



26 March 2020

## COVID-19 and recovery support for bushfire-impacted communities

*While COVID-19 introduces a new challenge to bushfire recovery, the Office of Emergency Management is determined to maintain momentum and keep delivering tangible help.*

It's important for people who have been through so much to know that government, agencies and councils will continue to stand with them right through the recovery process - no matter the changing environment.

The same support mechanisms and packages will remain in place. The only change will be how we communicate this support, in response to social distance limitations and controls on large gatherings.

There may be less face-to-face interaction, but the state government will work closely with councils using other avenues, to provide assistance and ensure people know what support is available.

### **Update on NSW Government clean-up with Laing O'Rourke**

Despite the uncertainty from COVID-19, Laing O'Rourke are progressing with the clean-up process and has measures in place for this to continue in the current environment.

The NSW Bushfire clean-up program has been dedicated as an essential service by the NSW Government, which will ensure the project can continue despite the measures being implemented to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Laing O'Rourke are booking more than 200 inspections of fire-affected properties a week to determine what work needs to be done.

We are still aiming to have most of the residential properties cleared by 30 June.

It is still essential for people in the community to register for clean-up with Service NSW. Register at: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/register-opt-nsw-bushfire-clean>

### **Precautions taken by Laing O'Rourke**

The Laing O'Rourke project team is ensuring all staff are complying with the social distancing recommendations.

Clean-up contractors will not shake hands, or exchange physical greetings, and stay at least 2 metres away from others. They are also ensuring that any staff who feel unwell stay at home and that all staff practice good hygiene by washing their hands thoroughly and regularly.



## Recovery Centres update

Protections such as social distancing and controls on large gatherings extended the opening of Recovery Centres for as long as possible, but Government's response to COVID-19 means they will now have to close temporarily.

This means the four remaining Recovery Centres in Bega, Bateman's Bay, Narooma and Ulladulla will now close. The numbers visiting these centres had decreased significantly over time, it had not become unusual for only one household to register on some days.

We would like to thank the Recovery Centre staff who have supported thousands of people affected by the bushfires. Staff will now be offering online, phone and one-on-one service where possible, in line with the social distancing requirements.

## Engagement with communities following any tightening of COVID-19 rules

The Office of Emergency Management are embarking on an outreach program to inform communities of support packages and deliver vital progress reports on clean-up and recovery.

We are working closely with councils and local MPS on contingency plans.

This program may include:

- Producing more frequent newsletters
- Engaging extensively with local media
- Urging people to follow the NSW Disaster Recovery accounts on social media (both Facebook and Twitter)
- Printing hard copy updates for delivery.

Other options are being explored and we are open to Council ideas on these.

## Temporary accommodation

Our top priority remains making sure people in bushfire-impacted areas are safe and cared for.

We are aware some people don't want to move from their town and community, which is totally understandable, and we have been reaching out to them.

Any person affected by the bushfires can be put in temporary accommodation immediately by calling Service NSW on 13 77 88.

In the lead-up to Winter there is still emergency accommodation available for people affected by bushfires.

*If you have any further questions on COVID-19 please contact the 24-hour Service NSW community hotline on 13 77 88.*