

Healthy and Engaged Communities

Disaster Recovery Infrastructure Funding and Emergency Training

Existing arrangements under the Natural Disaster Financial Assistance program are inefficient and place significant administrative burdens on councils and communities impacted by emergencies. With significant weather events and natural disasters becoming more frequent, it is critical that this process be improved so that Council can quickly and efficiently support community recovery.

It is also critical that betterment to damaged infrastructure is allowed so that it can be upgraded in readiness for future disaster events. The recent announcement stating that Victorian and Australian Government were coming together to deliver a Council Priority Betterment Program is welcome, however an expansion to the program to include all councils and a more permanent betterment fund is needed.

Additionally, South Gippsland Shire Council believes there is an opportunity for Australian and Victorian governments to clarify and resource the role of local government in emergency management, as outlined

and supported by the MAV position paper *'The Role of Local Government in Emergency Management'*.

For example, the current Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program (MERP) funding is inadequate to support the ongoing role of emergency management, particularly in small regional councils with a limited budget. The MERP allocation has not increased in over a decade and has failed to keep up with the evolving role of local government in emergency management.

In addition, local government statutory and key support roles have weak and inconsistent training or accreditation opportunities. Training opportunities made available for local government emergency management staff are available through external consultants and providers and some agencies such as the CFA, but at a considerable cost.

Our Request

South Gippsland Shire Council is calling on the Australian and Victorian Governments to:

- Simplify the methodology and data inputs required in Victoria to prove Council's eligibility for Disaster Recovery Funding, bringing it in line with other States and ahead of any national unification of claims processes.
- Financially support Local Government to ensure post disaster funding programs enable betterment to improve assets beyond the 'previous condition' to provide resilience against future damage resulting from disaster events.
- Support a Victorian led training or accreditation program would provide consistency and efficiencies across the state, allowing for greater resource sharing in times of emergency and growing our capacity as an emergency management network.
- Support local communities to establish Community Energy Hubs in isolated townships through funding support to upgrade appropriate infrastructure and establish reliable access to essential services.



Community Energy Support Hubs

South Gippsland Shire features a collection of small townships with unique geographical features. This includes townships that are located on peninsulas such as Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay and Sandy Point. As a result of this geographic positioning, these communities are quite isolated and can only be accessed by a single road in and out, this presents some unique challenges and a heavy reliance on existing electricity and telecommunications services. South Gippsland Shire Council is supportive of the establishment of energy support hubs in these isolated communities.

The centres would not be Bushfire Places of Last Resort or relief centres, but rather a dedicated place in which people can access a reliable energy supply and communication support during a significant event, such as a long-term power outage or a flooded road that restricts egress. Community members would be reminded that the community energy hubs are not a substitute for individual emergency planning, but rather an additional support for people who need to access an energy supply. The hubs encourage community continuity through the efficient and effective use of existing assets.