

Queensland Recovery and Resilience Stories

2023–2024

Throughout the 2023–24 season, 13 disaster events impacted Queensland, including two tropical cyclones, record flooding, severe storms and bushfires.

The [2023–24 State Recovery and Resilience Plan \(SRRP\)](#) provides a pathway to recovery from the impacts of these disaster events.

This resource, *Queensland Recovery and Resilience Stories*, is a companion to the SRRP, sharing the varied and inspirational experiences of Queenslanders on their recovery journeys.



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS RECOVERY TASK GROUP

Following the Southern Queensland Bushfires, it became evident a focused approach was needed to address the psychological impact on the local school children.

The Chair of the Local Human and Social Recovery Group (LHSRG) suggested establishing a Children and Young Persons Recovery Task Group (the Task Group) focusing on children. It would conduct its own meetings and have the capacity to involve additional stakeholders focused on youth-related issues not typically involved with LHSRG. Bushkids, a not-for-profit organisation which supports children and families in Queensland's regional, rural and remote communities, accepted the role of chairing the Task Group.

Using its members and connections, the Task Group proficiently gathers and identifies emerging issues. It is also able to easily distribute relevant and timely information.

Following the bushfires, the LHSRG Chair arranged for two training positions within the local government area for a Stormbirds program, which is an education program supporting the recovery of children and young people in response to change, loss and uncertainty that often results from disasters. Through Bushkids and the Task Group, the Stormbirds program has since been delivered to all children at one of the bushfire-affected schools, and a cohort of directly-impacted children at another school.



Image: Bushkids. (courtesy: Southern Downs Regional Council)



Image: Education program materials. (courtesy: Southern Downs Regional Council)

BIRDIE'S TREE HELPS YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES GOING THROUGH NATURAL DISASTERS

Birdie's Tree is an award-winning set of storybooks, videos and resources created by the Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (QCPIMH).

The storybooks follow Birdie and Mr Frog's journey as they learn about different natural disasters and find out how to cope and recover from stressful events.

Birdie's Tree provides a gentle entry for young children and families to start a conversation prior to, during and in the years following disaster events.

Birdie and Mr Frog are now well-known characters within some local communities, with the free resources visible at schools, early years services, local libraries and community events. The integration of Birdie's Tree supports resilience through building common recovery language for children, providing safety and reinforcement through a shared connection point.

In late 2021, Southern Downs Regional Council facilitated training in using Birdie's Tree to schools, kindergartens and playgroups. Further training was provided in December 2022 and March 2023.

All schools, kindergartens and playgroups have copies of the Birdie's Tree storybooks to share with children.

Birdie's Tree has now become a part of the community in preparing for disasters.

Shortly after the bushfires, the Bureau of Meteorology issued a heatwave warning for the affected area in Southern Downs. The Children and Young Persons Recovery Task Group promptly distributed the information and reminded people about the Birdie's Tree resources and training Community Recovery and Resilience Officers had given to local schools to assist during heatwaves.

Schools, kindergartens and playgroups could read *Birdie and the Very Hot Day* to help young children learn what happens when it gets very hot and how to stay cool and safe in a heatwave.

Further information on Birdie's Tree resources is available on the Queensland Government's [Birdie's Tree website](#).



Image: Early Years Workshop Chinchilla held at Busy Bees at Chinchilla, Dr Andrea Baldwin. (courtesy DLGWV)



Image: Early Years Workshop Chinchilla held at Busy Bees at Chinchilla. (courtesy DLGWV)

FARMERS RECOVERY TASK GROUP

The agricultural zones near Dalveen and the town of Wallangarra Jennings on the Queensland–New South Wales border were among the hardest-hit areas impacted by the Southern Queensland Bushfires.

The LHSRG recognised the specific challenges farmers faced and established a Farmers Recovery Task Group.

The Farmers Recovery Task Group coordinates efforts, collaborates, and creates engagement events to reach out to affected landholders while strategising for the upcoming year. Combining primary producer, rural financial counselling, and mental health support services within the group, these events attract a broader audience and address a wider range of topics than any individual service could effectively manage or promote.

The task group was also involved in a project to coordinate the rebuild of thousands of kilometres of community fencing lost in the fires.

Most rural residential landowners impacted by the fires were not eligible for funding assistance to rebuild and many were also inadequately insured for the large amount of fencing lost.

The project coordinated labour, materials, charitable contributions, and assistance for those who may have ‘fallen through the cracks’ and needed support.

The project leader is a volunteer with a disaster recovery background, first-hand knowledge of the event, and local connections.

The Farmers Recovery Task Group is jointly chaired by Queensland Health’s TRACC (Tackling Regional Adversity through Connected Communities) program and Department of Primary Industries (DPI). Its partner agencies include the Rural Financial Counselling Service, local government, University of Southern Queensland’s SQNNSW Innovation Hub, Queensland Farmers Federation, Rural Aid, and a NSW-based local landcare organisation.

Wallangarra Jennings Together:

Community BBQ for Recovery & Renewal

A YEAR ON FROM THE 2023 BUSHFIRES



COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDER RESILIENCE EVENT

FREE SAUSAGE SIZZLE

Monday 2nd December

11am – 1pm (QLD)

ALL WELCOME!

All enquiries:
James Wong: james.wong@sdrcl.qld.gov.au
Kristie Lambert: kristie.lambert@health.qld.gov.au

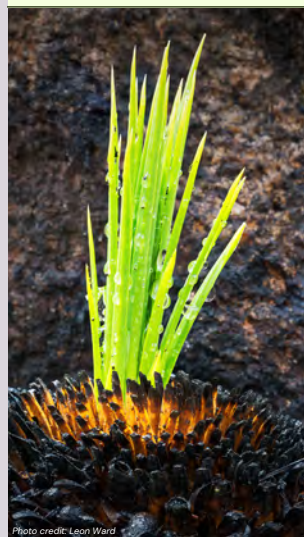


Photo credit: Leon Ward

WALLANGARRA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS HALL

Image: Wallangarra Together Community BBQ for Recovery and Renewal. (courtesy Southern Downs Regional Council)



Image: FRTG recovery event Dalveen (courtesy Southern Downs Regional Council)



Image: Farmers Recovery Task Group – Wallangarra Jennings, 2023. (courtesy Southern Downs Regional Council)

TAMBORINE CHAINSAW WARRIORS

Tamborine Mountain was one of the worst impacted areas during the South Queensland Severe Storms and Rainfall event.

Homes and infrastructure were destroyed and large trees felled.

The sheer scale of debris was so great many residents couldn't deal with it themselves.

Adam Chanter, a maritime professional, had been living on the mountain for more than a decade.

Confident in his professional abilities and community knowledge he turned up to the first town hall meeting ready to help.

Adam wasn't alone – many locals with expertise were looking to volunteer.

One of the first things they needed to do was remove large amounts of debris and restore access.

Rather than waiting for help to arrive Adam suggested a team of local 'chainsaw warriors' could do the job.

With no power and limited mobile coverage, they used already-established informal networks of community sporting and social groups to find volunteers and residents who needed help.

They also door knocked, put up flyers with QR codes at recovery hubs, real estate agencies and sporting clubs and reached out via Facebook and social media.

Adam used the data to map volunteer capability with resident need.

'We built the platform out of need and desire,' Adam said, 'connecting volunteers with those who needed help.'

Seventy-five chainsaw warriors went to work helping more than 125 families who were directly impacted.

Those with engineering experience assessed the jobs and built teams around volunteer capability.

They organised on-the job training and education for volunteers who needed to use chainsaws.

Adam shared the data about affected residents with groups doing welfare checks and connected with other volunteer groups that provided donated generators to people without power, running water or sewerage.

He also liaised with Disaster Relief Australia on jobs outside his team's capabilities.

Energex invited the Chainsaw Warriors to observe their forward-facing operations at the local sports grounds. Adam said the team learnt much from seeing how they organised and engaged with affected residents.

Adam is hopeful the community will learn from the experience and improve their preparedness for the next high risk weather season.

He's also hopeful all levels of government will better integrate and resource community volunteer groups.

'If we had the capability to better support and quantify data, we would be able to mobilise and steer the services more efficiently,' Adam said. 'This approach can only be successful if it is community led and government enabled.'

Adam wants 'to be ready to be forward facing' when the next disaster strikes 'so we don't waste time'.



Images: Chainsaw warriors (courtesy Adam Chanter)

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GOOMBURRA COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Nestled in the western foothills of the Great Dividing Range, Goomburra is one of four Main Range National Park visitor nodes.

The 25.5-kilometre road heading into the Main Range and campgrounds is the only route in and out.

Following the 2019 bushfires the community decided they needed to become more disaster ready.

They used Community Hall Committee (Hall Committee) meetings to build honest and truthful relationships and plan what they needed to do.

This approach enabled the Community Recovery and Resilience Officer (CRRO) to gain insight into local issues. At the first meeting the CRRO attended the community identified two upcoming recovery projects, with many more to follow.

Early initiatives included:

- the Birdie's Tree program
- providing support for community events
- launching a Neighbour Day campaign
- upskilling community members with online training
- providing training on evacuation centre procedures and psychological first aid
- conducting first aid training in conjunction with the installation of a new automated external defibrillator at the hall.

The Hall Committee successfully secured a Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal grant to install solar panels.

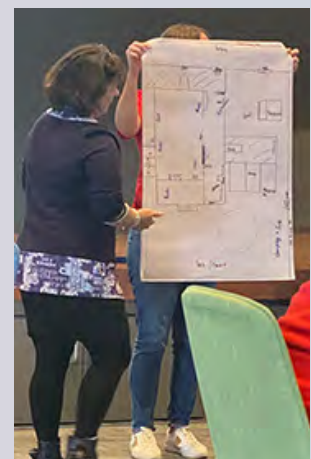
In September 2022, the CRRO organised a 'Big Map' exercise in collaboration with the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) and local community members at the hall, along with a follow-up Get Ready Goomburra emergency services event in November.

These activities led to the establishment of the Goomburra Disaster Group, consisting of Hall Committee members, key business owners including the campgrounds, the local QPS officer, retired QFD personnel, and other interested community members.

With the CRRO and District Management Officer's assistance, the group is developing its hyper-local disaster plan, aiming to receive LDMG endorsement once it's complete.

During this process, Goomburra experienced the Southern Queensland Bushfires, which quickly saw their planning put into action.

Although the plan is still underway, some initial outcomes have emerged, including securing a grant to install accessible toilets and establish a designated UHF radio channel for valley-wide communication during emergencies. They also constructed a helicopter pad at the upper end of the valley, which was used by an air ambulance in its first week of operation.



Goomburra community initiative (courtesy Southern Downs Regional Council)

PEER-SUPPORT FOR RECOVERY WORKERS FOLLOWING DISASTERS

In 2023, Blue Knot Foundation provided trauma informed and self-care training for recovery workers in the Southern Downs community.

Developing a trauma-informed recovery workforce is fundamental for supporting the recovery of those people who have experienced trauma from natural disasters.

Following the Bushfires, the Community Recovery and Resilience Officer set up a peer-support program for those working in recovery.

The program provided facilitated peer-to-peer support sessions.

Participants could connect with colleagues from other recovery organisations, providing a safe space to come together.

The program ran until the end of June 2024.



Images: Bushfire damage in the Southern Downs (courtesy: QRA)



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Front cover images

Top left: Old Kamerunga Bridge, Barron River (courtesy: QRA)
 Top right: ACT rangers, firefighters join QPWS fireresponse (courtesy: DETSI)
 Middle right/Bottom left: Cross border exercises (courtesy: LGAQ)
 Bottom centre: SES crew ready to conduct debris clean-up in FNQ following TC Jasper (courtesy: SES)
 Bottom right: Captain Cook Highway (Cairns–Mossman) landslip at Buchan North (courtesy: TMR)

Back cover images

Top: Wujal Wujal community building following Tropical Cyclone Jasper (courtesy: QRA)
 Bottom: A flooded Warrego River, Charleville (courtesy: Murweh Shire Council)



**Queensland
 Government**