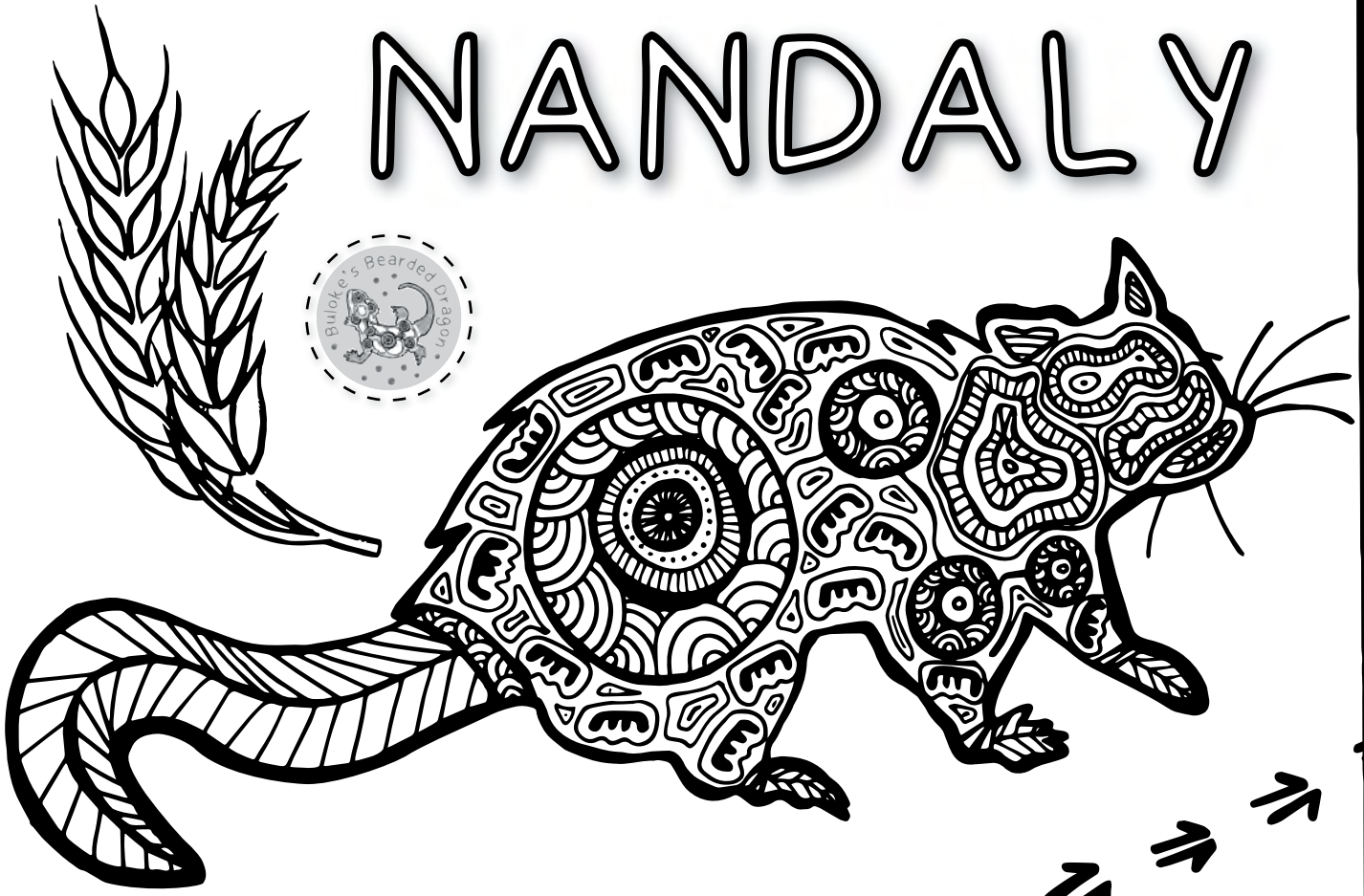
WATCHEM



NULLAWIL



NANDALY



Can you match the words to their meanings?

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------------|---|
| Buloke | <input type="radio"/> | A natural stream of flowing water through Charlton |
| River | <input type="radio"/> | A summer sport played with a racket and ball |
| Tree | <input type="radio"/> | Large bodies of fresh or salt water, surrounded by land |
| Road | <input type="radio"/> | A vehicle with four wheels, often used for daily travel |
| Car | <input type="radio"/> | A winter team sport on a court with rings |
| Shop | <input type="radio"/> | A surface for vehicles, where a pothole may be |
| Lakes | <input type="radio"/> | A place where students can learn |
| Netball | <input type="radio"/> | A sport played on a field with sticks and a ball |
| Hockey | <input type="radio"/> | The name of the local shire, also a type of tree |
| Tennis | <input type="radio"/> | A tall plant with branches, providing shade and habitat |
| School | <input type="radio"/> | A place where people buy goods and services |



For the Caregivers

We hope this book has not only brought fun and creativity to your days but also inspired a sense of empowerment and connection among our youth, laying the foundation for a community that will shine brightly into the future.

Buloke's Town Features

For your safety and convenience while travelling around our amazing communities.

 **Playspace**
 **Free Pool**
 **Fuel**
 **Public toilet**
 **ATM**
 **Hospital**
 **Food**
 **Bird box**

	CHARLTON	DONALD	BIRCHIP	WYCHEPROOF	SEA LAKE	NULLAWIL	BERRIWILLOCK	CULGOA	WATCHEM	NANDALY
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	*	*

* coming in 2025

Useful Resources

If you or someone you know is in need of crisis support call triple 000

Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800	Gambler's Help	1800 858 858
Safe Steps	1800 015 188	Nurse on Call	1300 606 024
Family Drug Support	1300 368 186	Parents Line	13 22 89
Rainbow Door text	0408 017 246	Beyond Blue	1300 244 636
Maternal & Child Health Line	13 22 29	Mensline	1300 789 978
Koori Maternity Service Swan Hill	03 5032 8600	Lifeline	131 114
Rural Financial Counselling	1300 735 578	13Yarn	13 92 76
Mallee Family Care	03 5023 5966	Non-emergency Police	13 14 44



As you colour your way through the “Buloke’s Bearded Dragon” colouring book, remember you can also take part in the “Buy in Buloke – Discover, support and celebrate local” campaign. The Buy in Buloke campaign encourages locals, their friends and families to come and shop within Buloke Shire to strengthen the economy. By highlighting Buloke’s unique products and services, it inspires residents to explore and value local offerings. The initiative invests in our economic sustainability and creates local jobs. So please join us in making a difference – every bit of support counts towards building a stronger more connected Buloke.

Proudly supported and funded by the Community Recovery Hubs Program



BALUK WELLBEING



**© Printed locally in Buloke by Buloke Times
Designed by Buloke Shire Council
in collaboration with local artists Kristie Witt & Kristie Dean**

Evaluation Report - Community Recovery Officer Program Loddon Mallee Region

June 2025

DRFA Category C - Government Grants Program (AGRN 1037)

Prepared by: Buloke Shire Council

City of Greater Bendigo

Gannawarra Shire Council

Loddon Shire Council

Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Mount Alexander Shire Council



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Loddon Mallee region is on Aboriginal land, including the lands of the Latji, Ngintait, Nyeri Nyeri, Barengi Gadjin, Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, Barapa Barap, Wamba Wamba and Yorta Yorta people, as well as other Traditional Owner groups who are not yet formally recognised.

We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, and are committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the region to achieve a shared vision of safer and more resilient communities.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution of the network of Community Recovery Officers and their respective councils in supporting community recovery efforts in response to the October 2022 flood event. We also wish to acknowledge assistance from the Community Recovery Officer, Evaluation Report Project Working Group and Emergency Recovery Victoria, Loddon Mallee Team in the preparation of this report.

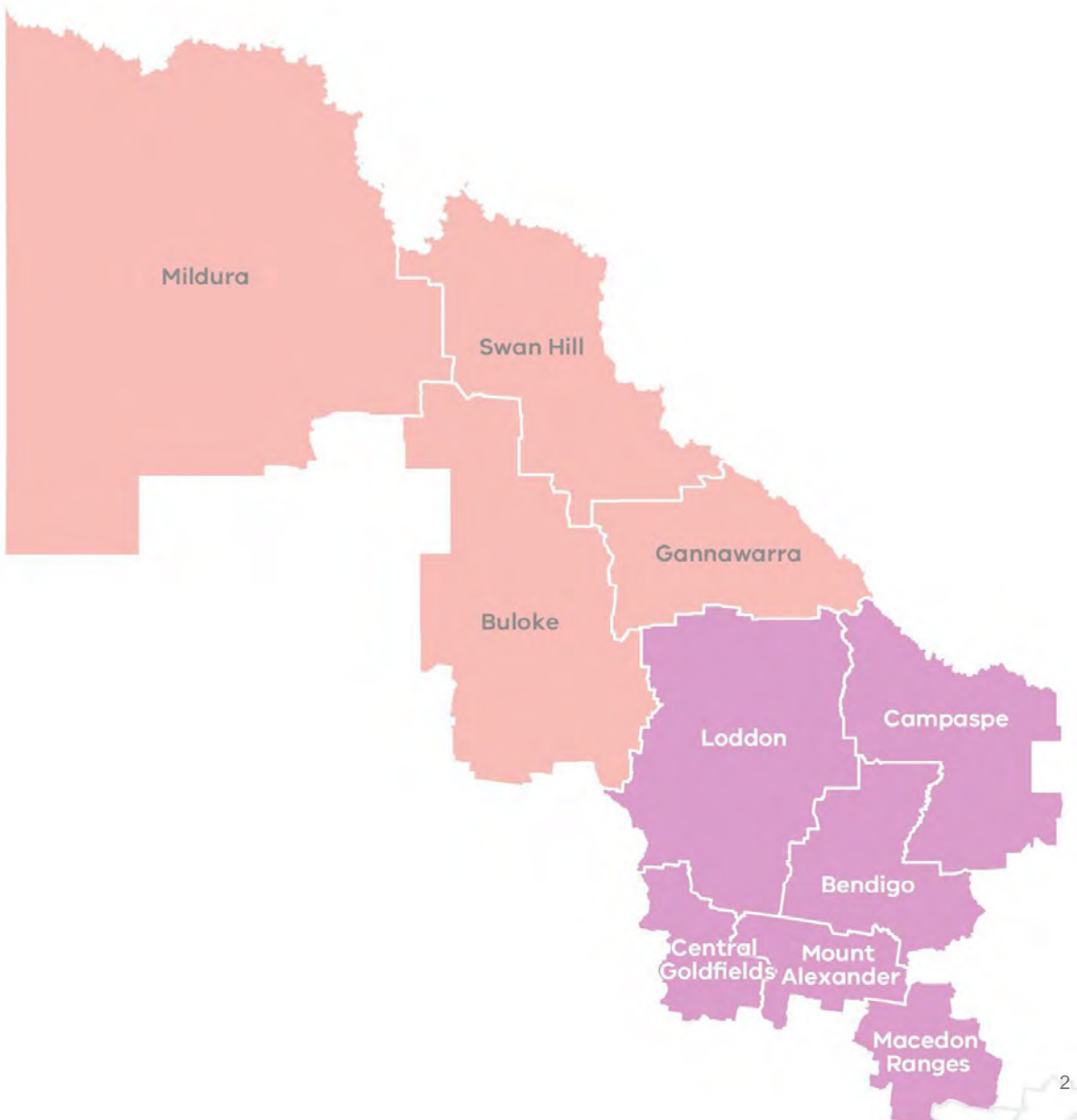


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Summary

Summary

The report has been prepared by six councils from the Loddon Mallee Region of Victoria from the perspective of a network of 26 Council Community Recovery Officers (CRO) and their line managers.

The report captures the experiences of the CRO workforce who worked in community recovery in response to the October 2022 Victorian floods.

The CRO workforce across the Loddon Mallee Region consisted of various employment arrangements, the majority engaged on short, fixed-term contracts in response to the funding model. Without a shared understanding, councils developed individual CRO position descriptions to engage a workforce in response to the single event (Victorian floods 2022 - AGRN 1037).

The significance of this project, therefore, is that it captures worker input during their time in the recovery roles. This offers rich data to inform the design of policy and funding models to enable improvements to future community recovery outcomes.

Background

The CRO network, several line managers and a panel of residents impacted by the 2022 Victorian floods held a workshop in August 2024 to capture their experiences of supporting community recovery.

The workshop:

- identified gaps, solutions and opportunities for ongoing regional and community recovery
- strengthened relationships, offered peer support and connections
- built capacity of the CRO network
- captured knowledge.

Key strategic priorities from the workshop included:

- (i) Embed resilience functions into ongoing Council community development roles
- (ii) Create a revised CRO Position Description (PD) more reflective of CRO roles, skills etc; and
- (iii) Undertake regional advocacy to establish an ongoing community resilience workforce.

To progress these priorities, a comparative analysis was undertaken with the Community Development and Engagement Initiative (CDEI), a Queensland initiative that funded

Community Development Officers (CDOs) working in recovery in response to the 2011 Queensland floods. This comparative analysis with the 2022 Victorian CRO program has enabled the councils involved to draw some legitimate conclusions about the level of ongoing maturity of community-led recovery policy in Australia and places the councils involved in a unique position to advocate for change.

Alignment with the Independent Review into Commonwealth Disaster Funding 2024 (Colvin review)

The Colvin review had been completed prior to this project evaluation being completed but had not yet been publicly released. Following the release of the Colvin review in October 2024, the draft CRO project evaluation was revisited, and it was highlighted that the recommendations aligned closely with many key findings of the Colvin review, though developed through a completely separate process. This evaluation supports findings, independently, of the Colvin review. These are noted in a separate Executive Summary document, and referenced in the following section: What are councils asking for?

What are councils asking for?

This Evaluation Report provides a case for change for councils involved in its preparation to advocate to the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) for policy and funding model changes.

The City of Greater Bendigo and Macedon Ranges Shire Council have been asked to advocate to NEMA on behalf of the region, on the following findings from this report:

I. Move from single event funding (response and recovery) to models more appropriate to support councils and communities to address the increased risks associated with a changing climate.

- 1.1. Establish an ongoing community resilience workforce in local government, ideally embedding resilience functions into ongoing council community development roles.

Colvin review alignment: Endorses recovery workforce development and calls for Commonwealth-state co-investment in sector capacity and wellbeing (Ch. 5, p. 103–105).

II. Avoid allocating inaccurate and disproportionate funding.

- 2.1 Redesign the current Impact Assessment based funding formula.

Colvin review alignment: Recommends moving away from reactive event-based funding toward long-term, risk-based investment strategies (Colvin Review, Ch. 3, p. 85–88).

Colvin review alignment: Calls for local government capability-building as a funding priority and suggests piloting a Commonwealth-funded Betterment Fund targeting local infrastructure and staffing needs (Ch. 4, p. 92–94).

III. Implement commensurate reporting.

3.1 Reduce the burden of reporting by developing a tiered system of reporting that is commensurate with the level of funding allocated.

3.2 Reduce reporting burden on councils by combining reporting, where multiple AGRN funded events impact councils simultaneously.

Colvin review alignment: Recommends tiered reporting frameworks commensurate with funding scale and complexity, particularly for small and rural councils (Ch. 5, p. 104).

IV. Measure 'soft' as well as 'hard' outcomes.

4.1 Use the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs to evaluate and assess 'successes' against desired outcomes, including developmental goals.

4.2 Funding should be explicitly allocated to monitoring and evaluation so that organisations can engage in use of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery more fully and appropriately.

Colvin review alignment: Urges a national framework for outcomes-based recovery, including social and cultural wellbeing metrics (Ch. 2, p. 67–69).

Conclusion

This Evaluation Report contributes to existing research and provides comparative learnings from past programs. It strengthens knowledge and application of community development in community recovery. Most importantly, it demonstrates opportunities to update policy and program guidelines to enable better recovery outcomes for communities who are being impacted by more frequent weather events.

The approach recommended in this Evaluation Report moves the current single event funding (response and recovery) to a model more appropriate to address the increased risks associated with a changing climate on the community. It places equal value on 'soft' processes (sustainable relationships and networks, community and organisational capability building, continuous learning and skill development) alongside 'hard' processes (outputs milestones and reporting activity/project measurement).

By establishing an ongoing community resilience workforce in local government, ideally by embedding resilience functions into ongoing council community development roles, communities will be supported to be better prepared for future events and more resilient to an increasingly changing climate.

1. Introduction

In Australia today, government funded disaster response programs are primarily embedded into the impacted communities, generally through local councils, but also through other community-based organisations. Two key examples of such programs are the Community Recovery Officer (CRO) and Community Recovery Hubs (Hubs) programs.

Many such programs are regarded as community development (CD) initiatives (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015)¹. Whilst this approach was not explicit to the CRO program, program guidelines refer to, and infer, a ‘community-based’ approach. Why is this approach important?

On the one hand, responding to more frequent, simultaneous and intense events, may make it difficult for governments to keep pace with policy settings around emerging evidence and best practice. On the other hand, these events contribute to a growing body of literature and evidence that helps inform and shape best practice. As a result, it is crucial to understand the distinction between the various theoretical and practical frameworks applied to policy and program design. This understanding is key to achieving the right balance between delivering the outputs and milestones required by funders and addressing the desired needs and outcomes expected by communities.

The evaluation undertaken by the Loddon Mallee Region CRO workforce in 2024, has again, reinforced the evidence and learnings from previous comparative programs, while also contributing new and nuanced perspectives to the ongoing narrative of contemporary disaster recovery policy and practice in Australia. Like any paradigm that continually evolves, this project presents options and opportunities to help advance community recovery practice at a time when community resilience is being most tested and needed. Policymakers adopting lessons learnt will help reduce ambiguity within the system and by virtue, within communities. This approach is one way to help our communities adapt to the continued and enduring challenges presented by disaster events.

1.1 About the Community Recovery Officer program

A wide-spread severe weather rain event impacted Victoria on the 13 October 2022 resulting in significant flooding across the State, including throughout the Loddon Mallee Region (LMR). Impacts from flooding were experienced in many communities throughout the region, affecting all 10 local government areas (LGAs).

In response to the event, all 10 local government areas of the LMR received funding through the Community Recovery Officer CRO program (the CRO program) and the Community Recovery Hubs Program (the Hub program) under Category C of the Disaster Recovery

¹ Shevella, L., Westoby, P., Connor, M. (2015). *Flirting with danger: practice dilemmas for community development in disaster recovery* Community Development. Vol. 46, No. 1, 26–42.

Funding Arrangements (DRFA), DRFA Australian Government Reference Number (AGRN) 1037. The program is administered by Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV).

Most councils received funding for fixed term 12 months positions, which was later extended to two years with all positions due to finish by 30 June 2025. However not all councils received funding for 12 months, with one only receiving funding for 6 months (1 FTE).

A delay in funding meant that most councils did not recruit CROs until mid-2023 at the earliest. Due to the need for councils to mobilise quickly to meet immediate relief needs, one council went ahead and appointed two temporary CROs to meet urgent recovery needs, aware that a process was underway for some CRO funding to be made available to reimburse its costs. This council had exhausted its CRO funding before it was even received in February 2023. A CRO was later employed using the Council's Community Recovery Hubs funding, however this was not received until July 2024 (8 months after the flood event), leaving a funding gap of several months.

Another council chose to appoint and self-fund CROs in the hope that funding would eventually be allocated, which occurred some eight months later.

The above circumstances around delayed funding, program extensions, and the need for councils to appoint staff to support community recovery needs has had unforeseen consequences. In December 2023, the Australian Government implemented changes through the Fair Work Ombudsman to Fixed Term Contract legislation. The intention of the changes was to prevent people being on rolling contracts for a long period of time.

However, the changes have also placed limitations on the use of fixed term contracts, having had a detrimental impact on the continuity of CRO staffing engaged by local governments following the 2022 floods. It is now much more difficult to extend fixed term contracts if recovery support needs to be extended and more funding is made available.

Objectives of the current CRO program contained in the program guidelines are to:

- boost local council capability and capacity to assist communities with short and medium-term recovery
- embed dedicated flood CROs within affected communities
- ensure community recovery needs are well understood so recovery information, events and activities are tailored to meet local needs
- together with affected communities and key stakeholders, develop, implement, and evaluate a range of recovery initiatives
- build community capability to respond to future disasters

CRO responsibilities included the development and oversight of a range of recovery initiatives, ensuring community recovery needs were understood and recovery information, events and activities were tailored to meet local needs and activities were delivered in line with the needs of their community (Emergency Recovery Victoria, 2022)².

² Emergency Recovery Victoria (2022). *Program Guidelines Community Recovery Officer Program*. Victorian State Government.

2. About the Evaluation

2.1 Aims and objectives

This report explores areas for improvement of the CRO program design from the perspectives of existing CROs, supporting communities across the Loddon Mallee Region after the devastating floods of 2022.

We aimed to firstly, understand if, and how, learnings from past programs have been applied to policy and program, particularly with respect to strengthening understanding and application of community development in community recovery.

Secondly, we wanted to capture the lived experiences of a cohort of 26 CROs supporting community recovery for a comparative analysis with past programs. This was to understand the level of ongoing maturity of community-led recovery policy in Australia over the passage of time.

This analysis aimed to identify opportunities for continuous improvement of the policy and program, to more effectively support councils and community organisations to support community recovery in a contemporary setting, including recovery programs that account for the impacts of climate change.

The report sought to understand and identify if valuing ‘soft’ processes, for example, sustainable relationships and networks, community and organisational capability building, continuous learning and skills development, alongside ‘hard’ processes, such as quantitative output-based activities and measurements, are important elements in helping achieve community recovery outcomes in 2025.

Whilst out of scope for this evaluation, we also posit that single event-based funding may no longer be a fit-for-purpose model to support community resilience in the face of climate change induced disasters.

2.2 Methods and approach

In the absence of any pre-determined or formalised support network, the Loddon Mallee CROs established a Community of Practice through an informal online network to provide peer support and share information and learnings. The ERV Loddon Mallee regional team supported the network as part of their stakeholder relationship functions.

A co-design group from the network designed an action learning capability workshop with the ERV regional team, which was held on 14-15 August 2024, with CROs, local government colleagues and community members.

Workshop data was grouped into themes from which four opportunities to progress further work emerged:

1. How Emergency Management (EM) agencies operate in your community during a disaster event

2. Embed resilience functions into ongoing council community development roles, create a new CRO PD more reflective of CRO roles, skills etc and undertake regional advocacy to establish ongoing community resilience workforce
3. Develop a register of Emergency Management resources & training
4. Conduct community resilience workforce training.

In the workshop, CROs overwhelmingly reported their strong commitment to supporting communities to be better prepared and more resilient to the impacts of future events. Additionally, they reported holding concerns about the potential for repeated trauma, destabilising of relationships and trust, and loss of corporate memory impacting momentum of preparedness activities between communities and government (especially councils) due to the short-term duration of programs like CRO. Many such concerns have been articulated in this report.

Given the CRO program's fixed two-year timeline, the network prioritised building regional recovery capability as an aspirational legacy of the CRO program and agreed on the following strategic priorities:

- (i) Embed resilience functions into ongoing council community development roles
- (ii) Create a new CRO PD more reflective of CRO roles, skills etc
- (iii) Undertake regional advocacy to establish ongoing community resilience workforce

A working group of five CROs, with backbone support from the regional ERV team has led this project, which has sought to understand the lived experience of the region's CROs from their perspectives and learnings of their two years in the CRO role.

The key feature of this work has involved a comparative analysis of:

- (i) the CRO guidelines and PDs developed by each funded Council and approved by ERV against,
- (ii) the actual functions undertaken by CROs, including tasks, roles, responsibilities, skills, knowledge, experience and training requirements.

Findings were then grouped into priorities and then further organised into themes, forming the basis of the revised PD (Appendix B).

3. Evidence review

A review of the literature was used to correlate the lived experience of the CRO workforce with the available evidence base, reinforcing the need to reimagine funding policy and program guidelines from which the revised PD is founded. This report provides a list of findings for consideration by both funders and funded organisations, which may be useful to guide the design and implementation of similar future programs. These findings have been reviewed against the relevant literature, providing an evidence base to inform best practice in future program design.

The lived experience of the CRO workforce captured in this project makes a significant contribution to understanding the current state of the system, in terms of disaster recovery in 2024. Sharing their experiences here helps to reflect on, and compare, on what lessons have been applied from the past. The following section discusses part of the recovery policy and

practice journey in Australia in the 21st century. A comparative analysis of the literature and the CRO insights, suggests lessons applied from the past may be arguably negligible.

A fundamental weakness that can beset good policy and program design from the outset, is failing to define theoretical and practical underpinnings and parameters. In this context, the relevant underpinnings to understand for this report are, or relate to, the concepts and terms community, recovery and resilience. While each of these have been widely researched and provide useful working definitions, they are necessarily “complex and binary” and therefore are subject to being overused, misused or interchanged, leading to assumptions in their understanding and application (Rawsthorne, et al, 2023)³. For the purpose of this report, the following definitions apply:

Community

“A community is often a geographical area, for example, a local government region or a particular town. Community can also be defined based on shared interests, identity or characteristics (e.g. a particular cultural and linguistically diverse community or the LGBTIQ+ community). Community in a community development sense refers to the citizens of the area and does not usually refer to service providers or organisations” (Alla et al, 2023)⁴.

In contemporary uses, the concept of ‘community’ is often ill-defined and infused... geographic descriptors provide limited insight into how communities are constituted, experienced or function. Binary descriptors (resilient/vulnerable or prepared/unprepared) are also unhelpful. Understanding the contours of community processes is, however, vital if we are to support community actions and shared responsibility in disaster events. This is far from straightforward as each community is unique, despite often exhibiting similar contours. Communities are socially produced, not an object to be acted upon (Rawsthorne, et al, 2023).

Community based

“An issue or problem is defined by agencies and professionals who develop strategies to solve the problem and then involve community members in these strategies. Ongoing responsibility for the program may be handed over to community members and community groups.

Characteristics:

- Decision-making power rests with the agency
- The problem or issue is defined by the agency
- There are defined timelines
- Outcomes are pre-specified, often changes in specific behaviours or knowledge levels” (Alla et al, 2023).

³ Rawsthorne, M., Howard, A., Joseph, P., Sampson, D., Katrack Harris, M. (2023). *Understanding community-led disaster preparedness*. University of Sydney, University of Newcastle. Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.

⁴ Alla, K. et al (2023). *Resource Sheet July 2023*, Aus Inst of Fam Studies.

Community Development

“Community groups identify important concerns and issues, and plan and implement strategies to mitigate their concerns and solve their issues.

Characteristics:

- Power relations between agency and community members are constantly negotiated
- The problem or issue is first named by the community, then defined in a way that advances the shared interests of the community and the agency
- Work is longer term in duration
- The desired outcome is an increase in the community members’ capacities
- The desired long-term outcomes usually include change at the neighbourhood or community level” (Alla et al, 2023).

“Community development is also understood as a professional discipline and is defined by the International Association for Community Development as “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline” (Gilchrist, Taylor, 2011)⁵.

Australian community development academic, Jim Ife, “promotes a holistic approach to community development and emphasises the different dimensions of human community: social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, spiritual, personal” and now adds the dimension of survival development in the context of climate change and the associated societal impacts” (Ife, 2013)⁶.

Recovery

The term recovery is based on the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) Community Recovery Handbook 2018)⁷.

- Recovery is the coordinated process of supporting affected communities in the reconstruction of the built environment and the restoration of emotional, social, economic, built and natural environment wellbeing.
- Recovery is the process of coming to terms with the impacts of a disaster and managing the disruptions and changes caused, which can result, for some people, in a new way of living. Being ‘recovered’ is being able to lead a life that individuals and communities value living, even if it is different to the life they were leading before the disaster event.

⁵ Gilchrist, A. and Taylor, M. (2011). *The Short Guide to Community Development*. Policy Press. pp. 2.

⁶ Ife, J. (2013). *Community Development in an Uncertain World*. Cambridge University Press, Research programs.

⁷ Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience. (2018). *Community Recovery*. Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection. Handbook 2.

Resilience

The terms resilience and disaster resilience are based on definitions contained in the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook 2020*⁸.

- Resilience is “the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of such hazards in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management” (UNDRR 2017)⁹.
- “A disaster resilient community is defined by the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience as one that ‘works together to understand and manage the risks that it confronts’ (COAG 2011)¹⁰. A resilient community has the opportunity, capacity and capability to identify and mitigate hazards and risks, absorb the effects of disruptive events, adapt or transform in anticipation or response to disruptive events and return to a functioning state” (COAG 2011).

In their study, Shevellar, Westoby and Connor identified what they termed “practice dilemmas” that included:

- the dilemmas of language
- being responsive to the accountability/audit culture of government and the longer-term relational and partnership needs of community work, and,
- tension for CDOs who were caught between “hard” vs. “soft” interventions.

The first dilemma of language applies equally to both programs in focus here, with both including official language and terms such as “recovery,” “resilience,” and “preparedness”. In practice these terms created issues of engagement and participation with communities engaged by CDOs, “who themselves spent time wrestling with what they understood the terms to mean”.

The language of resilience also incurred scepticism, often seen as empty rhetoric by community member. “Resilience is a buzzword amongst the agencies and the government and the workers and everyone else. It’s one of those words that people in the community either just blink at you or say “What are those words? We don’t use it” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

In contrast the study found that “preparedness” was the most palatable word for most community members, and therefore easier to use for CDOs as compared to the words “recovery” and “resilience” which were seen as backward looking, the technical language and

⁸ Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience. (2020) *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience*. Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection. First edition

⁹ Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction. (2017). *Definition Resilience*. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

¹⁰ COAG 2009, *National Disaster Resilience Statement*. National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, 2011.

work of “disaster preparedness” was considered forward looking and accepted by community members” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

Social Capital

Communities that have active and strong groups and social networks are understood to have high levels of social capital. While there are various definitions of social capital, it can be understood as “networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam, 1995)¹¹.

Local leadership and high social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) are known to promote resilience and recovery, “as social capital, manifested through networks, trust, and shared norms within communities, generally enhances disaster resilience and recovery by facilitating collective action, improving communication, and fostering support” (Ulubasoglu et al, 2024)¹².

In their study, *The hidden power of community: Unveiling social capital’s role in Australia’s disaster resilience*, Ulubasoglu et al report that “impact of bushfires is most prominent amongst specific subgroups of the population, such as older people, people who are unemployed, people who are divorced, and people living in remote areas.” Further, “the most severely impacted individuals amongst those affected groups are those who reside in low-social capital communities” (Ulubasoglu et al, 2024).

The central tenet of concerns raised by CROs for this report was lack of sector capacity and community capability. Adopting a systemic approach aims to strengthen the connections in the system designed to build *institutional resilience*, defined in the literature as “the ability of a network of organizations, groups, and individuals acting collectively to address short or long-term natural hazards and disaster-based shocks to economic, environmental, social, and physical systems” (Smith, Martin, Wenge, 2018)¹³.

Importantly, by facilitating stronger sector – community relationships, promoting social capital and enacting collaborative planning; through what Smith, et al term *assistance networks*, helps communities become more resilient to disasters and develop more sustainable disaster recovery plans (Smith, Martin, Wenge, 2018), while importantly, not adding extra burden to already extended capacity.

Such networks are organised and formalised to augment localised disaster preparedness, response and recovery functions, which, as (Smith, Martin and Wenge) contend are a naturally occurring function of community, more likely to be sustainable and lead to greater resilience in communities (Smith, Martin, Wenge, 2018).

¹¹ Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹² Ulubasoglu, M., Pullabhotla, H., Tong, L., Nicholas, A. (2024). *The hidden power of community: Unveiling social capital’s role in Australia’s disaster resilience*. Centre for Disaster Resilience and Recovery, Deakin Business School.

¹³ Smith, G., Martin, A., Wenge, D. (2018). *Disaster Recovery in an Era of Climate Change: The Unrealized Promise of Institutional Resilience*. Springer International Publishing AG.

“Disaster recovery requires understanding and harnessing the power of institutional arrangements, recognising that disaster recovery assistance networks have the ability to affect positive change over time. Achieving this aim means embracing innovative, locally grounded solutions, and fostering the ability of the network to learn and adapt, guided by collaborative mechanisms like planning.” (Smith, Martin, Wenge, 2018).

This is supported by Antrobus et al. in their project drawing on case studies from the 2011 Queensland floods, titled *Identifying and Evaluating Factors Influencing Community Resilience in a Crisis* which identified six themes that is described by Norris et al. as a “model of community resilience as a set of networked adaptive capacities” (Norris et al, 2008)¹⁴. The factors influencing community resilience in a crisis are:

1. The importance of prior relationships
2. Importance of local coordination
3. Waste and inefficiency through lack of coordination
4. Meeting needs of the local community
5. Complications related to government funding
6. Stepping up to leadership roles during a crisis.

Further, Rawsthorne, et al propose “a framework drawing on theoretical insights on community development and complexity to support community-led preparedness through action across 7 interrelated dimensions, *information, networks, decision-making processes, communication, self-organising systems, resources and inclusion*. Supporting communities to pay attention to these dimensions strengthens their capacity to prepare for and recover from future disasters” (Rawsthorne, et al, 2023).

Disaster impacted communities with high levels of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) and strong social networks experience enhanced levels of resilience and recovery, and a readiness to activate response efforts in the immediate absence of response agencies, due to inaccessibility or lack of capacity in large scale events. There are various ways to achieve this, for example developing community-led disaster preparedness plans and including community groups seeking to be, or actively involved in, localised disaster preparedness, for example as members of local Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs).

4. Findings of the evaluation - The case for change:

Despite the substantial evidence of the benefits of community development in disasters, and the multiple disasters in Australia between 2011 and 2022, incorporating evidence of lessons learnt from those events over time, is not evident. However, evidence from the 2011 CDO program and findings from this evaluation demonstrates comparative similarities from which to base a case for change.

¹⁴ Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategies for disaster readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 127-150.

Both programs describe similar aims such as working with communities on recovery needs, implementing projects, activities, and events that contribute to recovery, resilience, and future disaster preparedness.

Both programs identified onerous reporting. Turning again to the 2015 work of Shevellar, Westoby, Connor, they describe the “tension for CDOs who were caught between having to be responsive to the accountability/audit culture of government and the longer-term relational and partnership needs of community work. The program had extremely tight accountability mechanisms that most CDOs described as onerous. Tools placed emphasis upon quantity. This experience accords with a global shift in development practice, where practice is being strongly driven by what is being called “the results agenda” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

Another factor explained more recently by Rawsthorne, et al is “a significant gap between policy and practice in community participation and leadership in preparedness and recovery...in what might be understood as ‘culture clash’ between command-and-control processes (emergency services organisations) and ‘organic grass roots processes’ (community-based groups and organisations)” (Rawsthorne, et al, 2023).

Both programs also experienced issues around the timing /and duration of the programs and roles in terms of delivery milestones but, and more importantly, the concerns of impacts on communities once the roles concluded. “There was little recognition or celebration of the less tangible and slower processes of community work... the difference between the longer-term processes of community work as opposed to quick service-delivery mode” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

Two years was therefore considered inadequate for achieving the genuine partnerships with communities that would help “shift the dial” from what Shevellar, Westoby, Connor, term “a results-oriented agenda and the political imperative of a program” which they contend “can often override community agendas and bottom-up practices” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

Both programs also reported experiencing what Shevellar, Westoby, Connor term the “dilemma of hard versus soft interventions” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015) referring to perceptions and ambiguity about eligibility criteria of available funding. Examples of soft interventions include events and activities that have social connections and psychosocial as the foci, whereas hard interventions include assets and infrastructure that have a practical application such as equipment purchases. The dilemma referred to by Shevellar, Westoby, Connor is created by community perceptions (and requests arguably based on lessons from previous experience) of the need for assets to assist with preparedness for future events (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

Perhaps the more challenging aspect of this dilemma involves the holistic, organic approach of community work and what Shevellar, Westoby, Connor describe as “the clear demarcation within government of “siloes” approaches to intervention (for example, one department responsible for roads and another for people’s mental health). In this case practitioners’ community engagement is guided by a more naturally occurring approach to communities and their needs, engaged “on community’s terms.” However, they were then left with

dilemmas when communities identified their needs in ways that were beyond the purview of the CD program” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

The final consideration worthy of noting involves the important role of reflective practice and peer support and learning, essential to help support practitioners to navigate what we have seen is complex community work and the important recovery outcomes such programs are designed to deliver.

Again, neither the CDO or CRO programs embedded reflective practice, peer support or learning in their program guidelines. Rather, this was left to the employing agency to ensure generic legislated workplace requirements were met. Again, this points to the issue frequently raised throughout this report of an underemphasis placed on the conceptual understanding and application of the ‘community-dimensions’ of the work compared to the government accountability and auditing imperatives.

“In the CDO experience in situ learning was not drawn upon to inform the learning processes that would have enhanced the program substantially. Our analysis is that the dilemmatic space reported in the findings – related to accountability/audit culture vs. partnership building – created too many pressures for the CDEI program managers. These pressures undermined the reflexive space for supporting learning that was more oriented toward CDO needs” (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor 2015).

These results present a range of implications for funded organisations and their communities. Organisations can experience lengthy recruitment caused by difficulty attracting suitable staff, but also capacity constraints in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, when response staff may also have to submit complex funding applications, including developing new position descriptions. This can be an unwanted distraction from responding to the immediate needs of the community. Short tenures, involve milestones and reporting within set timeframes. This can be prohibitive to developing longer-term and systemic recovery and resilience outcomes within communities, which requires systemic change in the organisation and local service system. Recovery staff can experience isolation leading to fatigue and burn out, impacting on individuals, the organisation and community.

Event based, short term programs can contribute to diminished relationships and trust by the community in the local organisation leading recovery, particularly in communities that have been repeatedly impacted, where there can be perceptions of “nothing changing” between events.

As Rawsthorne, et al contend, policies that ‘roll out’ projects in a cookie cutter fashion often have very uneven traction between locations. These approaches are largely short lived with outcomes shaped by the project or funding logics rather than community priorities and processes” (Rawsthorne, et al, 2023).

In the following two tables we present a list of considerations for recovery funding organisations and funded organisations. Table 1 presents an opportunity to design recovery programs to address inquiry findings and use and improve existing programs and platforms for continuous improvement to support community recovery outcomes. These factors have been identified in the literature and by the CRO cohort.

In Table 2 we have identified opportunities for funded organisations to augment their programs and processes to help improve place-based and community-led recovery. The table captures the experiences identified by the CRO cohort and are supported in the literature.

Table 1: Funding organisations

Component	Finding	Opportunity
<p>Effectively measuring the soft and enabling the hard ‘outcomes’</p>	<p>Both workers and the literature point to this as the foremost tension in current community-led recovery program design. Community trust in community-based practitioners (and their Council) can be quickly eroded when simple, inexpensive identified needs requested by communities are deemed ineligible and out of scope of funding guidelines¹⁵. Commonly reported examples by CROs include sandbagging machines, generators and portable lighting.</p> <p>CRO and Hubs guidelines almost exclusively funded soft (psycho-social) recovery activities such as community events, whereas many communities typically requested hard activities such as purchase of assets to help with preparedness for the next event, and in so doing increase capacity to respond to future events and become more resilient to their impacts.</p>	<p>Broaden policy and program guidelines to equip workers to be responsive to the needs of communities.</p> <p>Use the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs to evaluate and assess the ‘success’ of the program against desired outcomes, including developmental goals.</p> <p>Funding in the program should specifically be allocated to monitoring and evaluation so that organisations could engage in this more fully and appropriately.</p>
<p>Commensurate Reporting</p>	<p>The cohort of workers identified that the reporting burden impacted their ability to get on with the work. This was described in the literature as the accountability/audit culture of government, requiring practitioners to be responsive to onerous reporting requirements, detrimental to the longer-</p>	<p>To reduce the burden of reporting, guidelines should include a tiered system of reporting that is practical and commensurate with the level of funding allocated.</p>

¹⁵ Shevellar, L., Westoby, P., Connor, M. (2015). *Flirting with danger: practice dilemmas for community development in disaster recovery* Community Development. Vol. 46, No. 1, 26–42.

	term relational and partnership requirements of community work.	
Workforce development, reflective practice and peer support	<p>Community-led recovery roles invariably encounter variously impacted individuals and communities, which can be confrontational and isolating for practitioners. Studies have found that the current policy and program paradigm does not explicitly include reflective practice, peer support and training into program design, beyond generic training mandated by funded organisations. Failure to do so risks potentially exposing practitioners to psychologically unsafe work environments, potentially exposing communities to unsafe practice and excluding continuous learning from policy and program development¹⁶.</p>	<p>Review and progress operational alignment with the Victorian Resilient Recovery Strategy, strategic priorities:</p> <p><i>4. Support the recovery workforce</i></p> <p><i>Actions 4.1. Develop a wellbeing program for all recovery leaders and practitioners to better support the wellbeing of those working in recovery</i></p> <p><i>4.2. Develop a formal network for all recovery leaders and practitioners to share knowledge, experience and learnings</i></p> <p><i>4.3. Establish a capabilities framework for state and local government recovery practitioners that aligns to broader emergency management capability</i></p> <p><i>4.4. Enhance approaches for resource sharing across the sector to support longer-term recovery</i></p>

Table 2: Funded organisations

Component	Finding	Opportunity
Community development principles and practice underpin the recovery role	<p>The literature describes a strong corollary between community development and achieving optimal community recovery outcomes. Whilst it may be difficult to attract</p>	<p>To design a role to appeal to community development practitioners must, firstly, access available</p>

¹⁶ Emergency Management Victoria. (2019). *Resilient recovery strategy* Victorian State Government.

	<p>trained community development practitioners in Australia today, it is nonetheless important to frame the role, as much as practicable, using a community development framework.</p>	<p>information and resources on previous community development, recovery programs and roles. Secondly, allow flexibility to recruit people skilled in community engagement, place-based approaches etc.</p>
<p>Explore opportunities for communities to participate in local emergency management arrangements</p>	<p>Contemporary disaster policy encourages individuals and communities to take responsibility for their own safety. As a result, many high-risk communities have activated community-based / led plans that sit alongside formal emergency management plans and arrangements.</p>	<p>Consider local-level opportunities to include key community groups and or community leaders into the control and command structure and other statutory planning mechanisms, such as MEMPCs.</p>
<p>Grow recovery skills and capabilities of local people working in recovery</p>	<p>Many of the CROs employed throughout the LMR were local people. Studies have found the benefits of employing local community leaders. While they may not possess professional expertise in disaster recovery, they have local knowledge and life experience, including an awareness of local needs before and after disasters. The value of Indigenous knowledge and its use in planning has also shown to be particularly important in understanding disaster recovery processes and outcomes.</p>	<p>There is an opportunity to support these 'short term' recovery roles and build expertise for the future. The intensity and frequency of disasters is increasing. Therefore, it is critical to ensure people working in recovery are supported with the required skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Building in supports for the CROs in future iterations of the program will assist the recovery workforces of the future.</p> <p>Embedding an ongoing workforce would increase the efficiencies of this relational and developmental work.</p> <p>To augment existing local government</p>

		resource sharing arrangements, CRO networks should consider establishing a surge workforce to support each other at a regional level, pending capacity, for example in response to events impacting isolated councils.
Consider partnering with other agencies to deliver programs	Where relevant, local organisations may benefit from considering a partnership approach to support needs of specific communities, for example, where impacted cohorts have intersectionality needs.	Where impacted community cohorts may have specific recovery support needs, specialist community service organisations may be better equipped to support and address such needs.
Consider using flexible employment arrangements for fixed term recovery roles	Some part-time CROs found it challenging to undertake community-based work while meeting organisational requirements, for example, generic staff training, staff meetings and other activities.	Consider flexible employment arrangements such as contracting.
Consider investigating language and terms that your community can relate to	The terms resilience and recovery may not be the most accepted terms by people in disaster impacted communities and may in fact be rejected leading to community disengagement.	Some studies have found that terms like 'preparedness' may be preferred over recovery and resilience as it is considered forward rather than backward looking.
Be conscious of, and plan to avoid, role creep	CROs reported difficulty balancing their community-facing roles with requests to assist or support other internal Council functions. More common in smaller councils, such requests were not necessarily	Funded organisations should consider where best to locate the recovery role within their organisation to leverage off the most relevant

	<p>viewed negatively, however, significant time commitment obviously reduces time on CRO Business as Usual functions.</p>	<p>established linkages and networks. Finding the ‘best fit’ should be informed by any specific recovery needs of impacted cohorts, organisational capacity, capability and availability of Council functions and program areas, for example, climate change, aged care, community development, economic development.</p>
<p>Build peer support, reflection and learning into the recovery role</p>	<p>Community-led recovery roles invariably encounter variously impacted individuals and communities, which can be confrontational and isolating for practitioners. Studies have found that the current policy and program paradigm does not explicitly include reflective practice, peer support and training into program design, beyond generic training mandated by funded organisations. Failure to do so risks potentially exposing practitioners to psychologically unsafe work environments, potentially exposes communities to unsafe practice and excludes continuous learning from policy and program development.</p>	<p>Build the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery into the program to evaluate and assess the successes of the program.</p> <p>Establish a Community of Practice to link recovery staff into supports with counterparts and other relevant networks.</p>

5. Discussion/Lessons Learned

The evaluation conducted a comparative analysis of the PDs of two community recovery programs: one from Queensland in 2011 and the other from Victoria in 2022.

The review of the literature, alongside the lived experience of the CRO workforce over the period 2011 – 2022, establishes a case for reimagined funding policy and program upon which the revised PD is based. The results demonstrate numerous missed opportunities to update policy and program guidelines, despite research providing valuable learnings from past programs, particularly regarding strengthening understanding and application of community development in community recovery.

As such, this evaluation has identified opportunities for continuous improvement of policy and programs to more effectively support councils and community organisations in achieving community recovery outcomes. This can partly be achieved by placing equal value on ‘soft’ processes (e.g., sustainable relationships and networks, community and organisational capability building, continuous learning and skills development) alongside ‘hard’ processes (e.g., outputs milestones, reporting, and activity/project-based measurements).

A further key consideration for federal and state governments, which is outside the scope of this evaluation, involves shifting from single event-based (response and recovery) funding to models more appropriate for support councils and communities in addressing the increased risks associated with a changing climate.

6. Conclusion

This evaluation sought to understand the lived experience of 26 Community Recovery Officers (CROs) who worked in community recovery in response to the October 2022 floods, across the Loddon Mallee Region of Victoria. By doing so, it identified opportunities to incorporate learnings that will address policy and practice shortcomings, thus improving community-led recovery programs.

The genesis of this project was a two-day reflective practice workshop held with the CROs in August 2024. Overwhelmingly, CROs expressed a strong commitment to support communities to be better prepared, more organised and engaged, and more resilient to the impacts of future events, which served as the primary driver for this project.

The CROs raised significant concerns about the potential for repeated trauma, destabilising of relationships and trust, and loss of corporate memory impacting momentum of preparedness activities between communities and government, particularly local councils.

We compared the 2011 Community Development Engagement Initiative (CDEI) program in Queensland, which employed Community Development Officers, and the 2022 Victorian CRO program, drawing conclusions about the level of dynamic maturity of community-led recovery policy in Australia over time.

Both programs share theoretical and practice frameworks that are contradictory. They have been described by Shevellar, Westoby and Connor as ‘dilemmatic’, juxtaposing the accountability/audit culture of government with the longer-term relational and partnership needs of community work. This dynamic has been found to produce practice dilemmas for community development workers in disaster recovery, particularly in areas such as skills, knowledge and language, competing accountabilities and meeting community expectations (Shevellar, Westoby, Connor, 2015).

A key conclusion from the analysis is these two, time-separate CRO experiences, demonstrating the need for policy developers to give further consideration (including conducting further research if required) to including the findings outlined in the table on pages 16 of this report into future similar programs/guidelines.

Equally we present a list of considerations on page 18 for funded organisations, which may be beneficial to help operationalise programs to meet the needs of their communities and their service system.

These findings have been reviewed against the relevant literature and can, therefore, be considered best practice in program design. However, the findings suggest significant and consequential gaps in policy and practice caused by the piecemeal adoption of the conceptual community development framework into program design. As demonstrated, this approach risks producing unintended consequences, such as further exposing people to harm in what is often an already tumultuous and vulnerable environment.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Advocating for Improvements

Policy Case for Change:

Recommendation	Action Options
<p>Advocate to NEMA on the following recommendations contained in the Evaluation Report, Community recovery Officer Position Description, Loddon Mallee.</p> <p>7. Move from single event (response and recovery) funding to models more appropriate to support councils and communities to address the increased risks associated with a changing climate.</p>	<p>A) Establish an ongoing community resilience workforce in local governments, ideally embedding resilience functions into ongoing council community development roles.</p> <p>B) Reduce reporting burden on Councils by combining reporting, where multiple AGRN funded events impact Councils simultaneously.</p>
<p>8. Avoid allocating inaccurate and disproportionate funding.</p>	<p>Redesign the current Impact Assessment based funding formula.</p>
<p>9. Implement commensurate Reporting</p>	<p>Reduce the burden of reporting by developing a tiered system of reporting that is commensurate with the level of funding allocated.</p>
<p>10. Measure soft as well as hard ‘outcomes’</p>	<p>A) Use the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs to evaluate and assess the ‘success’ of the program against desired outcomes, including developmental goals.</p> <p>B) Funding in the program should be explicitly allocated to monitoring and evaluation so that organisations could engage in this more fully and appropriately.</p>

Program Case for Change:

Recommendation	Action Option
<p>Ensure community development principles and practice underpin the recovery role.</p>	<p>Adopt the revised CRO position description reflecting the CRO experience, for use with future like guidelines to enhance community recovery outcomes.</p>
<p>Workforce development, reflective practice and peer support</p>	<p>A) Review and progress operational alignment with the Victorian Resilient Recovery Strategy, Strategic Priorities:</p> <p><i>4. Support the recovery workforce</i></p> <p><i>Actions</i></p> <p><i>4.1. Develop a wellbeing program for all recovery leaders and practitioners to better support the wellbeing of those working in recovery</i></p> <p><i>4.2. Develop a formal network for all recovery leaders and practitioners to share knowledge, experience and learnings</i></p> <p><i>4.3. Establish a capabilities framework for state and local government recovery practitioners that aligns to broader emergency management capability</i></p> <p><i>4.4. Enhance approaches for resource sharing across the sector to support longer-term recovery</i></p>
<p>Establish mechanisms to recognise LGA stakeholders that are best placed to deliver place-based supports.</p>	<p>Guidelines articulate a preference for CROs to be located in Community engagement / development teams in Councils, if they exist.</p>
<p>Align future programs to the Strategy for Aboriginal Community-led Recovery.</p>	<p>Compile examples for Councils on of best practice engagement of Aboriginal Communities in community recovery.</p>
<p>Better support community recovery of people experiencing intersectionality needs.</p>	<p>Develop guidance materials that provide LGAs with specific advice on how best to engage specific cohorts that are at greater risk, e.g. people living with disability, LGBTQIA+, senior Victorians, youth and children, CALD communities.</p>
<p>Develop a library of resources based on lessons learnt captured from LGAs before program closure.</p>	<p>A) Prepare program packages, funding guidelines and list of successful / eligible initiatives ahead of the next event to ensure future programs are timelier.</p> <p>B) Provide Councils with the <i>list of considerations for funded organisations</i>, contained in the CRO PD Evaluation Report, as an appendix to future program guidelines.</p>

Appendix B: Comparative analysis: Revised CRO Position Description versus current Council CRO Position Description

Overview:

This document, developed as part of this evaluation project, provides an analysis of key insights, similarities, and differences between the revised CRO PD and the current 10 CRO PDs that were created by councils, and approved by ERV for the CRO program. We are not suggesting a move to 'blanket' consistency of PDs. Contextualised PDs for these roles are critical for different Council and community contexts.

Key Insights:

1. Core Focus:

- The revised CRO PD emphasises a more structured approach to pre- and post-disaster mapping and community engagement.
- The current Council PDs vary in focus, with some prioritising community recovery projects, while others address resource management and community consultation.

2. Community Engagement:

Both the revised and current PDs underscore the importance of community engagement.

- The revised CRO PD explicitly highlights mapping and comparing disaster impacts and working across community and stakeholders.
- The current Council PDs frequently describe engaging communities to identify recovery needs and facilitate resources.

3. Decision-Making and Accountability:

- The revised CRO PD allows for sound decision-making within prescribed guidelines, with a strong emphasis on timely delivery.
- The current Council PDs often highlight decision-making linked to project risk and resource management, with varying levels of autonomy.

4. Skillsets:

- The revised CRO PD specifies a demonstrated understanding of community development and disaster resilience.
- The current Council PDs generally require proficiency in emergency management, community recovery, and project delivery, often with less specificity.

5. Qualifications and Experience:

- The revised CRO PD requires extensive experience in community recovery and resilience.
- The current Council PDs often require a degree or diploma in related fields, with some allowing for equivalent experience.

Key Similarities:

1. Community-Centric Approach:

Both the revised and current PDs focus heavily on supporting communities during and after disasters.

2. Accountability:

- Both roles require delivering outcomes within set guidelines and achieving project goals effectively.

3. Project Delivery:

- Both emphasise implementing projects that address community needs and disaster recovery.

4. Qualifications and Knowledge:

- Both require a strong educational background and experience in community engagement, disaster recovery, and related fields.

5. Team Collaboration:

Both roles emphasise working closely with teams and stakeholders to deliver successful outcomes.

Key Differences:

1. Role Titles:

- The revised CRO PD is defined as a single role, whereas the current PDs include various titles such as Recovery, Resilience, Events Officer, and Flood Recovery Officer.

2. Scope of Responsibilities:

- The revised CRO PD focuses on understanding disaster impacts mapping and working systematically with stakeholders.

- The current Council PDs are broader, covering tasks like facilitating community recovery, implementing projects, and resource supervision.

3. Focus on Pre-Disaster Work:

- The revised CRO PD uniquely includes pre-disaster community and environmental assets mapping.

- The current council PDs largely focus on post-disaster recovery and resilience.

4. Stakeholder Collaboration:

- The revised CRO PD provides a more structured approach to working with diverse stakeholders.

- The current Council PDs describe collaboration more generally, often with community members and internal teams.

5. Specialist Skills:

- The revised CRO PD includes a more detailed emphasis on understanding community

development frameworks and applying disaster risk reduction principles.

- The current Council PDs emphasise skills like project management and knowledge of relevant legislation.

Summary:

The revised CRO PD reflects an evolution in disaster recovery roles, incorporating a systematic, forward-looking approach to community resilience and recovery. While maintaining many foundational elements from the current 2022 Council PDs, it enhances focus on pre-disaster activities, structured decision-making, and specific community development expertise. Both PDs are broader in scope and vary significantly across councils, reflecting diverse community needs and organisational priorities.

Appendix C: Revised Position Description

Using this PD

- This PD combines information from the Queensland Government’s 2011 Community Development and Engagement Initiative (CDEI), a Queensland initiative that funded Community Development Officers (CDOs) and the experiences of officers from the current Community Recovery Officer (CRO) Program.
- Depending on the scale, impact and duration of individual disaster events, some of the key tasks outlined below may be the responsibility of more than one person, for example a CRO or their Manager
- It may not be necessary to apply all tasks, roles and responsibilities listed in the PD. Consideration needs to be given to the circumstances of each event and needs of the funded organisation and impacted community.

KEY TASKS, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

OBJECTIVES	KEY TASKS (options for inclusion)
<p>Map and analyse the impact of disaster on community infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map and compare pre- and post-disaster community infrastructure (networks, services, facilities, leadership, cultural diversity and population characteristics). • Analyse major impacts on social and cultural life as a result of the disaster. • Clarify who is most vulnerable and in need of support in terms of location/target group/limited capacity for recovery. • Clarify service gaps. • Develop short to long term recovery plan/s inclusive of community needs, funding requirements and indicative arrangements for community and Council to transition from recovery.
<p>Demonstrate knowledge of community development and engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a community engagement strategy using best practices to effectively reach affected community, including directly impacted individuals, family and friends, the broader community and those providing support. • Engage with affected community to identify and prioritise recovery aspirations, needs, and projects • Build relationships with community stakeholders, fostering trust, transparency, and mutual understanding throughout the recovery process. • Capture and report on evolving community needs and aspirations as recovery progresses, ensuring ongoing responsiveness and adaptability. • Coordinate community service surge workforces to support recovery and build resilience effectively. • Liaise between technical teams and the community, ensuring technical solutions align with community needs and priorities. • Adopt trauma-informed practices that acknowledge and respect the impacts of trauma on individuals and communities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise the mental strain, fatigue, and anxiety experienced by the community, implementing empathetic and sensitive engagement and support strategies.
<p>Facilitate and support governance, planning and reporting process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support communities in developing and delivering projects and activities focused on rebuilding, recovering and preparedness. Collaborate with recovery planning committee to represent community needs, aspirations and priority projects . Engage stakeholders through public meetings, workshops, and community events to inform, gather feedback and foster inclusive participation in recovery efforts. Build and strengthen partnerships by collaborating with networks, organisations, and other Community Recovery Officers (CROs) to enhance recovery outcomes and share resources. Chair and support meetings by preparing agendas, facilitating discussions, and recording meeting minutes. Ensure priority projects meet the funding criteria for the Flexible Funds package and comply with NDRRA Category C guidelines. Contribute to regular reporting, and review and evaluation activities as required. Meet all reporting requirements within specified timeframes and formats.
<p>Establish processes for sharing timely and accessible information with communities and stakeholders across multiple formats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build and maintain strong relationships with community groups to understand information and communication needs and preferences, ensuring the delivery of timely and relevant recovery updates. Identify and leverage existing community information networks where appropriate. Recognise the diversity of the community by using multiple formats to effectively disseminate information. Facilitate of the exchange of information between community groups and relevant service providers to enhance collaboration and support.
<p>Promote inclusive, culturally safe practices that foster community participation, self-determination, and healing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and engage with existing and emerging community leaders and key partners to facilitate and lead community recovery initiatives and events. Facilitate the implementation of community-driven solutions. Honour community wishes regarding rituals, symbols, and anniversary events. Employ inclusive processes and asset-based community development approach to support recovery efforts. Promote and support community capacity building for disaster preparedness and resilience, enabling better management of future events. Support the provision of culturally appropriate services to families and individuals.
<p>Build and maintain strong networks by liaising with local service providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information to relevant service providers about personal and community support needs. Facilitate information sharing and a promote a coordinated response among service providers to address individual support needs effectively.
<p>Provide advice to guide community development initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support best practice in needs assessment, project prioritisation, and community support by providing advice to recovery committees and service providers on a community development approach to recovery.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a climate of action, reflection and continuous improvement in the development, implementation and review of local plans and actions.
Develop, operate and maintain data management practices and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, manage, and ensure the accurate, timely sharing, and dissemination of data to relevant stakeholders. • Conduct Secondary Impact Assessments (SIAs) to evaluate the wider impacts of events, identifying critical needs, risks, and recovery priorities. • Operate and maintain proficiency in EM Crisisworks and recovery support services to record, track, and analyse data, ensuring compliance with organisational standards.
Advocate purposefully to address and advance community needs and priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate both internally and externally to enhance collaboration between teams, organisations, and stakeholders, promoting a unified and coordinated approach to recovery efforts. • Promote greater transparency within the organisation by encouraging clear communication of decisions, processes, and objectives, thereby enhancing trust and accountability.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

[Position Title] must adhere to Council policies, budgets, and objectives while ensuring timely, accurate, and professional outcomes. They must manage resources effectively and contribute to the development of policies and plans tailored to community and organisational needs.

- Ensure the timely and accurate delivery of recovery programs, projects, and initiatives in line with Council policies, strategic objectives, and budgetary constraints.
- Maintain responsibility for the management of resources, including adherence to clear objectives and regular reporting mechanisms to ensure compliance with plans and goals.
- Provide advice within defined regulatory and professional guidelines, ensuring significant decisions or actions are subject to appeal or review where necessary.
- Act as a representative of the Council on assigned projects, contributing recommendations for process and project improvements while adhering to established protocols.
- Ensure the development and delivery of recovery-related plans, policies, and initiatives tailored to meet community and organisational needs, with a focus on professional and courteous service.

JUDGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

[Position Title] must solve complex or technical problems, apply specialist knowledge, and exercise initiative to address new or unforeseen challenges. They must emphasise the ability to work within defined parameters while making independent decisions when guidance is unavailable.

- Make sound day-to-day decisions within approved program and budgetary parameters, exercising initiative and innovation in problem-solving.
- Solve technical or complex issues by selecting appropriate methods or processes, often requiring creativity and adaptability to new situations.
- Apply knowledge and judgement to guide procedural or policy developments, ensuring recommendations are backed by thorough investigation and analysis.

- Identify practical solutions to unique challenges, using professional expertise while referring matters outside standard procedures to senior staff.
- Operate with defined guidance and support, while exercising independent judgement when guidance is unavailable, particularly in relation to emerging or unforeseen issues.

SPECIALIST SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

[Position Title] work in a disaster affected community is invariably a complex task, requiring a high level of maturity, together with highly developed interpersonal and organisational skills. In addition to these fundamental requisites the following skills should also be sought in anyone undertaking such a role:

- Demonstrated understanding of community development principles and practice
- Well-developed mediation and conflict resolution skills
- Strong local knowledge, skills and connections
- Demonstrated high level community engagement knowledge, skills and experience
- Capacity to interact and work with a broad range of groups within the affected community
- Strong written and verbal communication skills including, group facilitation report writing, IT and financial / budget management
- Creativity, flexibility and initiative
- Planning and organisational skills
- Experience in and knowledge of funding and grant application processes.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Ability to work independently, under limited supervision and as a member of a team within a broad range of contexts
- High level of interpersonal and verbal communication skills
- Commitment to personal and professional development for self and co-workers
- Empathic and compassionate approach to the needs of people who have experienced trauma and /or are from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Self-care and personal resilience skills

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Essential:

- Experience in Community Development or related field (e.g.: Community Engagement, Health Promotion, Community Recovery/Resilience, Youth Development, Economic Development, Sport & Recreation Development)
- Experience in project planning, implementation and review (including budgeting, timelines and reporting)
- Demonstrated skills in being trauma informed
- Demonstrated communication and interpersonal skills including consulting and liaising with a range of stakeholders
- Demonstrated ability to maintain effective professional partnerships
- Analytical skills in determining priorities and benefits of projects and programs.

Highly desirable:

- Relevant post-secondary qualifications
- Knowledge of Community Recovery principles and practices

- Knowledge of the Foundations in Disaster Recovery and Resilience Research and Development.
- Knowledge of working within a Local Government context
- Knowledge of the local community including community networks and community services and agencies
- Knowledge of CALD (cultural and linguistically diverse)
- Knowledge of neurodivergent and disability issues experienced during an event.
- Mental health and comorbidity expertise
- Basic understanding of MARAM, PFA Suicide Risk: Detecting & Assessing Suicidality, and AOD

Training:

- Trauma informed practice
- Intersectionality and disaster training (gender, Aboriginal cultural awareness, CALD (cultural and linguistically diverse), LGBTIQ+, neurodivergent, people living with disability
- Basic understanding of MARAM, PFA Suicide Risk: Detecting & Assessing Suicidality, and AOD, Mental health and comorbidity

Appendix D: Workshop Data

Following the October 2022 flood event, all 10 local government areas of the Loddon Mallee Region received funding through the Community Recovery Officer program under the DRFA Australian Government reference number (AGRN) 1037. Most positions were initially fixed term for 12 months, which was later extended to two years.

ERV Community Recovery Officer program Guidelines

Background

The Community Recovery Officer (CRO) program is jointly funded under Category C of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRF). These are the Commonwealth-state cost-sharing arrangements for providing financial support for relief and recovery activities resulting from natural disasters and terrorist acts. The CRO program is administered by Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV).

Program Objectives

The CRO program will boost local council capability and capacity to assist communities with short and medium-term recovery.

The CRO program will enable targeted LGAs and Alpine Resorts to:

- Embed dedicated flood CROs within affected communities.
- Ensure community recovery needs are well understood so recovery information, events and activities are tailored to meet local needs.
- Together with affected communities and key stakeholders, develop, implement, and evaluate a range of recovery initiatives.
- Build community capability to respond to future disasters.

Further details on the CRO program are available in the Program Guidelines at Attachment 1.

Loddon Mallee Community Recovery Officer Network

Community Recovery Officers established an informal regional Network to provide peer support and share information and learnings. The ERV Loddon Mallee regional team liaised with the Network as part of their stakeholder relationship functions.

Community Recovery Officer Capability Workshop

On 14-15 August 2024 Community Recovery Officers (CROs) from the Loddon Mallee Region were joined by local government colleagues and community members in a workshop.

Workshop Purpose

- relationship building, peer support and social connection
- network capacity building
- sharing and acknowledging experiences of supporting community recovery
- knowledge capture (harvesting)
- identifying gaps, solutions and opportunities for ongoing regional and community recovery.

“The Art of Hosting approach is considered one of the most effective tools for achieving **collective sense-making** by creating the conditions that allow conversation-driven processes to lead groups into deeper insights and meaningful results. The more people participate in these kinds of well-hosted conversations, the greater becomes their capacity to participate in and contribute to wise and effective collective action.”

Participants engaged in group and individual action learning processes in response to the following three key questions:

Key workshop questions and responses

What are you noticing about recovery work in your area?

- Participants viewed the EM sector as bureaucratic in terms of roles, responsibilities and relationships and obstructive to participatory recovery in terms of pathways and entry points
- A lack of trauma informed community engagement can be antithetical to recovery
- There is limited system reach (always the same faces – often wearing multiple hats – refer also increased risk of fatigue etc), which reduces impact and results in not addressing intersectionality needs, and failure to engage with and learn new perspectives from minority groups / other community actors
- Community-led planning and actions during response, relief, recovery and ongoing preparedness are generally not incorporated into Municipal emergency management roles
- There is increased community fatigue and a sense of despondency to the increasing cascade of disasters and events
- Noticing increased community ambivalence (sense of hopelessness) to the perception that nothing changes between one event and the next.

What needs to change?

- Delays in post event funding to councils
- Difficulties for regional (especially small rural councils) recruiting and retaining skilled staff
- Funding policy changes required to enable councils to deliver hard and soft infrastructure
- Providing more sustainable and ongoing funding for positions such as CROs
- Embedding climate related “resilience” into council BAU, for example through generalist Community Development roles
- Council management structures and arrangements can inhibit traction for recovery staff within councils
- Trauma Informed and Community Development training is required
- Existing Impact Assessment processes are not delivering for councils or communities
- Community-led and supported advocacy to government.

What has changed (for the better)?

- Systems and processes established e.g. Windemere
- Multiple training resources already in the system, identified and available for workforce / community capacity building
- Opportunity to apply / achieve practical place-based and co-designed efforts with impacted communities to aid recovery and resilience and augment local EM efforts
- Council relationship and capacity building is improving outcomes for communities through improved internal council coordination and communication and engagement.

What are the shining lights showing us the way forward?

- Integrating First Nations People and their skills and knowledge into disaster recovery
- Established agencies and networks including, ERV, Windemere, RFCS, statewide local government emergency management community of practice and Red Cross
- Established programs including, 72-hour preparedness, Pillowcase and Children's Ground – 25 year model
- University of Melbourne study into surge workforce planning in health
- Emerging technology such as AI and videogames for community engagement
- Relationships with numerous community organisations established at place
- Community leaders activated through the CRO program.

Summary of guest community speaker feedback

Four guest speakers from communities in the region were invited to respond to set questions about their recovery and lived experience of the flood event.

The scale impacts and timing of flooding across the region was impossible for EM agencies to respond to equitably. Resources were triaged to highest areas of priority resulting in many impacted people and communities fending for themselves. While rural people are often described as self-reliant, the resultant communication outages impacted timely and accurate information, caused physical isolation resulting in inability to access relief centres, and a host of other circumstances at an individual level. There is a greater sense amongst residents of rural and regional areas that communities play a vital part in responding to disaster events, however, they are not always equipped with the necessary resources to do so. This was particularly evident in areas, which may not have historically experienced severe flooding, whereby community planning and response arrangements were not in place. Along with the reported challenges and limitations experienced, there is also a sense of hope gained from the learnings, connections and suite of community recovery activities led by the CRO program.

High level Feedback

Participant feedback using a check in, check out process across the two days, indicates the workshop was highly effective in achieving its stated purpose particularly relationship building, peer support and social connection. A self-rated confidence indicator shows CROs gained greater professional confidence to discharge duties through sharing and acknowledging experiences of supporting community recovery, knowledge capture

(harvesting) and identifying gaps, solutions and opportunities for ongoing regional and community recovery.

Concluding Remarks

The CRO workforce occupies a critical position in bridging the community – council – government relationship in meaningful and practical ways. Overwhelmingly, CROs report commitment to supporting communities to be better prepared, more organised and engaged and more resilient to the impacts of future events. Despite various and ongoing limitations, the opportunities unlocked by the CRO program will leave an important legacy beyond the program, for all tiers of government and self-organised communities and groups whose efforts, may not have always been value added by the sector in the past. CROs hold legitimate concerns about the potential for repeated trauma, destabilising of relationships and trust and loss of corporate memory impacting momentum of preparedness activities between communities and government (especially councils) due to the short-term duration of programs like CRO.

Workshop Themes

A synthesis of the workshop data identified several themes from which four opportunities to progress further work emerged:

1. How EM agencies operate in your community during a disaster event
2. Embed resilience functions into ongoing council CD roles, create a new CRO PD more reflective of CRO roles, skills etc and undertake regional advocacy to establish ongoing community resilience workforce
3. Develop a register of EM Resources & Training
4. Conduct Community Resilience Workforce Training.

Attachment 1: Community Recovery Officer Program Guidelines



Program Guidelines

Community Recovery Officer Program



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Emergency Recovery Victoria proudly acknowledges the First Peoples of Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Aboriginal self-determination and decision-making are crucial to the appropriate design and delivery of community recovery responses. ERV will continue to work closely with Aboriginal communities to ensure significant focus and support is given to community-led solutions that will achieve long-term recovery.

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Program Guidelines

Community Recovery Officer Program

Background

The Community Recovery Officer (CRO) program is jointly funded under Category C of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRF). These are the Commonwealth-state cost-sharing arrangements for providing financial support for relief and recovery activities resulting from natural disasters and terrorist acts. There are strict guidelines governing use and acquittal of funds.

The CRO program will be administered by Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV).

About the program

The CRO program has been established to assist communities affected by the Victorian floods (commencing 6 October 2022) recover by providing funding to targeted Local Government Areas (LGAs) and Alpine Resorts to engage CROs.

Program objectives

The CRO program will boost local council capability and capacity to assist communities with short and medium-term recovery.

The CRO program will enable targeted LGAs and Alpine Resorts to:

- Embed dedicated flood CROs within affected communities.
- Ensure community recovery needs are well understood so recovery information, events and activities are tailored to meet local needs.
- Together with affected communities and key stakeholders, develop, implement, and evaluate a range of recovery initiatives.
- Build community capability to respond to future disasters.



Funding available

The total funding available under the CRO program is \$6 million. This will support up to 46 full-time equivalent (FTE) CRO positions and oncosts across impacted areas of Victoria.

This program provides direct offers of \$128,000 per full-time CRO position (FTE), capped at a maximum of \$512,000, to targeted LGAs and Alpine resorts to support CRO salaries, oncosts, and operational costs specifically supporting the CRO position/s.

The funding and number of indicative CRO FTE positions offered will be determined by a Needs Assessment (refer section Needs Assessment) conducted by ERV in consultation with Local Government Victoria. The funding offer, including number of indicative FTE will vary depending on severity of impact on the community. For instance, LGAs and Alpine Resorts in heavily impacted areas may be offered funding to support multiple CRO positions and others in less impacted areas offered funding to support part-time CRO positions.

Targeted LGAs and Alpine Resorts will receive a direct funding offer which outlines the funding amount and the number of indicative FTE positions allocated to their organisation, as well as information on how to progress the funding offer.

LGAs and Alpine Resorts are encouraged to consider capacity building and training needs as well as place-based implementation approaches to flexibly meet local needs when implementing funding and indicative allocated FTE. Funding may be used flexibly, for example, a council implementing the funding for 1 indicative FTE under the CRO program across 12 months may implement:

- two part-time positions over the same duration
- one part-time position over a longer duration
- multiple part-time positions over a shorter duration

For more detail see ['Funding Process' on page 6](#).

Eligibility

Who is eligible under the CRO program?

Funding will be offered to target LGAs and Alpine Resorts directly impacted by the Victorian Floods (commencing 6 October 2022) and are listed as eligible under the DRFA Australian Government reference number (AGRN) 1037.

Funding offers have been prioritised to target LGAs and Alpine Resorts based on a Needs Assessment (refer to section Needs Assessment for more information).

For the list of LGAs and Alpine Resorts as of 28 November 2022* that are eligible under this program, see 'Eligible LGAs and Alpine Resorts' at the end of these Guidelines.

**Please note, additional locations may become eligible as the Victorian Floods (commencing 6 October 2022) progresses..*



Funded positions

Funding received from ERV for this program can only be spent on activities in line with the Program Objectives eligible expenditure as outlined in these Guidelines, with all activities to be delivered and funding expended by no later than 30 June 2025. All expenditure must be directly associated with the delivery of the CRO program.

What types of positions will be supported?

This program supports LGAs and Alpine Resorts to embed CRO positions within their locality or area.

CROs will be responsible for the development and oversight of a range of recovery initiatives. They will ensure community recovery needs are understood and recovery information, events and activities are be tailored to meet local needs.

CROs will need to deliver activities in line with the needs of their community, and may include:

- Working with affected communities to identify recovery needs.
- Ensuring engagement in recovery is inclusive of all community members and includes culturally safe practices of shared respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge.
- Supporting individuals, organisations and systems to ensure self-determination for First Nations peoples. This includes sharing power (decision-making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal communities.
- Developing and distributing information on recovery matters.
- Assisting to navigate and access, relief and recovery support.
- Assisting the state to identify additional assistance that may be required to support impacted communities.
- Attending and/or establishing recovery meetings to gather and share local intelligence.
- Developing community-based recovery initiatives and supporting community events that promote community connections and build stronger relationships within communities.
- Deliver resilience and capability building initiatives to support individuals, businesses, and other impacted groups to prepare for future disasters.

What costs are eligible?

Costs that are eligible under the CRO program include expenditure associated with:

- Salary and oncosts for CRO positions (i.e. wages and superannuation)
- Operational costs associated with CRO positions such as:
 - IT (i.e. computers and phones)
 - Travel and accommodation costs
 - Professional development (i.e. training)
 - Printing and stationary.

ERV may consider other costs not listed here as eligible on a case-by-case basis if they are aligned with the program objectives and are not listed as ineligible below (refer to [What costs are ineligible?](#)).

All costs are subject to compliance with DRFA funding requirements and ERV approval. All costs will be reviewed by ERV during the Delivery Plan approval process to ensure they are reasonable and proportionate to the CRO FTE and activities being delivered. If funding recipients are unsure about the eligibility of planned expenditure, they should contact ERV to confirm.



What costs are ineligible?

Ineligible costs may include (but are not limited to):

- Costs associated with core "business as usual" activities, including:
 - Purchase of core business capital equipment such as office equipment, motor vehicles.
 - Ongoing costs for administration, operation, or maintenance.
- Projects that may have a negative impact on the environment, heritage, existing businesses, services and/or communities
- Passing on funding in the form of a sponsorship or donation
- Repair works or activities that are otherwise covered by insurance
- Political and/or fundraising activities
- Purchase of alcohol, gifts, prizes, or incentives (e.g., thank you gifts, gift cards or similar rewards)
- Purchase of assets (e.g., machinery, tools, equipment, vehicles etc.)
- Purchase of land, buildings or existing infrastructure, including the costs associated with the sub-division of land
- Activities outside of the funded period
- Projects that require ongoing or recurrent funding to succeed or deliver benefit
- Projects that are within the responsibility of another State, Federal or Local Government program and/ or are more suitably funded (or have already been funded) under another program
- Activities that will break any Federal, State, or local laws, including any current coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions or health directions.

Funding process

To progress the funding offer, LGAs and Alpine Resorts will be need to submit a Delivery Plan which includes providing copies of the position descriptions for their CROs and a budget.

Key Activity	Dates	
Direct funding offers	March 2023	Targeted LGAs and Alpine Resorts will receive a direct funding offer which outlines next steps including how to accept the funding offer and details relating to the Delivery Plan.
Funding Agreements*	March 2023 – May 2023	Targeted LGAs and Alpine Resorts will receive a funding agreement and will be required to complete and submit their Delivery Plan to receive payment.
Funding Period	6 October 2022 – 30 June 2025	Engagement of Community Recovery Officers and delivery of agreed recovery activities.

*Please note, it is a requirement of funding under the DRFA that all Community Recovery Officer positions and activities funded under this program must be delivered/concluded and fully expended by 30 June 2025 at the latest.

Delivery Plan

Upon receipt of the direct funding offer, ERV will provide all funding recipients with a Funding Agreement and a Delivery Plan template which is required to be completed and returned to progress their CRO Program funding offer.

The completed Delivery Plan must be submitted to grants@erv.vic.gov.au.

Before completing the Delivery Plan, direct funding offer recipients are required to read these program guidelines carefully to make sure their proposed activities are eligible, and all required documents are provided.

Any questions relating to this process can be directed to the ERV Central Grants Team on **1800 560 760** or at grants@erv.vic.gov.au.



Mandatory documents to provide

All funding offer recipients will be required to provide the following mandatory documents and evidence as part of their Delivery Plan submission.

<p>Position Description (mandatory)</p>	<p>Provide a copy of the position description for the Community Recovery Officer role, which is subject to ERV approval.</p> <p>An example position description that can be used by has been included at the end of these Guidelines.</p>
<p>Project Budget (mandatory)</p>	<p>Provide project budget details for all sources of income, planned expenditure and in-kind support.</p> <p>This must be completed within the Delivery Plan template, under the Delivery Budget section.</p> <p><i>Please ensure you carefully review the guidance in the ERV Delivery Plan template under 'Additional Information - Important GST information' to ensure you have costed your expenditure correctly.</i></p>
<p>Financial Statement (mandatory)</p>	<p>Provide a copy or link to the organisations 2021-22 Annual report.</p>
<p>Public Liability Insurance (PLI) (mandatory)</p>	<p>It is an ERV requirement that all funding recipients hold PLI for the duration of funded activities. PLI covers members of the public and protects the organisation from liability risks such as injury and property damage.</p> <p>In the Delivery Plan, you will be required to certify that your organisation holds the relevant PLI for the duration of this activity. Noting ERV may request a copy of the relevant PLI Certificate of Currency at any time.</p> <p><i>Please note, all funding recipients must also maintain workers compensation insurance as required by law for the duration of funded activities and positions. This does not need to be provided to ERV as part of the Delivery Plan.</i></p>
<p>Other documents (optional)</p>	<p>Any other additional supporting documentation and/or attachments provided that may support the Delivery Plan, can also be attached. For example, where available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Impact Assessments (IIAs) and/or Secondary Impact Assessments (SIAs) • quotes or costings (if available), pictures and/or newspaper articles etc.



Needs assessment, prioritisation and allocation of funding

All funding offers will be allocated and prioritised based on an ERV Needs Assessment. The assessment will incorporate data inputs from a variety of sources as well as local knowledge and context to inform the overall impact and need to inform the allocation of CRO funding and indicative FTE CRO positions required.

Information sources that have been used to undertake and assessment of need to inform the allocation process are listed below. Please note the data continues to evolve, and while available data has been used to inform the allocation, improved data may become available over time:

- Initial Impact Assessments (IIAs)
- Secondary Impact Assessments (SIAs) where available
- Recovery Support Program statistics
- Advice from Local Government Victoria (LGV)
- Security and Emergency Management Committee of Cabinet (SEMC) reports
- ERV Regional Recovery Teams
- Discussions with Individual Councils

The following Table sets out a needs-based and tiered approach to the allocation of indicative CRO FTE resources. This approach considers:

- the severity of the event impacts to infrastructure, the community and individuals as well as the impacts to the economy indicated as a Tier; and
- An assessment of the capacity of the LGA to manage the severity of identified community and economic recovery needs indicated as a Level.

Severity of Impact	Assessment of Relative Community and Economic Impact*	CRO Role Allocation (Indicative FTE)	CRO Funding Allocation (Total \$)
N/A	N/A	0	\$0
Tier 1	Level 1	0.5	\$64,000.00
	Level 2	1	\$128,000.00
Tier 2	Level 1	1.5	\$192,000.00
	Level 2	2	\$256,000.00
Tier 3	Level 1	2.5	\$320,000.00
	Level 2	3	\$384,000.00
Tier 4	Level 1	3.5	\$448,000.00
	Level 2	4	\$512,000.00

* Note that this assessment will include consideration of relevant factors including Geographic extent and nature of impacts to settlements, including town size and function; nature of impacts and level of disruption to community functioning and key economic activities

Please note, all decisions by ERV or the Minister for Emergency Services are considered final. This includes decisions in relation to any aspect of the funding allocation and assessment process, any decision to offer or award funding under this program, or to withdraw the offer or cancel the funding agreement.



Funding recipients

To accept and finalise the funding offer, ERV will provide funding recipients with a letter of offer, a funding agreement and other documents which must be returned to ERV.

Victorian Common Funding Agreement

All funding recipients are required to enter into a Victorian Common Funding Agreement (Agreement) with ERV to receive and manage the funding.

The Agreement will outline the terms and conditions of the funding (also referred to as a grant), including the approved use of funds, the Agreement term, the ERV approved community recovery officer position description and the due dates of all key deliverables, funding payments and reporting requirements.

To ensure funding recipients are not delayed in accessing funds to begin recovery efforts, all allocated funds will be paid upfront following the execution of the Agreement.

- In addition to the signed Agreement, funding recipients will be required to provide a completed Supplier Details Form and supporting evidence to confirm the bank account nominated.
- Please note the information below regarding overdue reports for existing funding, as this could potentially delay the release of funding payments.

ERV will draft the Agreement in consultation with funding recipients and will actively monitor progress of the funded activities and provide support over the duration of the Agreement.

Please note, if the Agreement and all required documents are not returned after a significant period and/or reminders by ERV, it is possible the offer of funding could be withdrawn.

Overdue reports

Funding recipients with previously awarded ERV funding (grants) must be up to date with all current reports and milestones under existing funding agreements to apply. Before ERV can release funds under this program, current grant recipients must be able to demonstrate that previous funds are being spent as agreed.

To check if reporting is up to date, organisations can contact the ERV Central Grants Team at grants@ervvic.gov.au or on **1800 560 760**.

Reporting and acquittal

Funding recipients are required to report on the funded community recovery officer role and provide regular progress and expenditure updates during the Agreement term and a final report and financial acquittal at the end.

All reporting requirements will be outlined in the Agreement, and ERV will provide all report templates.

Reporting requirements may differ depending on the funded activities, but funding recipients should anticipate the following reporting requirements for the duration of the Agreement:

- Progress Reports— Every three months
- Financial Reports—At the end of each financial year
- Final Report and Financial Acquittal—One month after completion of the funded role and activities.

Information collected will be reported back to the Commonwealth will be undertaken in accordance with the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs (refer to: vic.gov.au/national-monitoring-and-evaluation-framework-disaster-recovery-programs).

ERV will coordinate collation and submission of reports to the Commonwealth. Councils are not expected to have any reporting responsibilities where ERV and its contractors are delivering the services.

Reporting, assurance and acquittal will be in accordance with existing requirements established under the DRFA. All State expenditure on this program will be captured in the relevant financial years DRFA acquittal in which the expenditure was incurred.

Evaluation

ERV is committed to continuous improvement practices in line with its community-led recovery principles. An evaluation will be conducted at the conclusion of this program in line with whole of government evaluation framework. Key stakeholders may be required to participate in an evaluation process, which may include the direct engagement of individuals, organisations and services.



Acknowledgement guidelines

Recipients of ERV funding must agree to follow ERV Acknowledgement Guidelines, which outlines how to acknowledge the government's funding in speeches, written materials, and other forms of presentations (e.g., using the Victorian Government logo).

As this program is jointly funded through the DRFA, grant recipients must also acknowledge the Commonwealth Government's funding support in the same manner.

A breach of these Guidelines will be considered a breach of the funding agreement with ERV. The ERV Acknowledgement Guidelines can be found at vic.gov.au/emergency-recovery-victoria

How to contact ERV for assistance

If you have questions about the program, how to apply or need assistance with your Agreement, contact the ERV Central Grants Team for assistance.

They will be able to assist with your enquiry or refer you to the relevant ERV representative.

Email: grants@erv.vic.gov.au

Phone: **1800 560 760**

Hearing impairments

If you are deaf, hearing-impaired, or speech impaired please call the ERV Central Grants Team for assistance via the National Relay Service:

- Teletypewriter (TTY) users call **133 677** then ask for **1300 112 755**
- Voice Relay –speak and listen users call **1300 555 727** then ask for **1300 112 755**

Interpreters

If you need an interpreter, call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on **131 450** then ask for **1800 560 760** to speak with the ERV Central Grants Team for assistance.

Privacy

Emergency Recover Victoria (ERV) is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. Any personal information about an applicant or a third party provided in an application or in correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)* and other applicable laws. This information may be provided to other Victorian Government agencies for the purpose of grant assessment and/or administration. For more information about the BRV Privacy Policy, visit vic.gov.au/privacy-policy-bushfire-recovery or contact the BRV Privacy Officer at: privacy@erv.vic.gov.au

Disclaimer

This publication is provided for information purposes only. No claim is made as to the accuracy or authenticity of the information contained herein. Information is provided on the basis that all persons accessing the information undertake responsibility for assessing its relevance and accuracy. BRV makes no representations, either expressed or implied, as to the suitability of the aid information for a particular purpose and disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequences which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.



Eligible LGAs and Alpine Resorts

Funding will be offered to LGAs and Alpine Resorts that were directly impacted by the Victorian Floods (commencing 6 October 2022) and are listed as eligible under the DRFA Australian Government reference number (AGRN) 1037. Funding will be allocated and prioritised based on a thorough needs assessment. There are currently 63 LGAs and one Alpine Resort considered eligible under the CRO program*:

- Alpine Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Ballarat City Council
- Banyule City Council
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Benalla Rural City Council
- Boroondara City Council
- Brimbank City Council
- Buloke Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Cardinia Shire Council
- Casey City Council
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Colac Otway Shire Council
- Corangamite Shire Council
- Falls Creek (Alpine Resort)
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- Golden Plains Shire Council
- Greater Bendigo City Council
- Greater Geelong City Council
- Greater Shepparton City Council
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Hindmarsh Shire Council
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Hume City Council
- Indigo Shire Council
- Latrobe City Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Manningham City Council
- Mansfield Shire Council
- Maribyrnong City Council
- Maroondah City Council
- Melbourne City Council
- Melton City Council
- Mildura Rural City Council
- Mitchell Shire Council
- Moira Shire Council
- Moonee Valley City Council
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Murrindindi Shire Council
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Strathbogie Shire Council
- Surf Coast Shire Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Towong Shire Council
- Wangaratta Rural City Council
- Warrnambool City Council
- Wellington Shire Council
- West Wimmera Shire Council
- Whittlesea City Council
- Wodonga City Council
- Wyndham City Council
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council

* Please note, additional locations may become eligible as the Victorian Floods (commencing 6 October 2022) progresses.

The current list of eligible locations for this event can be found online at the [Australian Government's Disaster Assist page for the October 2022 Victorian Floods](#).



Example position description

Position Title:	Community Recovery Officer
Position Objective:	The Community Recovery Officer program will boost local council capability and capacity to assist communities with short and medium-term recovery.
Position Number:	
Business Unit:	
Location:	
Reports to:	
Employment Status:	Fixed term 12 months After hours work may be required, flexible work arrangement available.
Award Classification:	
Salary Range / Hourly Rate:	
Superannuation:	
Vehicle Provision:	

Position Objective

The purpose of the role is to:

- Embed dedicated flood community recovery officers within affected communities.
- Ensure community recovery needs are well understood so recovery information, events and activities are tailored to meet local needs.
- Work with affected communities and key stakeholders to develop, implement, and evaluate a range of recovery initiatives.
- Build community capability to respond to future disasters.

Key Responsibilities and Duties

Community recovery officers will deliver activities in line with the needs of their community, including:

- Working with affected communities to identify recovery needs.
- Ensuring engagement in recovery is inclusive of all community members and includes culturally safe practices of shared respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge.
- Supporting individuals, organisations and systems to ensure self-determination for First Nations peoples. This includes sharing power (decision-making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal communities.



- Developing and distributing information on recovery matters.
- Assisting to navigate and access, relief and recovery support.
- Assisting the State to identify additional assistance that may be required to support impacted communities.
- Attending and/or establishing recovery meetings to gather and share local intelligence.
- Developing community-based recovery initiatives and supporting community events that promote community connections and build stronger relationships within communities.
- Deliver resilience and capability building initiatives to support individuals, businesses and other impacted groups to prepare for future disasters.
- Support the reporting of data and outcomes on all aspects of recovery.
- Maintain effective and cooperative communication with all stakeholders, including state government departments, community agencies, local services, and businesses to progress actions across all pillars of recovery.
- Undertake other activities as required to achieve the objectives of this position, such as grants management, administrative support, engagement and support of Community Recovery Groups, and support program delivery of Community Recovery Hubs.

Statutory

- Ensure compliance with statutory requirements and Council policy and practices applicable to the functional areas of the position.
- Provide reporting to state government agencies as required.

Occupational Health & Safety

- Create, maintain, and always foster a safe work environment.
- Follow safe work practices, procedures, instructions, and rules always.
- Perform all duties in a manner that ensures personal health and safety, and that of others in the workplace and the public.
- Regularly inspect own immediate work environment and report all hazards or incidents that can cause harm or that represent a threat to public safety.

Skills and Knowledge

- Proficiency in the application of theory of emergency management, community engagement and a range of projects as they relate to community and relief and recovery.
- Knowledge and understanding of community relief and recovery and the role of local government in this area.
- Understanding of best practice and the statutory framework for emergency management.
- Liaise, negotiate, and communicate effectively on complex issues with a range of stakeholders including our most vulnerable members of the community and all agencies to achieve quality outcomes.
- Well-developed skills in analysis, research methods and ability to appraise information.
- Capacity for initiative and innovation in approach to all aspects of the position.
- An understanding of the long-term goals of Emergency Management and of the relevant policies of both the unit and the wider organisation.
- Excellent facilitation, negotiation, conflict resolution, interpersonal and communication skills.
- Demonstrated ability to plan, deliver, monitor, and evaluate projects and processes.
- An ability to work independently, as well as collaboratively with a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Demonstrated ability to manage own time and set priorities to ensure objectives of the position are achieved within available resources and applicable timeframes.
- Ability to work across a range of programs and projects simultaneously.

BGL COMMUNITY RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE (CRAR) PROGRAM

Summary Report for Acquittal Purposes

Buloke, Gannawarra and Loddon (BLG) Community Recovery and Resilience (CRaR) Collaborative Action Plan

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This summary report has been prepared to support Buloke Shire Council's acquittal requirements and to provide a consolidated update on the BLG CRaR Collaborative Action Plan, which is now scheduled for finalisation in November 2025.

COMMENCEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

- Project Commenced: Tuesday, 5 July 2023

PROJECT AIM

To establish a sustained and trauma-informed emergency management model for the BLG region that can be adapted for other rural and regional communities. The model aims to:

- Aid local disaster recovery
- Enhance community resilience
- Address cumulative trauma from successive disasters
- Promote proactive disaster preparedness

This initiative responds to the BLG Leadership Group's call for:

- Improved information flows
- Stronger communication
- Greater recognition of local knowledge and lived experience

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

As part of the 2025/26 Implementation Roadmap, five priority action areas have been identified:

1. Community Pathways & Resources
2. Advocacy
3. Workforce Development
4. Communications
5. Evidence Building

EVIDENCE BASE AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

The CRaR initiative draws on:

- National and state-level reviews, including:
 - o The Colvin Review (2024) – Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding
 - o The Victorian Government's Response to the 2022 Flood Inquiry
- Community lived experience and local feedback
- Partnerships with Melbourne University, Gateway Health, and local councils

These sources have informed the development of the Community Emergency Preparedness and Recovery Plan (CEPaR) and the broader strategic direction of the CRaR initiative.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Strengthening local government capability through targeted investment
- Balancing disaster funding across built, economic, social, and natural domains
- Embedding community-centred and accessible emergency management practices
- Recognising and integrating local knowledge into early warning systems and decision-making processes

NEXT STEPS

This summary serves as a foundational reference for future planning, advocacy, and implementation efforts. It will be included in the final report due in November 2025, alongside documentation of lived experience, community engagement, and strategic partnerships.

Inclusive & Connected “Sporting clubs are the heart of rural communities, providing belonging, purpose, and emotional support during hardship.”— Wade Humphries. “It’s not just about playing sport — it’s the friendships, the laughs, and the feeling that you belong somewhere.”— Shane O’Shea. “Recovery doesn’t happen alone — it happens through connection, conversations, and sharing experiences.”— David Younger. “Being from the country shapes who you are — it gives you strength and community values you carry with you.”— Kate Alday. “Getting back on the court, back on the field — it’s about saying, ‘we’re still here, and we’re moving forward together.’”— Shane O’Shea

Disability pride, accessibility & inclusion “If someone needed somewhere to go immediately — especially accessible housing — there just wasn’t anything available.”— Naomi Mills. “Real recovery means no one is left behind — not by a ramp, not by a road, not by a policy.”— Michael Bleasdale. “Human dignity must be central to recovery — it’s not just about restoring services, it’s about restoring lives.”— John Richmond. “If we get accessibility right in the rebuild, we build stronger, smarter, fairer communities.”— Michael Bleasdale. “Programs like Women Leading Locally inspire rural leaders, helping amplify local voices in decision-making.”— Charmaine Delaney

Mental health & youth wellbeing “Six months down the track, you start feeling weird — headaches, grumpiness — and wonder why you can’t face the paddocks.”— Janet Stafford. “It’s important that parents, teachers, and coaches all keep reminding us — wear your seatbelt, don’t speed.”— Olivia Driscoll. “Volunteering around sport strengthens community pride, giving residents a shared purpose and a lifeline for mental health.”— Shane O’Shea. “It’s only now, months later, that many are starting to feel the emotional fatigue of recovery.”— Jo Beard. “Recovery for young people isn’t separate from community recovery — it’s central to it.”— Julie Slater

Leadership, connection & shared identity “When people realise others are grappling with the same challenges, it shifts from ‘I’m alone’ to ‘we’re in this together’ — and that’s powerful.”— Karen Corr. “Celebrating success, no matter how small, builds momentum and helps communities heal.”— Julie Coffey. “Without volunteers, none of this happens — it’s the heart and soul of every rural town.”— Danny Forrest. “Sometimes it’s not about talking about floods — it’s about talking, laughing, reconnecting, and feeling normal again.”— Angela Carey

Sustainable Places & Healthy Environment The road network is the lifeline of country communities — if it’s broken, so is the community connection.”— Shane O’Shea. “Fixing roads isn’t just about cars — it’s about keeping our clubs alive, our kids engaged, and our towns connected.” — Jenna Allen. “Every pothole, every flooded road becomes a danger if we don’t fix them fast enough.”— Glenn Weir. “Our roads were built for seven-tonne Bedfords — now we have B-doubles and caravans. Without betterment funding, we’re rebuilding the past, not the future.”— Dan McLoughlan. “Even emergency works are slow — full rehabilitation is a long haul, and we rely heavily on external funding.”— Dan McLoughlan

Environmental protection & climate adaptation “Floods have changed — and so must our information. Land has shifted, and our models must reflect that reality.”— Camille White. “Mass livestock losses require swift, safe disposal solutions to avoid biosecurity and environmental risks.”— Paul Ratajczyk. “Recovery gives us a rare chance — not just to fix things, but to make them better than they were before.”— Trevor Rumbold. “Accessible emergency housing remains a critical gap in rural communities, with limited options available for people with disabilities during disaster events.”— Naomi Mills. “Every flood teaches us something new—our faster E. coli testing now gives councils 24–48 hour turnarounds for better community warnings.”— Paul Ratajczyk

Public Spaces “It’s the playgrounds, the barbecue areas, the parks — they’re the heart of rural living and connection.”— Trevor Rumbold. “Every park upgraded, every footpath laid — it all adds up to a stronger, prouder Buloke.”— Trevor Rumbold. “Even getting a team back on the field or a netball court feels like a win for the whole community.”— Julie Coffey. “Sport keeps you involved — you’re part of something bigger, not just on your own.”— Ryan Sanderson

Disaster planning “We’re staying ready — maintaining communication with agencies like the Catchment Authorities and BOM to prepare before the next rain comes.”— Wayne O’Toole. “The relationship between Council and emergency services is critical — it saves time, and ultimately, it saves communities.”— Senior Sergeant Roberta Barry. “Emergency plans aren’t just for floods — they’re about making sure people feel calm, empowered, and ready.”— Anthony Hogan. “Before building community energy, we need to make sure people have had the time to stop, reflect, and look after themselves.”— Karen Corr. “Listening to locals and working with agencies like the CMA was crucial — it helped return the water to its natural flows and protect more homes.”— Dan McLoughlan

Economy “Research and readiness are now part of farming — because weather won’t wait for us to catch up.”— Fiona Best. “We’re not just bouncing back — we’re bouncing forward through innovation and grit.”— Fiona Best. “One good rain away from a bumper year — and that changes everything for everyone.”— Tim Grenda. “Recovery isn’t just about getting back on your feet — it’s about standing stronger for the next challenge.”— Jo Beard. “Instead of sitting at school, the kids were out there sandbagging businesses and homes.”— Megan King

Small business strength “Our store became the place where everyone came — for news, for support, for community.”— Sam Grenda. “People think ‘I’ll be right,’ but the longer you wait, the harder it becomes.”— Jo Beard. “If you want young people to stay or come back, you have to give them something to belong to.”— Anthony Judd. “Creative partnerships are essential to making regional communities more sustainable after repeated natural disasters.”— Fiona Best. “Sometimes just having a chat over a cuppa can be the start of turning things around.”— Jo Beard

Skills development “Tactics for Tough Times evolved into CRAR — it’s about building resilience between disasters, not just after.”— Mandy Hutchinson. “By combining our lived experience with evidence from Melbourne University, we can better support people to sustain hope and skills for the long term.”— Mandy Hutchinson. “Thinking outside the box and making it happen with limited funds — that’s what rural communities do best.”— Charmaine Delaney. “Online gaming is community building in a different arena — full of teamwork, new friendships, leadership.”— Michael White

Tourism, liveability & identity “Knowing someone from a small place can achieve big things makes a huge difference to what you believe you can do.”— Kate Alday. “Being from the country shapes who you are — it gives you strength and community values you carry with you.”— Kate Alday. “Neighbourhood houses are the beating hearts of our small towns — always open, always adapting.”— Kayleen Cossar. “It’s the playgrounds, the barbecue areas, the parks — they’re the heart of rural living and connection.”— Trevor Rumbold. “If communities invest in their young people, they’ll get that investment back — with interest.”— Kate Alday

Leadership “The relationship between Council and emergency services is critical — it saves time, and ultimately, it saves communities.”— Senior Sergeant Roberta Barry. “Our role isn’t to take over — it’s to wrap around councils and help them deliver what their communities need most.”— Angela Carey. “You can’t manage a disaster from a distance — you have to understand the people and the place to get it right.”— Cr Alan Getley. “When young people are part of creating solutions, they grow stronger and feel more hopeful.”— Julie Slater. “Leadership starts early — involving young people now means they’ll be ready to lead tomorrow.”— Megan King. “We don’t bring in experts telling people what to do — we create spaces for locals to share knowledge, bounce ideas, and solve challenges together.”— Karen Corr. “Human dignity must be central to recovery — it’s not just about restoring services, it’s about restoring lives.”— John Richmond. “Recovery doesn’t happen alone — it happens through connection, conversations, and sharing experiences.”— David Younger