



Government
of South Australia

2019-20

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN

**BUSHFIRE
RECOVERY**

INTERIM REPORT

Message from the Premier

Summer 2019-20 brought the most significant fires seen in South Australia for many years. The fires were complex, unpredictable and difficult to fight due to challenging weather conditions and terrain.

Across South Australia almost 280,000 hectares of land was burned, a large portion of which was primary production areas, national parks and reserves. The communities in the areas of Yorketown, the Adelaide Hills, Kangaroo Island and Keilira were significantly affected. Tragically three lives were lost, and many people lost their homes.

South Australia was not alone. Images of devastated communities, beach rescues, burning forests and wildlife rescues from across the country filled our screens each day. On the South Australian and Western Australian border, the Eyre Highway closed for 12 days due to erratic fires on the west side of the border. Smoke and ash caused the air-quality index in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra to reach hazardous levels, affecting people's health.

Businesses, agencies, not-for-profits and governments worked around the clock to assist in the relief and recovery effort. We saw images of hope and survival, heroism and generosity as people worked tirelessly to help their neighbours and fellow citizens. The strength and spirit of individual responses demonstrated the potential for these communities to rebuild and reshape their lives in the wake of disaster.

We have been committed to helping our impacted communities get back on their feet - by the end of November 2020 the State Government had invested more than \$79 million in grant programs and other initiatives to help people recover and rebuild. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, the State Government invested \$24 million in post-fire clean up and provided local recovery coordination, tax relief measures, and waived fees for a range of government services. The public also rallied behind fire-affected communities by

generously donating to the SA Bushfire Appeal, which saw nearly \$8 million gifted to individuals, families and businesses to purchase personal and other needs, and more than \$1 million gifted to community groups and organisations.

The consequences of the fires on South Australian communities, the environment and the economy will be felt for years to come, compounding the effects of pre-existing drought conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic that overlapped with the end of the fire season. While each individual and every community recovers at a different pace, there is clearly now a sense of both individuals and communities looking ahead, making plans and rebuilding lives.

As we prepare for the approaching fire season we also pause to reflect on the horrors of last season. Reflection will bring sadness but may also provide an opportunity for South Australians to celebrate the community spirit that has been so critical to recovery and continues to generate hope.



Steven Marshall
Premier



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Recovery from a disaster is a complex and often lengthy process. Communities have different needs and recover at different rates.

Impacts and experiences vary among individuals and communities, and support needs to consider that memories of past events can resurface after trauma.

The overall aim of recovery is to:

- restore or improve the lives and livelihoods of people within a disaster-affected community
- restore or improve the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets and systems of a disaster-affected community
- align with the principles of sustainable development, and 'build back better' to avoid or reduce future risk
- rebuild and sustainably restore the infrastructure, services, housing, facilities and livelihoods required for the functioning of a community over the medium to long term.

The South Australian Bushfire Recovery Interim Report (the Report) tells the story of the Yorketown, Cudlee Creek, Kangaroo Island and other fires and the achievements of the early recovery phase across the four domains of recovery: social, economic, built environment and the natural environment.

The Report identifies the vision for recovery and establishes what must be achieved over the next three to five years, and the activity and assessment needed to monitor and evaluate progress. It reflects, but does not duplicate, the community recovery plans developed by the communities of the Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island.

The recovery process

Vision

The lives and livelihoods of the communities affected by the bushfires of 2019-20 are restored and improved, along with their economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets.

Objectives



Social

Communities affected by the bushfires feel safe and secure to engage in the recovery process and connect with their communities and support.



Economic

Businesses and industries continue to work towards positions of strength and can operate and trade in their local environment.



Built environment

Essential services and critical infrastructure are restored and made more resilient.



Natural environment

The natural environment is restored and regenerated to a more resilient landscape with healthy biodiversity and ecosystems.

Conditions before the 2019-20 fire season

South Australia, like many other parts of Australia, faced above-average fire potential in spring 2019 due to a very warm and dry start to 2019 and a long-term rainfall deficit across the state in 2017 and 2018. Different regions experienced varying predictions, conditions and fire impacts.

In August 2019, the Lower Eyre Peninsula was identified as having above-average fire potential following heavy rainfall and a bumper cropping season.

The December 2019 seasonal outlook highlighted continued hot and dry conditions. South Australia had the potential for significant bushfires, including in the populated areas of

the Mount Lofty Ranges, and popular tourist destinations such as the Limestone Coast, and Yorke and Eyre peninsulas. Dust issues during windy conditions were also predicted.

Kangaroo Island was identified in both the August 2019 and December 2019 seasonal outlook reports as having above-average fire potential.



The emergency response

The 2019-20 bushfire season was catastrophic, resulting in high demand on emergency and community services.

The Country Fire Service was supported in controlling the fires by the state's other emergency services including the Department for Environment and Water, State Emergency Service and the South Australian Police, and the Australian Defence Force. The farm fighting units were also significant contributors to the firefighting effort, responding with their own equipment to protect their own and others' property.

On 11 November 2019, catastrophic fire weather conditions led to a fire at Duck Ponds on the Lower Eyre Peninsula that burned through 14,090 hectares and destroyed two homes.

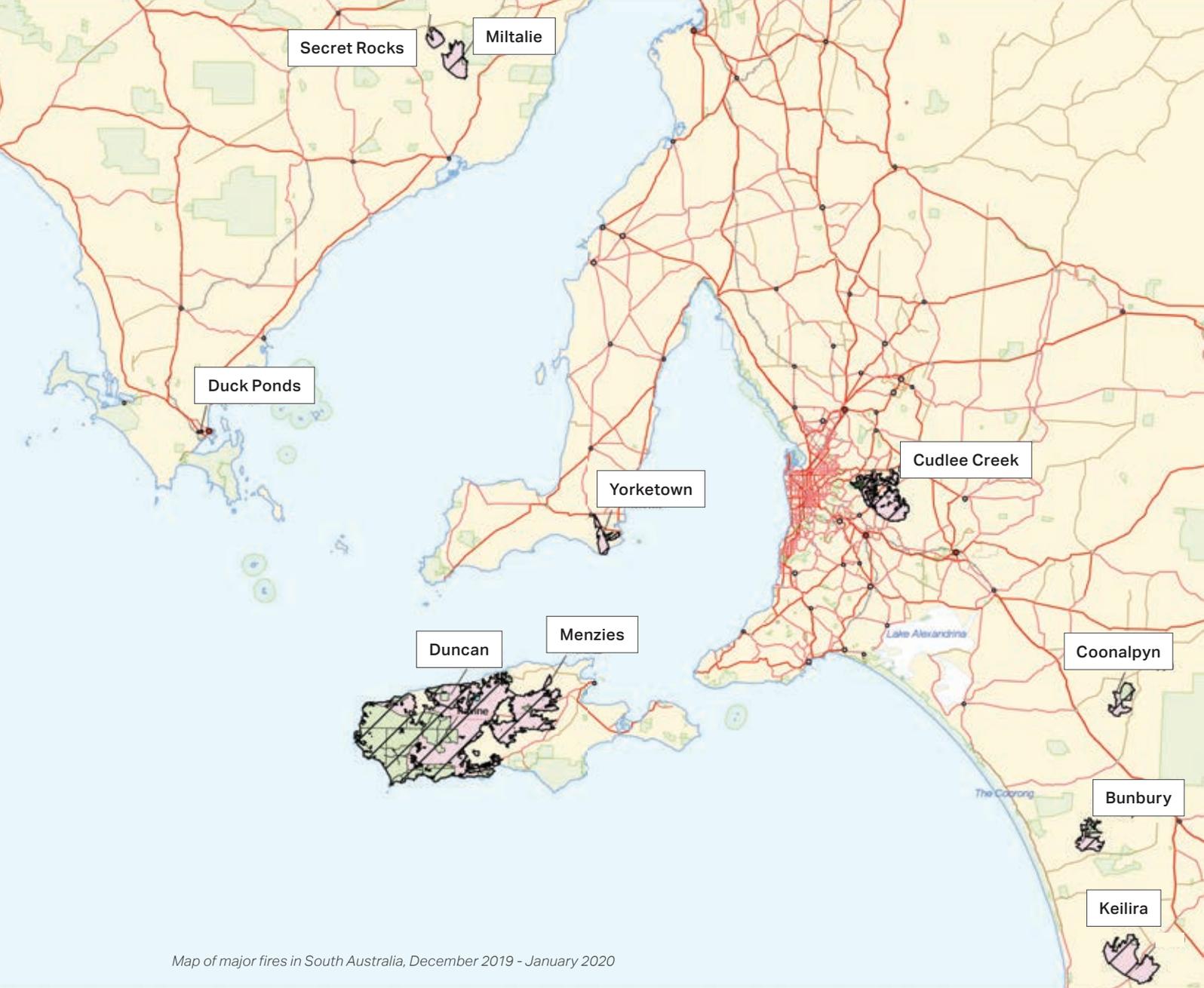
On 20 November, multiple fires started across the state. Of note was a fire at Yorketown that burned through 6,694 hectares, with eight homes and 680 stock destroyed.

On 20 December 2019, catastrophic fire weather conditions, combined with lightning, resulted in numerous fires, including the Cudlee Creek fire in the Adelaide Hills. This fire burned 23,253 hectares; 98 homes were lost and hundreds more defended. Although the fire was initially contained within 24 hours, breakouts and flare-ups continued for a further 10 days. Air support crews delivered more than 1.25 million litres of foam, retardant and gel to the fire ground. Many firefighters were treated for injuries due to the ferocity of the fire.

On the same day, two fires started on Kangaroo Island. Later, these fires merged with the fire in the Ravine de Casoars (the Ravine fire) that started on 30 December 2019 and swept through Flinders Chase National Park. The merged fire burned through 211,474 hectares of reserves and farming land on the western end of the island.

Fire season 21 October 2019 - 30 April 2020

					
31	2,286	1,387,088	26	3,200	Multiple
total fire ban days	rural fires	CFS personnel hours	contracted aircraft and 2,390 flying hours	loads of suppressant	large air tankers from NSW and Victoria



In the early New Year emergency warnings were issued for many parts of Kangaroo Island, and Parndana and Vivonne Bay were evacuated. The Ravine fire was in inaccessible terrain and was not controlled until 31 January; it was declared safe on 6 February.

Tragically, two lives were lost on Kangaroo Island and one in the Adelaide Hills. The fire also destroyed 87 homes and a significant quantity of wildlife.

From 11 November 2019 until 27 February 2020 when the Kangaroo Island fires were declared out South Australia experienced the worst conditions on record.

Agencies and farm fighting units worked tirelessly together to overcome the challenges of the fires and continue to work together today to support communities with recovery and rebuilding.

Yorke Peninsula fire

Wednesday 20 November 2019 was a day of statewide total fire ban including seven catastrophic level bans – one of which related to Yorke Peninsula.

A small grassfire was reported near the Yorketown Area School, caused by an electrical infrastructure fault. Farm firefighting units and local brigades attempted to contain the fire, with air support and strike teams from around the state joining local resources.

The fire soon spread from local properties and homes to include the AGL wind farm at Honiton, adding to the complexity. A wind change early on the morning of 21 November arrived with a greater-than-predicted ferocity, causing breakouts that threatened the township of Edithburgh, south-east of Yorketown.

The Yorketown fire was declared safe on Friday 29 November 2019.

On 20 November a fire also started 75 km to the north of Yorketown area around the Price township, which led to people being evacuated. People were the focus of the relief and recovery efforts, with cereal crop loss another significant issue.

The towns affected by the Yorke Peninsula fires on the Lower Yorke Peninsula were Coobowie, Edithburgh, Honiton, Hungry Point, Moorowie, Port Giles, Sultana Point, Seven Roads, Troubridge Point, Wattle Point, Wool Bay and Yorketown, and on the Upper Yorke Peninsula Price, Port Clinton and Ardrossan.

Yorke Peninsula has a population of 11,328 and with 485km of coastline is a significant tourist destination. The region is an important contributor to the South Australian economy through exports of meat and livestock, field crops and seafood.



Wheat is one of the Yorke Peninsula's chief agricultural commodities, together with barley and pulses accounting for almost half of the total value of agricultural production in the region.

Cudlee Creek fire (Adelaide Hills region)

Friday 20 December 2019 was a day of widespread catastrophic fire conditions.

On that day a tree branch fell on power lines near Cudlee Creek as a result of strong winds in the Adelaide Hills. The electrical connection broke, which caused sparking and resulted in one of the largest fires through the Adelaide Hills in recent years. Hot, dry winds helped the fire grow and by mid-afternoon the localities of Woodside, Lobethal, Inverbrackie, Charleston, Cudlee Creek, Brukunga, Lenswood, Mount Torrens, Gumeracha and Harrogate were under threat.

The fire was declared contained on Tuesday 31 December 2019.

The Adelaide Hills area affected by the Cudlee Creek fire covered a large area of the Adelaide Hills Council and parts of the Mount Barker District Council. It also spread into the corners of the Mid Murray Council and the Rural City of Murray Bridge.

The area has over 700 active community groups ranging from arts, sports and social groups to bushland and garden revival, and maintaining Aboriginal heritage sites and culture. Many people came together as first responders supporting each other in the first few weeks of the disaster and even more have come together on community reference and support groups, designing and driving recovery on their own terms.

The Adelaide Hills, east of Adelaide, is known for its cool climate wines, natural bushland and steep gorges. The region is a major environmental, recreational and tourism asset. Most of the area lies within the Mount Lofty Ranges watershed that supplies about 60 per cent of metropolitan Adelaide's water supply.

In addition to being a major tourist destination and wine exporting region, the Adelaide Hills region also contributes economically to South Australia's dairy, horticulture, and wool production.



The Adelaide Hills wine industry joins tourism in playing a key economic role in the region's growth.

Clean-up offers a clean slate

“Having a clear block was like having a clear slate”.

After the disorienting devastation of losing the family home, Nell Ward felt she had turned a corner when their block had been cleared, one of more than 550 properties cleaned up as part of the government’s recovery effort. While the pile of burned rubble was there, it was still their home – however once it was gone Nell felt like a psychological weight had been lifted, and they could start to plan for the future.

The Wards plan to use bricks salvaged from the original house as part of a feature wall in their new home. The house will be more bushfire compliant and more energy efficient with solar panels, and a battery provided free by the South Australian government through its bushfire rebuilding battery scheme.



Nell with her daughter on their cleared block

Kangaroo Island fires

The 2019-20 Fire Danger Season was one of the most challenging in history for Kangaroo Island communities.

On 20 December dry lightning raked the Island, igniting the Menzies and Duncan fires and planting embers that would later ignite and merge with the Ravine fire that started on 30 December. Dangerous conditions saw the fires breach containment lines and sweep through the Flinders Chase National Park and western side of the Island. Almost half of the Island's 440,500 hectares was burned.

The Ravine fire was declared contained on 21 January 2020, controlled on 31 January and safe on 6 February.

The Island is located 14 km from the mainland of South Australia, 110 km south-west of Adelaide, and encompasses a mix of small townships, mixed agriculture, tourism businesses, and wilderness.

Kangaroo Island is a much-loved tourist destination, globally recognised for its natural beauty, wild beaches and quality food and beverages. It has a resident population of 4,500 and contributes significantly to the South Australian economy with some 200,000 visitors each year.



Tourism and primary production underpin the Island's economy; about two-thirds of Island businesses participate in tourism in some way.

Keilira fire

On Thursday 30 December 2019, dry lightning and associated weather conditions caused a fire to break out and spread in the Keilira region.

This was the largest fire in the area since Ash Wednesday 1983, and impacted 22 properties, burned more than 37,182 hectares, and destroyed one home, two unused farm houses, and over 2,000 bales of hay.

An estimated 400 head of cattle and 3,000 sheep were lost, and hundreds of kilometres of fencing were destroyed.

Numerous mobile black spots and insufficient water resources created challenges in responding to the fire. These items both featured strongly in community advocacy and rebuilding opportunities during recovery.

Keilira is a close-knit farming community located within the Kingston District Council in the Limestone Coast region. The area strongly contributes to the state's grain, wool and sheep exports, joining wine and seafood as key Limestone Coast produce.



Sheep on a property at Keilira - the sheep meat and wool industry is a key economic driver of the Limestone Coast. Image courtesy Danielle England.



Local mentors key to quick solutions

The benefits of a small community shone through during the Kangaroo Island bushfires in the summer of 2019-20.

As soon as the fires started, Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) had staff on the ground working with primary producers to complete impact assessments and help industry start to rebuild and recover.

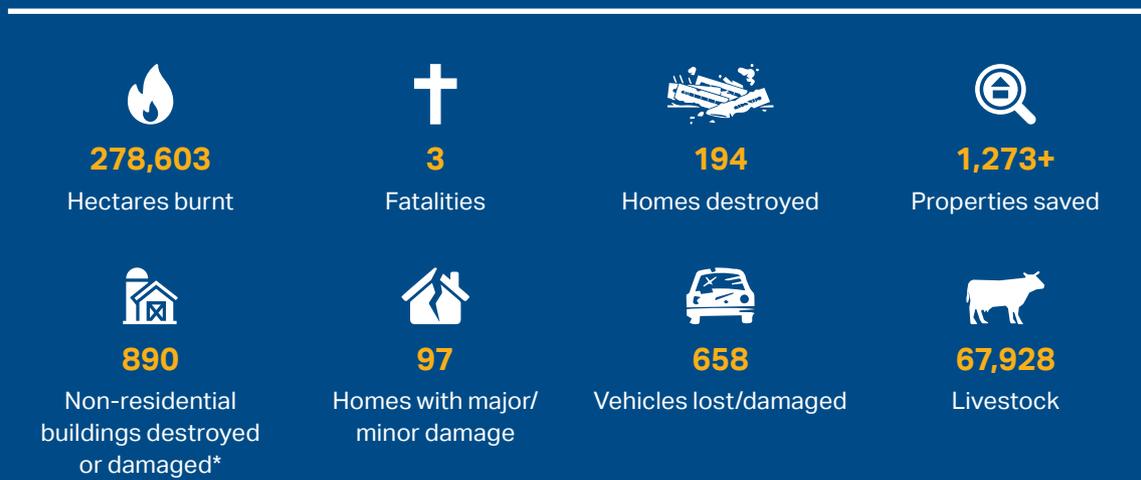
PIRSA soon extended its existing Family and Business Support (FaBS) program to include three dedicated case managers on Kangaroo Island. FaBS Case Managers provide a free and confidential service to farmers and small business owners, and connect them to services such as Rural Financial Counselling, mental health services, and recovery services.

Because they know the local community it makes the flow of information much smoother, and can help solve problems quickly.

KI local Judy Wilkinson is one of three Family and Business Support case managers dedicated to helping primary producers and other small business owners on the Island.

The impact of the fires – a summary

The most significant impacts were experienced on Kangaroo Island and Cudlee Creek in the Adelaide Hills during December and January. Homes, livestock and crops were also lost in other fires across South Australia that summer.



*Includes business and tourism facilities, community facilities, sheds, vacant houses, etc

Cudlee Creek

 938	 1
 98	 56
 542	 325
 23,253	 3,852

Kangaroo Island

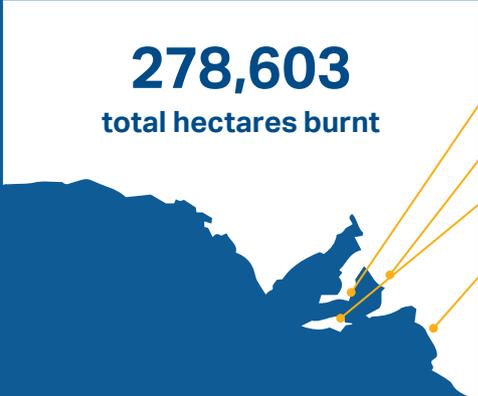
 335	 2
 87	 32
 332	 322
 211,474	 59,730

Keilira

 -	 0
 1	 0
 5	 0
 37,182	 3,666

Yorketown

 -	 0
 8	 9
 11	 11
 6,694	 680



Yorketown	6,694 ha
Cudlee Creek	23,253 ha
Kangaroo Island	211,474 ha
Keilira	37,182 ha

Agriculture \$186.57m in production alone, including:

 <p>1,200 primary production businesses impacted</p>	 <p>67,928 of livestock worth \$16.99m</p>	 <p>781ha of viticulture worth \$8.78m</p>	 <p>15,275ha of forestry worth \$143.31m</p>
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National Parks over 90,000ha of parks burnt, including:

<p>17 parks impacted</p>	<p>100% lost Charleston Conservation Park, Porter Scrub Conservation Park</p>	<p>98% lost Flinders Chase National Park, Kelly Hill Conservation Park <i>(including \$41m damage to park infrastructure)</i></p>	<p>111 Heritage Agreements impacted, up to 27,546ha</p>
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Wildlife

 <p>40-50k koalas lost</p>	 <p>40 threatened species had more than half of their habitats destroyed</p>	 <p>2 birds + 4 mammals named as highest priorities for urgent intervention</p>
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Industries most affected

					
Wine	Tourism	Honey	Farming (crops/livestock)	Forestry	Aquaculture

Behind the numbers

Social impacts

The health and wellbeing impacts of the fires on people are far-reaching, with loss of life and injuries to those fighting or fleeing the fires being most visible and immediate. The impact on people's mental health continues to be felt as livelihoods are affected, daily routines are disrupted and the personal connection to community is fractured. The charred landscape in some areas is a reminder of the devastation, sometimes making it difficult to move on until new growth begins.

Relief centres were established within 24 hours of the Yorke Peninsula, Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island fires starting. Relief centres provide a safe haven, information and other personal support services such as food and temporary accommodation for people who have evacuated or are unable to return to their homes because of the fires.

As the emergency reduces, relief centres transition to recovery centres, functioning as a long term hub for the affected communities. Recovery centres are a one-stop shop for information, referral and support.

In the early stage of recovery, those who were most vulnerable were provided with emergency housing and supported to identify medium-term housing solutions to give them time to consider their future options. The State Government began discussions with the Minderoo Foundation to build temporary housing and together they provided 48 pods to residents of Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills.

The beginning of the school year at the end of January was an important milestone of recovery as it reintroduced routine to daily life and provided an opportunity for children and young people to reconnect with friends. Schools were provided with additional resources to ensure teachers could offer increased and targeted support to their students.

The longer-term impacts on communities are yet to be realised as people decide whether to stay, rebuild their homes and businesses, or leave the area to rebuild elsewhere.

COVID-19 and social distancing restrictions delayed opportunities for community gatherings, which are known to be important for recovery. The local recovery teams used a variety of communication modes to reach out to community including phone calls, online meetings and webinars, hand delivered newsletters and surveys, and video interviews posted to social media.

Infrastructure impacts

The fires of summer 2019-20 resulted in a loss of 194 houses, 890 outbuildings and sheds, hundreds of kilometres of fencing and the damage of road signage and furniture.

In the Adelaide Hills, community facilities including the Fox Creek Mountain Bike Park, Charleston Conservation Park, and Lobethal Bushland Park were damaged, along with many vineyards and the electricity and communication infrastructure.

On Kangaroo Island, significant loss occurred in the Flinders Chase National Park, including the destruction of the Flinders Chase Visitor Centre, facilities, paths and accommodation. The loss of visitor accommodation, including the luxury accommodation venue Southern Ocean Lodge, has significantly affected tourism numbers and expenditure. The water treatment plant, as well as electricity and communication infrastructure, were severely impacted.

Community amenities including the Western Districts Memorial Community Sports Centre, Stokes Bay Community Hall and Tennis Courts were lost.

Economic impacts

A range of industries was impacted by the fires, most notably forestry, tourism, wine, agriculture and apiary.

Tourism is a key industry of both Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills and was dramatically affected by the fires. Combined lost visitor expenditure during January and February 2020 has been estimated at more than \$37 million. The loss of tourism infrastructure, as well as habitat and landscape damage, affected the key tourism draw cards of wine and wildlife.

The economic impact on primary production, including wine and viticulture, honey production, agriculture (crop, fodder and livestock), forestry and aquaculture, is estimated to be more than \$187 million.

Approximately 1,200 primary production businesses were impacted with losses including:

- 67,928 head of livestock, worth \$16.99 million
- 781 hectares of viticulture, worth \$8.78 million
- 15,275 hectares of forestry, worth \$143.31 million.

In the Adelaide Hills, fires destroyed about 30 per cent of vineyard plantings, and surrounding vineyards were affected by smoke taint. Industry representatives predict it will take several seasons to return the vineyards to a harvestable state. Horticulture was also heavily impacted by the fires, which followed two consecutive years of hailstorms. Fire-related horticulture losses are estimated at \$2.27 million and predicted recovery timeframes range from three to 10 years.

COVID-19 has further impacted economic recovery with business closures, a fall in tourism, and supply chain interruptions.

Environmental impacts

The environmental impacts of the fires were significant with more than 190,000 hectares of national parks, reserves and Crown land burnt across the state.

The fires led to the closure of many of the 17 affected national parks – including one of South Australia’s oldest, the Flinders Chase National Park – with consequential economic impacts on the visitor economy.

It is difficult to confirm the number of native animals that perished. More than 40 state and nationally threatened species (27 plant and 13 animal) had more than half of their habitats destroyed on Kangaroo Island, and dozens of other threatened species were affected by the Cudlee Creek and Keilira fires.

On Kangaroo Island, some of the more widespread, abundant and mobile species, such as koalas, kangaroos and wallabies, suffered significant mortalities. The koala population is estimated to have reduced from 50,000 to between 5,000 and 10,000.

The Kangaroo Island dunnart is endemic to the Island and listed in the endangered category as a threatened species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Over 90% of its habitat was burnt in the fires, raising this as a priority action for recovery along with feral cat control.

Many koalas also perished in the Cudlee Creek fire, but evidence suggests the overall koala population in the Mount Lofty Ranges is secure.

Financial assistance and relief measures

An immediate injection of funds into local economies is vital for people and businesses to kick start their individual recovery. The State Government provided a range of immediate relief measures and additional resources to support South Australians directly impacted by the fires.

The Commonwealth and South Australian governments also jointly contributed funds through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. Initiatives under these funding arrangements for medium to long-term recovery are generally determined through broader consultation and planning.

STATE AND COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENTS



Personal hardship grants
3000 granted
\$1.67 million



Re-establishment grants
22 granted
\$324,435

\$10K

Small business support grants
501 granted
\$5.01 million

\$50K

Small business rebuilding grants
135 granted
\$4.63 million



Primary Producer Grants
357 granted
\$24.08 million



17 concessional loans approved
\$2.64 million



Kangaroo Island freight assistance
\$3.7 million



Replacement of Crown land fencing
\$4.6 million



Feral pig eradication
\$2.7 million

As at 30 November 2020

SA Bushfire Appeal

Appeal closed 31 July 2020

State Government contribution

\$2 million

Total amount raised by public

\$7.06 million

Total received

\$9.06 million

Gift Payments

Gifted to 1,062 individuals, families and businesses

\$7.94 million

Gifted to 39 community groups and organisations

\$1.12 million

STATE GOVERNMENT



Export Accelerator Grant

5 granted

\$150,000



E-Commerce Accelerator Program

95 granted

\$931,326



Community Organisations

12 granted

\$92,379



Recovery Grants for Sports Organisations

19 granted

\$190,000



Volunteer Firefighter Grants

105 granted

\$367,700



Wildlife Recovery Fund

21 granted

\$448,569



Tax relief measures and fee waivers



Disaster waste removal and disposal

\$24 million



Local recovery coordination

\$2.29 million

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT



Disaster Recovery Allowance

For loss of income



National Bushfire Recovery Fund

\$2 billion



Direct payments to councils

Ranging from \$200k to \$1.3 million

As at 30 November 2020

Recovery commences

Successful recovery relies on a collaborative, coordinated and flexible approach.

It is important after significant disasters that State Government quickly mobilises in-kind and financial support to assist affected communities meet their basic needs such as shelter, safety, food and information. It is equally important that government listens to how the community wants to proceed with their recovery, and finds out what is important to them.

Communities are central to the identification, planning and delivery of suitable programs in each fire-affected area. The State Government continues to work with local councils, the Commonwealth Government, not-for-profit organisations and industry to ensure affected people, businesses and communities can access what they need as quickly and as easily as possible.

A community-centred approach also generates opportunities for each region to develop locally owned and managed initiatives for disaster risk reduction and resilience.

By integrating the experiences and aspirations of communities into development plans and recovery operations, the longer-term recovery process is most likely to foster ongoing and sustainable community and economic development and resilience.



A recovery pod being delivered to Kangaroo Island.



Somewhere to sleep

“It’s been really, really helpful.”

Kangaroo Island farmers Ben and Sabrina Davis lost their home, farm equipment and livestock in the blaze. They’ve moved to cropping as a first step to rebuilding their business, and the delivery to their property of a Minderoo Foundation Recovery Pod – co-funded by State Government with Minderoo – has made a world of difference to their recovery. Ben has said it’s been “awesome” to have somewhere to come in after working all day restoring the property – sometimes as late as two o’clock in the morning - to cook, to shower, and to sleep.

Ben and Sabrina Davis outside the recovery pod provided by the State Government and the Minderoo Foundation.



Local schools got involved in the 'Dollars 4 Doonas' campaign by creating artwork with personal messages inserted into the bedding packages, as pictured here being unloaded at Parndana on Kangaroo Island.

Communities supporting communities

Brand new wool quilts and pillows found their way onto the beds of hundreds of people who lost their homes during the Kangaroo Island, Adelaide Hills and Yorketown bushfires thanks to the 'Dollars 4 Doonas' campaign.

The communities of Naracoorte and district rallied with the local Lions Club and family-owned bedding company MiniJumbuk to initiate the campaign, which saw the community and local businesses raise money to create quality bedding packages.

For every \$50 raised, Naracoorte-based MiniJumbuk committed to donating up to 1000 of their locally-made quilts and 2000 pillows.

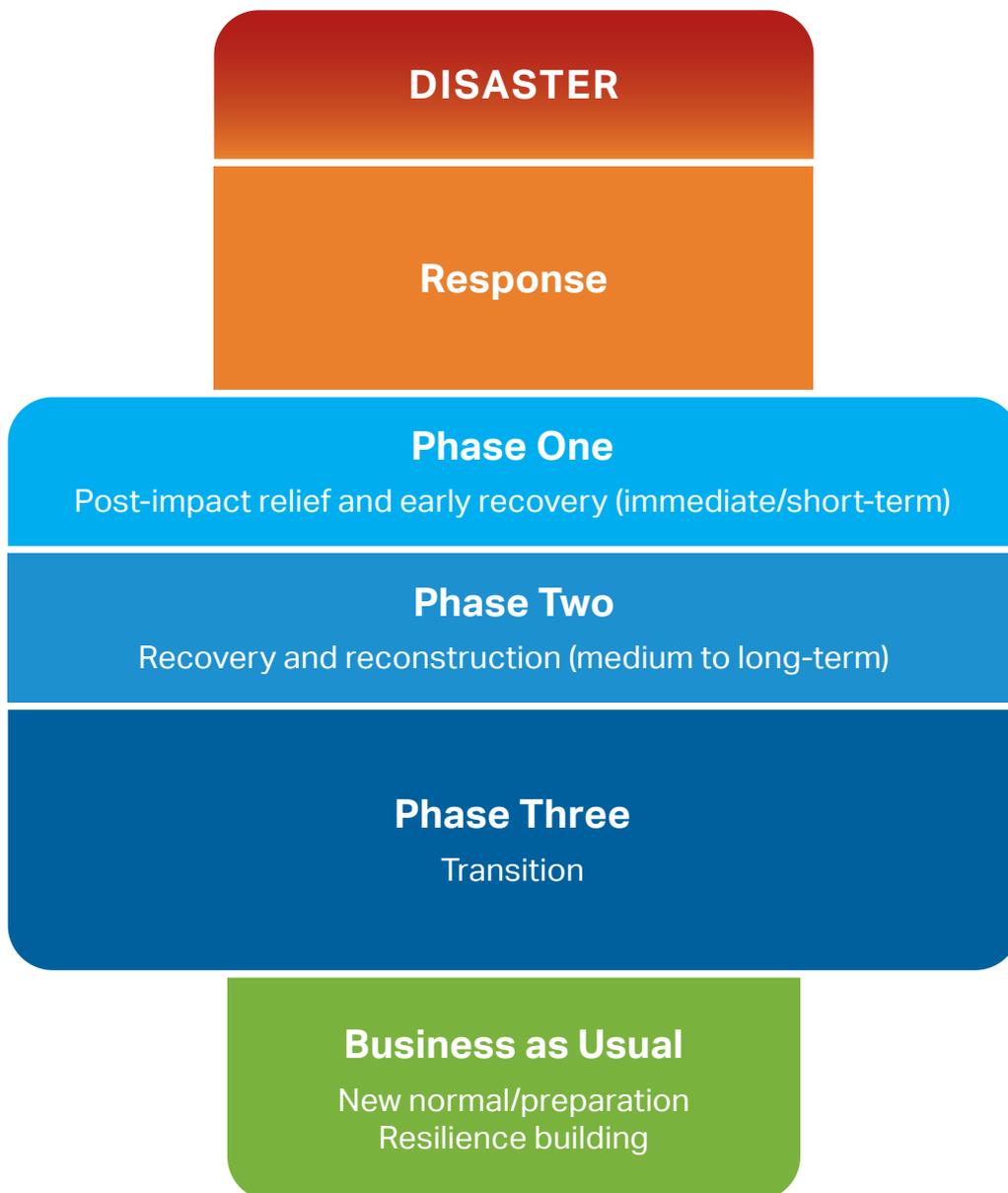
The bedding packages of a wool quilt and two pillows were provided to every affected family member.

Recovery phases

There are three recovery phases

Phase 1	Post-impact relief and early recovery
Phase 2	Recovery, rebuilding and resilience
Phase 3	Transition

Each phase involves the social, economic, built environment and natural environment domains of recovery. These domains are characterised by local recovery solutions and investment in activities that contribute to community resilience.



PHASE ONE



Post-impact relief and early recovery

Local recovery coordinators and recovery teams were established in the first fortnight of the fires in Yorketown, Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island to engage with residents and communities and drive locally-led approaches to recovery.

Local recovery committees and reference groups were quickly established with membership including representatives from councils, industry organisations, community groups and not-for-profit organisations.

Kingston District Council, through strong leadership and with the support of a resourceful and robust community, led the recovery effort from the Kielira fire. Council coordinated regional government services and other organisations, provided logistical support for volunteer organisations, and successfully advocated for upgrades to telecommunications and firefighting water resources. The community came together for workshops, managing hay donations, working bees and fund raisers, and provided meals and other support for BlazeAid who were on the ground for 15 weeks. They also looked out for the health and welfare of those most affected.

On 16 January 2020, the Premier announced the appointment of a State Lead for Disaster Rebuilding and Resilience to identify opportunities to address key areas of the economy, environment and wellbeing aspects of recovery, underpinned by *Stronger Together, South Australia's Disaster Resilience Strategy*, and to consider how State Government investment could help people rebuild.

The State Recovery Coordination Group, which consists of agencies with portfolio responsibilities related to specific consequences of the bushfires, worked with partners such as the Local Government Association and the not-for-profit sector to help local communities recover, reconnect and rebuild.

Across the fire grounds, early relief and recovery activities were delivered by all levels of government, not-for-profit organisations, local businesses, corporations and community members.

The breadth of involvement enabled broad community ownership of the recovery process, helping each community design and deliver its own recovery program while increasing its preparedness for future events.

There were many generous offers of support from not-for-profit organisations, businesses and community groups with which the State Government partnered for accommodation, catering, resources, labour and equipment supplies and relief. Red Cross Australia, Disaster and Recovery Ministries and the Tzu Chi Foundation provided outreach, pastoral support and financial assistance while the St Vincent de Paul Society coordinated the collection and distribution of donated goods.

Organisations such as BlazeAid, Disaster Relief Australia and Habitat for Humanity helped in many ways, from sifting through the ashes for personal items and clearing away debris to pulling down and replacing burned fencing. Volunteering SA&NT coordinated spontaneous volunteers to assist in early recovery activities.

Post-impact relief and recovery were disrupted while the State Government and communities across South Australia adhered to the COVID-19 restrictions that came into effect in mid-March 2020. By the end of June 2020, community support networks and programs had been re-established, essential services reconnected, and government-supported clean-up programs completed.



BlazeAid in action

PHASE
TWO



Recovery and reconstruction

Every individual and community recovers at a different pace.

At the close of 2020, despite the impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions on business and social interaction, South Australian individuals and communities are, in the main, looking ahead and making plans. They are repairing properties, restoring the economy and environment, and establishing bushfire resilience projects.

Recovery and reconstruction projects continue to be designed and funded following consultation with each local community.

Activities in the recovery and reconstruction phase support the recovery outcomes across all four domains of recovery effort – social, economic, built environment and natural environment – to achieve desired outcomes.

Social recovery



Outcomes

Communities affected by the bushfires feel safe and secure to engage in the recovery process and connect with their communities and support

The State Government is committed to supporting good mental health and wellbeing, which is fundamental to individuals' recovery and, in turn, the recovery of local communities and regions.

A four-year mental health and wellbeing recovery package will aid the medium to long-term mental health and wellbeing recovery of people in bushfire-affected communities. The first stage of this initiative is being implemented with a focus on community consultation and using co-design processes to identify supports required by communities to strengthen their mental health and wellbeing. The four-year package includes a local grants program to fund community driven projects and a partnerships approach to work with non-government and philanthropic agencies to co-deliver responses to address community identified mental health and wellbeing needs.

Community Development Officers have been established in the Adelaide Hills, Kangaroo Island and Yorke Peninsula to co-design recovery programs and enhance community resilience and capacity.

Early activity included support for individuals, households, primary producers and businesses.

Outreach services reached 458 people in the first few months, and free childcare established by the Department of Human Services enabled residents to visit the relief centres for financial assistance, information, referrals and support.

Restoration of essential services included water, electricity, phone towers and internet connections.

Wildlife rescue teams were deployed to rescue injured wildlife and biosecurity measures were put in place on Kangaroo Island.

The burial of dead livestock and native animals was a necessary but difficult task, with

assistance provided by the Department of Primary Industries and Regions and the South Australian Environmental Protection Authority.

Green Industries South Australia began coordinating the Disaster Waste Management program – an extensive program which includes the spraying, removal and disposal of asbestos; building debris; felled tree and boundary fencing; chemicals, gas cylinders, CRC posts, poly pipes and wiring; and vehicles.

The Australian Defence Force was deployed to Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills to assist with clean-up tasks and water cartage.



The ADF played a critical role in the recovery and clean-up process on Kangaroo Island and in the Adelaide Hills including supporting koala rehabilitation at Cleland Wildlife Park. Cleland image courtesy Nicole Mankowski photography

PHASE TWO



Economic recovery



Outcomes

Businesses and industries have returned to positions of strength and can operate and trade in their local environment

During early recovery efforts, the #BookThemOut campaign and regional Adelaide Fringe festival events encouraged people to holiday in and visit Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills.

A cost-sharing arrangement between the State and Commonwealth governments has provided funds to boost economic recovery in bushfire-affected communities with the aim of "building back better".

Businesses and primary producers have been supported with financial relief packages including grants and concessional loans, relief for stamp duty on purchase of replacement properties and motor vehicles, land tax relief, and Emergency Services Levy relief.

South Australia will receive - and match - \$26.4 million Commonwealth funding through the Local Economic Recovery (LER) Program. A total of \$52.8 million will be allocated to projects that support local and regional recovery needs. The priority areas are Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills region. State Government supported councils and communities to identify projects demonstrating economic benefit to the local community and welcomed by them.

The South Australian Disaster Small Business Transformation and Growth Program is a State Government initiative delivering measures including access to export and investment advice, coaching and mentoring services, and a new business hub on Kangaroo Island.

Natural environment recovery



Outcomes

The natural environment is restored and regenerated to a more resilient landscape with healthy biodiversity and ecosystems

The State Government is focused on environmental rejuvenation and rehabilitation and has funded:

- the Woodland Bird Resilience Program in the Adelaide Hills, a two-year program for habitat restoration and management
- the Feral Pig Eradication Program on Kangaroo Island, a three-year program to eradicate feral pigs and support conservation and increase agricultural productivity
- Landscape Recovery Grants to help primary producers and hobby farmers in the Adelaide Hills receive technical support to rehabilitate their land.

Built environment recovery



Outcomes

Essential services and critical infrastructure are restored and made more resilient

The first project announced under the Local Economic Recovery Program is a new desalination plant to be built on Kangaroo Island. It will provide a secure drinking water supply for more than 1,000 properties, help economic recovery by creating as many as 500 jobs, and improve bushfire resilience.

In addition, the State Government:

- has established a dedicated Bushfire Planning and Building Assessment Recovery Unit to assist people through the rebuilding process
- is providing free solar batteries for people rebuilding their houses
- is designing and restoring key tourism sites and national parks.

Local recovery and disaster resilience

The Kangaroo Island and Cudlee Creek community recovery plans have been developed by collecting, reflecting and integrating the experiences and aspirations of impacted communities. This approach aims to develop ongoing and sustainable community and economic development and resilience.

The community recovery plans are outcome-focused and align with the overall vision and program outcomes outlined in this report.

Studies of other disaster-affected communities show that the resilience of the South Australian communities affected by the fires will be enhanced by:

- conducting activities with individuals, businesses and communities to prepare them for future bushfire seasons and possible fires
- encouraging the development and implementation of business continuity plans that consider and mitigate the impacts of disaster on staff and operations
- supporting community connectedness and participation
- promoting and enabling access to health and wellbeing programs.

PHASE THREE

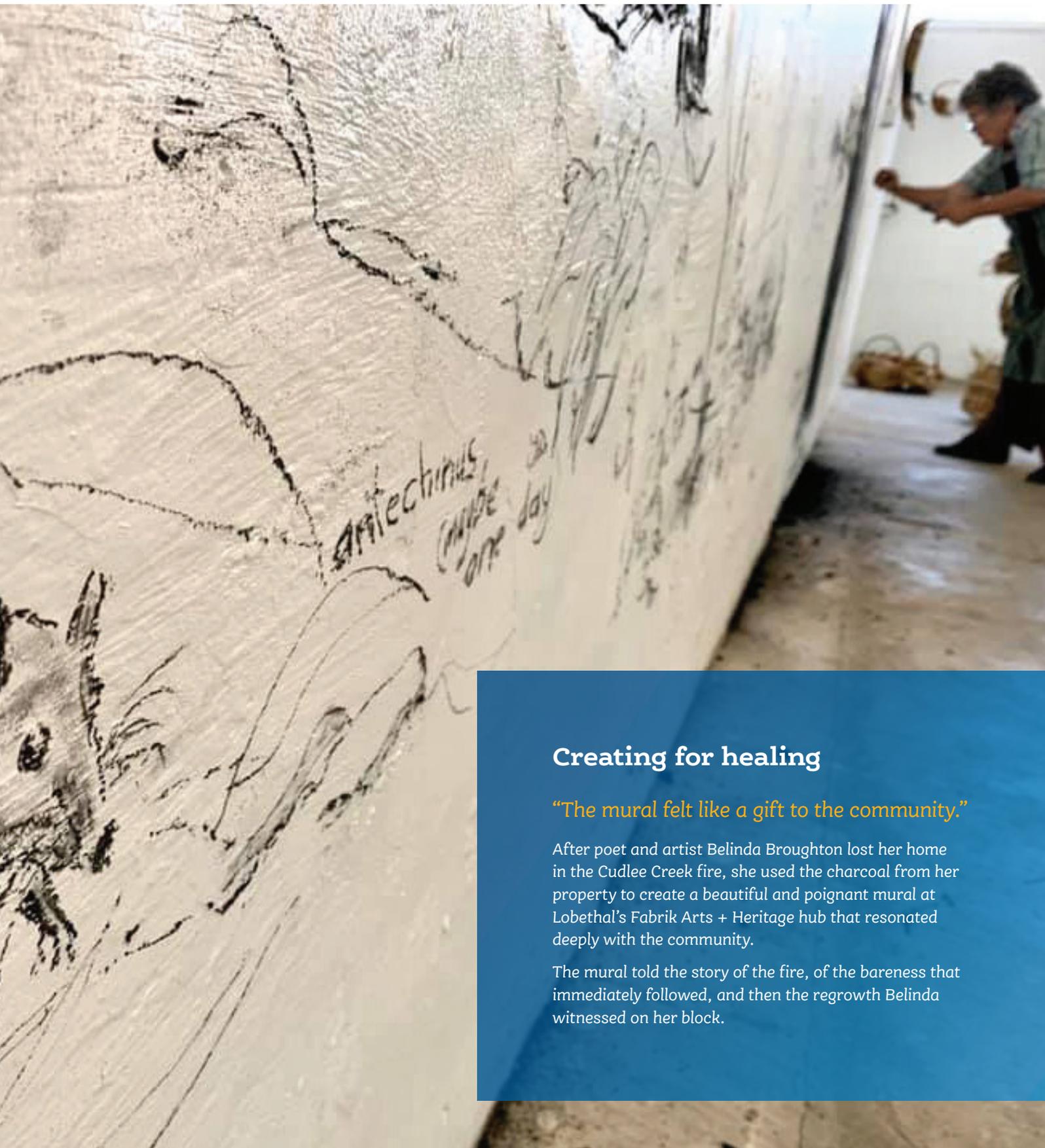


Transition

The Transition phase establishes a progressive handover of recovery and reconstruction responsibilities to organisations such as local government, community-based and industry-led sectors.

It will involve the completion of bushfire resilience projects, and the transition of recovery activities to normal council and community routines. Planning for the transition from formal support is an integral part of the community recovery plans and will commence in early 2021, led by the community recovery committees. Consultations and handovers to relevant agencies will conclude by June 2021.





Creating for healing

“The mural felt like a gift to the community.”

After poet and artist Belinda Broughton lost her home in the Cudlee Creek fire, she used the charcoal from her property to create a beautiful and poignant mural at Lobethal’s Fabrik Arts + Heritage hub that resonated deeply with the community.

The mural told the story of the fire, of the bareness that immediately followed, and then the regrowth Belinda witnessed on her block.



Looking forward

The first anniversaries of the bushfires will mean South Australians begin reflecting on the past year.

While milestones are important for us to be able to look backwards and remember the past, they also give us the opportunity to look forward, measure how far we have come, and prepare us for how we continue moving forward.

While this report provides the numbers of houses, habitats and bushland lost, it does not adequately tell the story of that loss. The houses were homes, and held possessions and memories; the animals lost were livestock tended, the result of hard work and representing livelihoods - as did the crops lost; the wildlife and bushland were cared for and loved.

The numbers do not tell the story of the collective grief or sadness that arose from these fires, or the memories of past fires they triggered.

Our words are, however, able to acknowledge those who were generous in their support to fellow friends, neighbours and citizens and can encourage those who continue to stay the distance through a long recovery. It continues to be important to listen and allow people to tell their stories of recovery to provide hope and inspiration for others.

The South Australian government will continue to coordinate and support communities as they recover from the bushfires and COVID-19. Alongside other critical programs, the Statewide Wellbeing Strategy led by Wellbeing SA funds a range of community-based projects that will contribute to positive wellbeing and resilience for communities and groups across South Australia to address the impacts of COVID-19. The website openyourworld.sa.gov.au provides valuable resources, tools and information to support improving wellbeing by staying healthy, active and connected. Community recovery plans will be further developed, implemented, and adjusted, maintaining flexibility to reflect ongoing community feedback.

In line with a culture of continuous improvement, external expertise will be engaged to conduct a formal evaluation of the recovery effort that will begin by December 2020. In addition, recommendations from both the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* and the *Independent Review into South Australia's 2019-20 Summer Bushfires* will continue to inform preparations for the next fire season and contribute to improving the effectiveness of disaster recovery in South Australia.

State Disaster Recovery

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