

# Disaster Advocacy Strategy 2026

# Overview

## The Longwood Berrys Lane bushfires

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires of January 2026 have had a lasting impact on communities across Strathbogie Shire.

The fires burned approximately 138,000 hectares, destroying more than 100 homes and 294 other structures, with major losses across farming, viticulture, equine industries and tourism.

Even in areas where homes remained intact, extended isolation, prolonged service outages and exposed vulnerabilities in telecommunications and electricity networks have placed considerable strain on families, businesses and emergency response systems.

The damage to essential infrastructure - including hundreds of kilometres of roads, bridges, culverts and community assets - combined with ongoing disruptions to agriculture, viticulture, equine industries and tourism, clearly demonstrates the long-term economic and social impacts these bushfires will have across the region.

Full recovery will take years, and smaller regional councils, with limited rate bases, are unable to meet these rebuilding costs alone.

While the immediate emergency response has concluded, the recovery journey is ongoing.

Residents are rebuilding homes, businesses and farms while also navigating the social, emotional and economic impacts of the disaster.

Supporting community recovery is a long-term process. It requires sustained coordination, accessible services and local leadership to ensure communities can recover and rebuild with confidence.

Strathbogie Shire Council is working closely with residents, community groups and government partners to support recovery.

However, to meet the scale of need across the Shire, continued government investment in recovery services and infrastructure is essential.

# Advocacy Priority:

## Community recovery and resilience

### The problem

Disaster recovery in rural communities does not occur quickly. Many impacts emerge months or years after the event, particularly for people experiencing financial strain, housing challenges or ongoing emotional stress.

Councils play a critical role in coordinating recovery efforts, supporting residents to access services and ensuring community voices are heard in recovery planning. However, delivering this work requires dedicated resources, specialised staff and ongoing operational support. Without sufficient funding, there is a risk that critical recovery services will be reduced before communities have fully recovered.

For smaller rural councils such as Strathbogie Shire, the cost of maintaining recovery hubs, outreach services and dedicated recovery staff places significant pressure on existing council resources.

### The solution

A coordinated, locally led recovery model supported by sustained government funding will ensure communities receive the support they need throughout the recovery period.

Maintaining a dedicated recovery team, community recovery hub and outreach services allows residents to access practical assistance, information and support close to home. It also ensures recovery programs remain responsive to local needs as they evolve over time.

This approach aligns with best practice disaster recovery, which recognises that community recovery typically extends for several years following major events.

### The ask

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking \$2.8 million in recovery funding over three years to maintain essential recovery services and coordination across the municipality.

**Recovery funding already committed: \$750,000**

**Additional funding requested:**

**2025-26 - \$950,000**

Funding to support the establishment and operation of recovery services, including:

- Fire Recovery Manager and Community Recovery Officer - \$300,000
- Planning and Building Recovery Officer - \$120,000
- Lease of motor vehicle for outreach services - \$20,000
- Recovery Hub operational costs - \$130,000
- Community-led relief and recovery centre costs - \$50,000
- Community recovery initiatives - \$100,000
- Recovery Projects Officer to deliver replacement of essential council assets damaged during the fire - \$120,000

- Waste management, polytank recycling, wood fire management and distribution – \$100,000

**2026-27 – \$950,000**

Continuation of the recovery program, including recovery coordination, hub operations, outreach services and community recovery initiatives.

**2027-28 – \$900,000**

Ongoing recovery coordination and support services to ensure the community continues to receive assistance as recovery needs evolve.

**Total funding request:  
\$2,800,000**

## The benefit

Investing in locally delivered recovery coordination will:

- ensure communities have ongoing access to practical support and information
- strengthen coordination between government agencies and local services
- support residents navigating rebuilding, insurance and financial challenges
- enable outreach services to reach smaller and more remote communities
- support community-led initiatives that rebuild connection and resilience
- ensure recovery efforts remain responsive to emerging community needs.

Sustained funding will also allow Council to continue playing its essential role in coordinating recovery across the municipality. Improving bridge infrastructure helps reduce isolation, enhances liveability, and increases equity for smaller, remote communities.

## Conclusion

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires have significantly affected the people of Strathbogie Shire. While the emergency response has ended, the recovery journey is still underway.

Ensuring communities have the support they need in the months and years ahead is critical to long-term recovery.

Strathbogie Shire Council seeks the Victorian Government's continued partnership through a \$2.8 million recovery funding package to maintain essential recovery services and ensure our communities are supported both in the short term and throughout the longer recovery process.

# Advocacy Priority: Community resilience projects

## The problem

Rural communities rely heavily on local infrastructure during emergencies. In many cases, halls and pavilions become the de facto meeting points for relief efforts, community briefings and support services.

However, many of these facilities were not designed with disaster resilience in mind. Limitations include:

- limited backup power and energy security
- ageing amenities and infrastructure
- insufficient capacity to host emergency services or outreach support
- limited ability to operate during extended outages or disruptions.

During the recent fires, communities showed remarkable resilience and supported each other in practical ways. But the experience also highlighted gaps in local infrastructure that need to be addressed if communities are to respond effectively to future emergencies.

Investing in resilient community infrastructure will ensure towns have safe, functional and well-equipped places to gather, access services and support each other when it matters most.

## The solution

Strathbogie Shire Council proposes a staged program of upgrades to key community facilities across the Shire. These projects will strengthen local capacity to respond to emergencies while also supporting everyday community life.

Upgrades will focus on practical resilience measures such as:

Upgrades will focus on practical resilience measures such as:

- backup power through generators and community batteries
- improved amenities and accessible facilities
- enhanced lighting and safety infrastructure
- flexible indoor and outdoor spaces to host services, briefings and community gatherings.

In addition to fixed infrastructure, a mobile outreach capability will enable services to reach smaller and more remote communities during recovery and future emergencies.

## The ask

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking \$12.9 million in targeted investment over three years to deliver the following community resilience initiatives.

### 2025-26

#### **\$500,000 – Multi-purpose Resilience, Relief and Recovery Mobile Hub**

A mobile outreach service that can deliver support, information and services directly to communities during emergencies and recovery periods.

### 2026-27

#### **\$3,000,000 – Ruffy Hall and Community Resilience Centre**

Development of a new community resilience hub and play space to replace ageing assets including the Tableland Community Centre. The facility will include backup power, a community battery and generator to support emergency response and recovery activities.

**2027-28****\$2,000,000 – Longwood Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Installation of community battery, generator, improved amenities and lighting to support community use and emergency response.

**\$2,000,000 – Violet Town Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Infrastructure upgrades including community battery, generator, lighting and improved amenities.

**\$2,500,000 – Euroa Friendlies Pavilion: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Expanded amenities, upgraded kitchen facilities, generator and community battery to enable the site to support large-scale community gatherings and recovery activities.

**\$1,000,000 – Strathbogie and Gooram Halls: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Resilience upgrades including backup power and improved infrastructure to support emergency operations and community use.

**\$440,000 – Euroa Cattle Saleyards: Upgrading for a Resilient Future**

Improvements to amenities and installation of charging infrastructure to support emergency logistics and agricultural operations.

Total funding request:  
\$12,940,000

**The benefit**

This investment will deliver long-term benefits for the region by:

- strengthening community preparedness and response capacity
- providing safe, reliable places for people to gather during emergencies
- supporting delivery of relief and recovery services closer to communities
- improving everyday community facilities used for sport, events and local activities
- strengthening social connection and wellbeing following disasters
- supporting local economies by protecting critical community infrastructure.

Importantly, resilient facilities will ensure communities are better prepared for future emergencies, reducing recovery times and improving coordination between agencies and local residents.

**Conclusion**

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires showed just how strong and resilient the communities of Strathbogie Shire truly are. People stepped up for one another, opening their halls and facilities, offering support, and working side by side with emergency services to protect their towns.

With the right investment, these same community assets can be strengthened so they continue to support everyday community life while also improving our preparedness for future emergencies.

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking the Victorian Government's partnership to deliver this \$12.9 million community resilience program, helping ensure our towns are better prepared, better connected and more resilient in the years ahead.

# Advocacy Priority: Economic business recovery package

## The problem

The local economy is built on small and medium-sized businesses, primary producers and family-run operations. Many operate on tight margins even in stable seasons.

The fires have resulted in:

- loss of livestock, fencing, pasture and on-farm infrastructure
- damage to vineyards and equine facilities
- disruption to tourism visitation and event cancellations
- reduced trade for hospitality and retail businesses
- complex and time-consuming insurance processes
- emotional and financial strain across farming families and business owners.

While government recovery programs are available, navigating them can be complex. Businesses are often required to engage with multiple agencies, funding streams and regulatory processes at the same time.

Without coordinated and targeted support, there is a risk of prolonged disruption, business closures and long-term economic decline in affected communities.

## The solution

Economic recovery will be strongest when support is coordinated, locally delivered and informed by a clear understanding of the impacts on rural economies.

A structured recovery framework led by the Victorian Government, working closely with local government and industry, would enable practical support to reach businesses and primary producers more efficiently.

Key elements of this approach include improved coordination between agencies, locally embedded business recovery expertise, and targeted financial and advisory support to help businesses stabilise and rebuild.

## The ask

To support economic recovery across Strathbogie Shire, Council requests the Victorian Government:

### **Establish a coordinated business and agricultural recovery framework**

A whole-of-government approach tailored to heavily impacted rural municipalities.

### **Undertake a comprehensive economic impact assessment**

Led jointly by Regional Development Victoria (RDV) and the Department of Agriculture to quantify losses across businesses, primary producers and supply chains.

### **Deploy business recovery specialists locally**

RDV-supported advisers embedded within the Recovery Centre in Euroa to support agricultural enterprises, commercial businesses and sole traders.

### **Provide insurance navigation and claims support**

Dedicated guidance to help residents and businesses manage complex claims processes.

### **Provide activation grants (not loans) for essential business equipment**

Small-to-medium grants to replace operational items such as laptops, phones and connectivity equipment often excluded from existing programs.

### **Expand agricultural recovery assistance**

Increased freight subsidies, feed assistance and fencing support to meet regional demand.

### **Strengthen AgBiz Assist and rural financial counselling services**

Additional rural financial counselors and integrated mental health supports for primary producers.

### **Expand local mental health and wellbeing services**

Outreach and case management services embedded within a coordinated recovery structure, particularly for remote farming communities.

### **Provide clear and timely communication on recovery programs**

Regular updates on state and federal recovery initiatives to support planning and business confidence.

## **The benefit**

A coordinated and locally embedded recovery response will:

- stabilise businesses and protect local employment
- accelerate recovery for agriculture and primary production supporting delivery of relief and recovery services closer to communities
- support tourism, viticulture and equine industries that underpin the regional economy providing safe, reliable places for people to gather during emergencies
- reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- strengthen confidence for businesses considering reinvestment
- support the wellbeing of business owners, farmers and workers.

Importantly, it will ensure government investment is targeted, effective and aligned with the real needs of rural communities.

## **Conclusion**

Strathbogie Shire is resilient. Communities, farmers and businesses have demonstrated extraordinary generosity, determination and leadership in the face of the Longwood Berrys Lane fires.

However, local resilience must be matched with coordinated government support.

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking the Victorian Government's partnership in delivering a practical, locally embedded recovery response that protects businesses, supports primary producers and secures the long-term economic future of our region.

# Advocacy Priority: Tourism, agriculture, viticulture and equine sector recovery

## The problem

The fires have had severe and far-reaching impacts.

### Tourism

Widespread cancellations, reduced visitation, lost seasonal income and reputational impacts threaten the region's visitor economy. Tourism is critical to long-term economic recovery, and delayed support risks prolonged downturns.

### Agriculture and viticulture

Many primary producers have lost buildings, fencing, pastures, irrigation infrastructure, machinery, stock and feed, creating multi-year financial pressures.

### Equine sector

Breeders face displaced animals, damaged facilities, pasture loss and rising operational costs, threatening one of the region's major economic contributors.

Without immediate, coordinated support, these sectors face prolonged financial stress, slowed recovery, and reduced regional economic activity.

## The solution

We call on the Victorian Government to implement a coordinated recovery approach with practical, locally embedded measures:

### Dedicated recovery packages

Tailored programs for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries addressing sector-specific needs.

### Direct financial assistance

Support to manage immediate cashflow challenges, repair or replace critical infrastructure, and restore land and assets.

### Specialist disaster advisory services

Access to expert advice on pasture recovery, veterinary and biosecurity support, and guidance for developing and implementing disaster preparedness and recovery plans.

### Enhanced freight and feed support

Subsidies to assist livestock and high-value breeding operations maintain continuity and minimise financial losses.

### Tourism and event stimulus funding

Investment in festivals, cellar doors, equine sales, regional events and visitor activations to rebuild demand and create economic multipliers in rural communities.

### Accelerated approvals and streamlined regulations

Faster permitting and simplified regulatory processes to enable producers to rebuild essential infrastructure quickly and efficiently.

### Investment in regional infrastructure and visitor economy

Support for initiatives such as:

- \$15 million Harvest Hub – Agri Food, Wine and Equine Centre in Nagambie for tourism and investment attraction, promoting the region and supporting local economic development
- \$1 million Visitor Economy Stimulus through Goulburn Regional Tourism (GRT) for concerts, event activations and initiatives that strengthen the visitor economy
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**Total proposed funding package: \$16 million.**

## The ask

To support tourism, agriculture, viticulture and equine recovery effectively, we request:

- immediate funding and financial assistance for businesses and producers to restore cashflow, replace critical infrastructure and repair damaged assets.
- sector-specific recovery packages for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries that reflect the unique operational and economic challenges of each sector.
- deployment of specialist disaster advisors to provide pasture, veterinary, biosecurity and business planning support across affected regions. reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- expanded freight and feed subsidies to support livestock and high-value breeding operations
- targeted stimulus for tourism and events including festivals, cellar doors, equine sales and other visitor activations to drive local economic recovery.
- accelerated approvals and streamlined regulatory processes to allow rapid rebuilding of essential infrastructure.
- investment in regional devel-

opment and visitor economy projects, specifically the Harvest Hub

- clear, timely communication of recovery programs and progress updates to ensure businesses and producers can plan and act confidently.

## The benefit

Targeted support will:

- stabilise businesses and protect employment across key sectors
- restore confidence in the visitor economy and regional events
- support multi-year recovery for agriculture, viticulture and equine industries
- reduce long-term economic and social impacts of the fires
- strengthen community resilience and preparedness for future disasters
- maximise economic multipliers through tourism, events and regional promotion initiatives.

A coordinated, sector-specific approach ensures that public investment achieves the greatest impact and supports sustainable, long-term recovery.

## Conclusion

The Longwood Berrys Lane fires have tested the resilience of Strathbogie Shire's industries. Our community has shown determination and commitment, but government support is critical to turn recovery into renewal.

We urge the Victorian Government to partner with our Shire by delivering practical, targeted, and timely recovery programs. This will protect our industries, safeguard jobs, and ensure our region emerges stronger and more resilient from the 2026 fires.

# Advocacy Priority: Housing and planning support

## The problem

The scale and urgency of the rebuilding effort required demands additional statutory flexibility, planning system support and targeted infrastructure investment.

To ensure reconstruction can proceed quickly, safely and consistently, Council is seeking the Victorian Government's support through a coordinated package of planning system relief, ministerial intervention and strategic infrastructure investment.

Rebuilding after bushfires is never straightforward. Residents, farmers and businesses are navigating insurance processes, construction industry shortages, infrastructure repairs and regulatory approvals at the same time.

The existing planning system, while designed to ensure good planning outcomes, can become complex and slow when applied to large-scale disaster recovery. For communities trying to rebuild homes, agricultural infrastructure and businesses, delays in planning approvals can create significant financial and emotional strain.

For a small rural council such as Strathbogie, the volume and complexity of recovery-related planning matters places significant

pressure on limited planning staff and resources. Without additional support and targeted regulatory flexibility, there is a real risk that the planning system may unintentionally slow down recovery.

A coordinated State response is needed to ensure the planning framework supports, rather than hinders, the rebuilding of homes, farms and businesses.

## The solution

Strathbogie Shire Council proposes a coordinated recovery planning framework supported by the Victorian Government that provides temporary statutory flexibility while maintaining appropriate planning safeguards.

This framework would introduce targeted recovery measures to streamline approvals, reduce unnecessary administrative requirements and provide greater certainty for residents, businesses and industry during the rebuilding process.

At the same time, longer-term planning and infrastructure investment is required to ensure rebuilding supports safer and more resilient communities in the future.

## The ask

To support efficient and coordinated recovery, Strathbogie Shire Council requests the Victorian Government's assistance with the following measures.

### **Bushfire recovery-specific planning scheme amendment**

Preparation and fast-tracked approval of a recovery-specific Planning Scheme Amendment for fire-affected municipalities that:

- enables rapid rebuilding and reinstatement
- removes duplicative or non-essential requirements
- introduces deemed-to-comply pathways and exemptions
- standardises recovery controls across affected councils
- provides certainty for communities, councils and industry.

Key measures could include streamlined approvals for agricultural infrastructure and outbuildings, simplified overlay triggers, reduced third-party processes and time-limited recovery planning controls.

### **Extension of Clause 52.07 time-frames**

The current requirement to com-

plete replacement accommodation within 18 months is no longer realistic given:

- construction industry capacity constraints
- insurance assessment and dispute delays
- infrastructure restoration timelines
- workforce shortages and financial pressures.

Council requests this timeframe be extended to five years from the date of the damaging event to reflect contemporary disaster recovery conditions.

### **Emergency septic and wastewater policy position**

Council seeks a temporary State-supported policy approach that allows:

- streamlined approval pathways for temporary and replacement septic systems
- greater flexibility on constrained or fire-affected sites
- faster decision-making to support reinstatement of habitable dwellings.

Delays in septic approvals are currently preventing some residents from rebuilding homes.

### **Temporary use of land for recovery purposes**

Ministerial authorisation to allow the temporary use of Council and private land, without rezoning or permits, for recovery-related purposes such as:

- temporary accommodation
- recovery hubs and community support facilities
- worker accommodation
- storage, logistics and plant operations.

This flexibility would significantly assist recovery operations across the shire.

### **Fast-tracked planning pathways for rural businesses**

Council requests accelerated approval pathways for businesses critical to the regional economy, including:

- primary production
- agricultural infrastructure and processing
- tourism-related businesses
- rural industry and employment-generating uses

Additional recovery support measures could include:

- temporary relaxation of parking, access and signage requirements for relocated businesses
- rapid approvals for temporary structures such as machinery sheds, storage or

produce facilities

- simplified change-of-use approvals for temporary business operations
- exemptions for like-for-like replacement of agricultural and commercial buildings.

Economic recovery is closely linked to community recovery. Supporting businesses to reopen quickly is critical for local employment and economic stability.

### **State-supported planning recovery hub**

Council seeks State support for a Planning Recovery Hub supported by:

- two dedicated planning officers for Strathbogie Shire
- case management support for complex rebuilding applications
- fast-tracked assessment of recovery-related planning matters
- assistance for displaced residents and businesses navigating planning processes.

This would ensure timely decision-making while maintaining planning integrity.

### Strategic planning and infrastructure investment

In addition to short-term recovery measures, Council seeks support for longer-term planning work to strengthen resilience and guide future growth.

### Shire-wide bushfire study and planning scheme amendment

State funding and technical support to deliver:

- a comprehensive bushfire hazard and risk assessment
- updated bushfire mapping and planning controls
- improved settlement planning guidance
- long-term resilience measures.

### Urban growth strategy and rural land use planning

Support to complete strategic planning work including:

- an Urban Growth Strategy
- a Rural Residential and Land Use Strategy.

These strategies will guide housing supply, settlement planning and long-term land use decisions.

### Housing-enabling infrastructure investment

Targeted State investment in critical enabling infrastructure including:

- water, sewer and drainage services
- road access and transport connections
- power and telecommunications
- bushfire resilience and evacuation infrastructure.

Without these services, planning approvals alone cannot deliver new housing.

### Industrial land servicing and infrastructure

Support to service and activate industrial land across the Shire to enable:

- business relocation following fire impacts
- local employment opportunities
- long-term economic resilience.

This includes upgrades to power supply, road access, drainage and essential utilities.

### The benefit

A coordinated package of planning system relief and infrastructure investment will:

- accelerate rebuilding of homes, farms and businesses
- reduce delays and uncertainty for residents and investors

- support economic recovery and job creation
- strengthen long-term community resilience
- ensure planning decisions support safer settlements in the future.

### Conclusion

Strathbogie Shire Council is ready to work closely with the Victorian Government to deliver these measures in a way that is practical, transparent and community-focused.

With targeted State support, we can ensure rebuilding happens quickly, safely and in a way that strengthens the long-term resilience of our communities.