

Somerset Regional Council Bushfire Recovery Plan

Eastern Queensland Bushfires, 7 October – 19 December 2019

Endorsed by: Somerset Regional Council on 12 February 2020



Mayor
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Recovery narrative

Recovery narrative

Somerset is a region rich in diversity. From breathtaking mountain scenery to major water resources and recreational assets such as Lakes Wivenhoe and Somerset, the Somerset region is full of beauty and discovery, which makes for an ideal country getaway and outdoor adventure. Located only an hour away from Brisbane's CBD, Somerset's native forests, placid waterways and picturesque patchwork landscape is a major attraction for tourists and locals alike.

Despite its idyllic lifestyle and location, the Somerset region is no stranger to disaster events, which has made for a robust and resilient community unit. Somerset is committed to increasing the resilience and growth of the community while continuing its commitment to a sustainable future.

Council Mission

We, in partnership with the community, will realise our vision by:

- Focussing on our customer's needs
- Planning for the future
- Utilising resources efficiently and effectively
- Using sound business practices
- Utilising the practice of continuous improvement

About the disaster event

During the November-December 2019 bushfires, a number of communities within the Somerset region were forced to evacuate due to uncontained fires throughout the area. The fires continued to burn over several weeks, which led to disruption throughout the community, in particular to essential services, businesses, rural producers and tourism. The event required a multi-agency response, including the help of interstate and international firefighters, to bring the blaze under control.

Approximately 25,500 hectares were impacted by the 2019 bushfires in the Somerset region.

Local Recovery Group

Due to the prolonged time frames the fires continued (over two months), The Local Recovery Group was not formally established. Instead it was decided that the recovery could be managed by the lead agencies involved based on 'business as usual'. As such, in using this practical model of our recovery plan, Council did not require full activation of all the subgroups. Similarly, during the fire events, the LDMG did not meet the need to go beyond 'Lean Forward' and operated by direct interaction with lead agencies.

Lines of Recovery

The Somerset Regional Council Recovery Sub Plan involves four key functions:

- **Human and Social**
- **Economic**
- **Environment**
- **Infrastructure**

Key stakeholders

Stakeholders include lead state government agencies, community groups, non-government organisations/non-government associations, local businesses and other invested parties.

Recovery objectives

Recovery objectives

1. Essential services – power and water supply - repaired and restored.
2. Emergency funding (personal hardship) available to the community.
3. Provide psychosocial support to community members.
4. Rural producer fencing repaired and/or replaced.
5. Damage and impact assessments performed by QFES.
6. Fencing, sheds, water tanks and farming infrastructure repaired and/or replaced.
7. Restore confidence in the tourism market.
8. Damaged/destroyed road furniture is removed or replaced as required. Ensure that fire damaged trees are inspected and removed if needed.
9. Increase community awareness and preparedness for all hazards through community engagement.
10. Recovery of wildlife habitats to accelerate return of wildlife.
11. Assist residents in finding grants/funding opportunities to support community recovery from event, for example DCDSS, GIVIT, BlazeAid and RuralAid.
12. Enhance recovery governance through the updating of Council's Local Recovery Sub-Plan.

Damage and impacts

Damage and impacts

Human and Social

- Community wellbeing – short term evacuations, including Esk hospital.
- Community wellbeing – a number of impacted properties not insured or underinsured.
- Community wellbeing – psychosocial wellbeing of community members affected, compounded trauma from drought.
- Isolation for children due to school closure – Esk State School.
- Essential services – loss of power and water to affected communities.
- Community messaging – limited radio broadcasts providing relevant information to the community during event.
- Concerns surrounding limited support for wildlife carers

Economic

- Impacts to rural properties, such as fencing loss, stock welfare and loss of paddock feed.
- Potential loss of income to local services and small businesses
- Tourism: potential impact on tourism due to road closures and closure of national parks
- Tourism: perception that area is unsafe - impacting local businesses.
- Loss of primary production equipment – trucks, water tanks etc.
- 840 hectares of plantation destroyed at HQ Plantations.
- Landcruiser Mountain Park evacuated
- Brisbane Valley Rail Trail closed in sections – impact to tourism

Environment

- Approximately 25,500 hectares were affected
- Burnt and fallen trees – public health and safety risk.
- Concerns surrounding vegetation regrowth for rural producers
- National, state and local parks and walking trails damaged, impacting on public access.
- Threat to flora and fauna in the region.
- Increased erosion as a result of loss of vegetation
- Removal of water from already depleted water sources

Building

- 4 dwellings were destroyed/uninhabitable.
- 3 sheds destroyed.
- Power disconnected to a number of homes/businesses.
- Water tanks sustained fire damage/residue.
- Loss/damage to irrigation systems and water pumps.
- Power poles damaged/destroyed.
- Kilometres of fencing destroyed

Transport and Roads

- Kilcoy-Murgon Road, Monsildale Road, Esk Hampton Road, Brisbane Valley Highway, Wivenhoe-Somerset Road, Wivenhoe Pocket Road and a number of local roads were closed during event.
- Road signs damaged/destroyed.
- Loss of sediment into Stormwater system as a result of fires with follow up rain storm

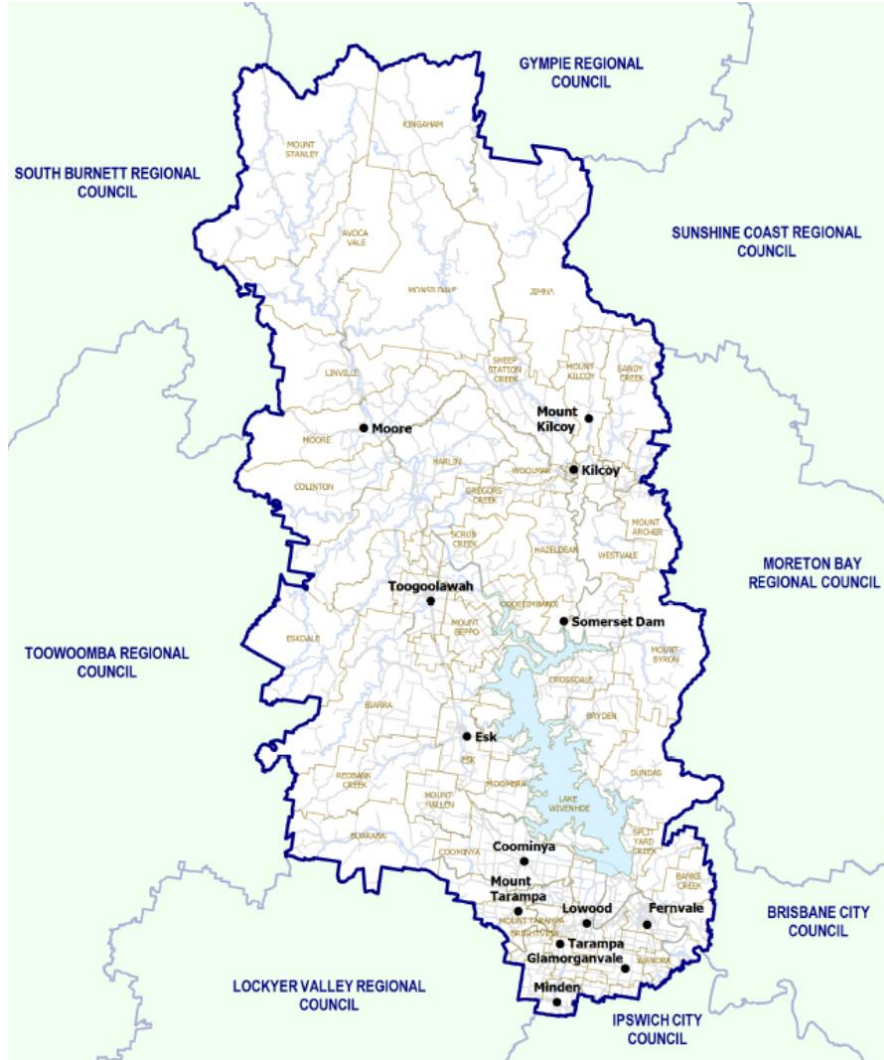
Recovery timeframes

Recovery timeframes

	Short term	Medium to long term	Ongoing
Human and Social	1 2 5	12	11 3 9
Economic		12 6 4	7
Environment		12	10
Infrastructure	1 5	12 6 4	8

Somerset Regional Council

Map of Somerset



Activations for Disaster Recovery Funding Assistance

For details of activations and assistance measures visit www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations

Disaster relief measure

- Counter Disaster Operations
- Essential Services Safety and Reconnection Scheme
- Personal Hardship Assistance Scheme (PHAS)*

Activation date

20/11/2019
20/11/2019
20/11/2019

*The PHAS and ESSRS for Somerset is limited, refer to www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/queensland-disasters for specific areas.

Recovery tasks

Human and social

- Assess human and social impacts
- Provide emergency hardship payments to impacted individuals
- Identify and manage personal hardship cases within the community.
- In partnership with relevant agencies, provide access to psychological support services to those in need of assistance.
- Reopen schools
- Promote bushfire awareness in community
- Confirm council processes for evacuation centres, incl. communications, stocking, materials etc.
- Promote Council's Disaster Dashboard as a one-stop-shop for Council's disaster messaging

Infrastructure

- Reopen roads.
- Identify damaged assets.
- Replace damaged road furniture.
- Removal of fire damaged vegetation impacting road and road furniture.
- Establish damage to dwellings / damage assessments to be undertaken.
- Provide assistance to repair fencing, water tanks, pipes, pumps and irrigation to rural properties by advising residents on available support programs.
- Power reconnections.

Economic

- Contact rural properties to determine extent of impact
- Assist with fencing replacement by directing properties to funding opportunities
- Reopen National Parks
- Engage with local community groups and impacted businesses
- Stimulate the tourism sector within Somerset - "open for business".
- Identify impact on agriculture and potential funding opportunities to assist recovery.

Environment

- Inspect and remove if necessary any fire damaged hazardous trees
- Identify impacts and activities to support the recovery of the natural environment.
- Allow easy access for community to safely dispose of waste at council landfill
- Identify impact and activities to support the recovery of wildlife and their habitats.

Recovery tasks

Measures of success

Human and Social

- Community members have returned home or have transitioned from evacuation centres into temporary/long term accommodation.
- Community members have returned to work.
- Schools have reopened and children returned to school.
- Community members have accessed financial assistance.
- Funding secured to support community recovery and resilience strategies.
- Stronger partnerships and relationships built with communities and local non-government organisations.
- Community kept up to date with key information during the recovery process.
- Community resilience increased in preparation of future disasters.
- Psychosocial support services have been provided.

Infrastructure

- Roads are open and trafficable.
- Asset damage has been identified.
- Damage assessments have been completed
- Power has been reconnected to all properties.
- Irrigation, water tanks and pumps have been replaced/fixed.

Economic

- Tourism – targeted media campaigns / open for business messaging, resulting in increased tourism.
- Support has been provided for businesses affected by event.
- National parks and camping grounds have been reopened
- Planned events have resumed in the region.
- Primary producers and rural properties have been supported.

Environment

- Wildlife numbers have increased in impacted areas.
- Re-opening of national parks.
- Hazardous fire affected trees blocking road corridors have been removed.
- Effective waste disposal has been undertaken.

Measure of success

Map of Somerset
Activations summary