




ACTION PLAN MAY 2020





Kempsey Shire Council acknowledges
the Dunghutti People as the traditional
custodians of the Macleay Valley.



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INTRODUCTION

Commencing in late 2019, Kempsey Shire was severely impacted by large scale bushfire events that resulted in 46% of the local government area being burned and more than 340 houses, outbuildings and facilities being damaged or destroyed by fire.

Burning 150,750 hectares of land, 46% of which was private property, the scale of the event was profound for the shire and severely impacted key industries including primary producers and forestry.

The huge scale of the firefighting operation involved Rural Fire Service and emergency services teams from multiple regions, coordinated by the RFS Mid North Coast team. Homes, businesses, livestock, grazing land, forestry, crops, machinery and infrastructure were lost or damaged in this devastating event.

The bushfire event compounded on the terrible impact of an ongoing drought that had already crippled much of the region. Then within months of the fires, much of the shire experienced significant rain.

The combined impacts of these events, in addition to the scale of the disaster, has resulted in unprecedented community hardship with the long term impacts of the disaster on the environment, the economy and the health and wellbeing of the community yet to be realised.

The full extent of damage to property is still being measured, and it is widely understood the

economic impact of a disaster of this scale will be significant and ongoing.

From the outset Council were closely involved in the emergency response led by the Rural Fire Service and NSW Police. In the ensuing months Council's focus shifted to actively working to support residents with the task of recovery and rebuilding.

Council has engaged with the affected communities since the first weeks to understand their immediate needs as well as the work required to rebuild. Community meetings have been held to link residents with support services, provide up to date information and hear the needs of the community. In addition, dedicated staff have provided one-on-one support for impacted residents. This ongoing work ensures that the communities and individuals have been able to share concerns and provide valuable input.

It is vital that the community has a sense of ownership in this recovery planning process. As such, a focus on engagement with these communities will continue as we support the recovery journey of the Macleay Valley.

The community resilience and cooperation that

has been the overwhelming response to these compounding disasters is a point of pride and feeds Council's confidence that the communities impacted by these natural disasters can not only recover but thrive in the wake of this terrible chapter in our history.



ABOUT KEMPSEY SHIRE

The Shire of Kempsey is a diverse region, comprising mountain and forested areas, open farmlands, urban areas, coastal beaches and seaside towns. The towns and communities of the shire are equally diverse.

The original inhabitants of this area are the people of the Dughutti Nation made up of the Dangaddi, Daingatti, Thungutti and Djunghatti people. The Dughutti nation is bordered by the Gumbaynggirr in the north, Biripi in the south and Anaiwan in the west.

European settlement began in 1827 when Capitan A.C. Innes established a cedar party north of Euroka Creek on the Macleay River.

At the heart of the Macleay Valley is Kempsey, the main service town for the community. Built on the banks of the Macleay River, it continues to be a key centre. Kempsey has the largest residential population and is the principle serviced centre for the shire, providing a range of administrative, civic, education and health services.

The Macleay River is the artery of our community that meanders through rural and urban areas. Whilst core to the valley's development, the river's

serenity is sometimes interrupted and the flood prone nature of parts of the valley largely shape distinctive land use patterns and built form.

The shire boasts over 15,000 hectares of National Parks and 79 kilometres of pristine coastline. The diverse range of individual plant species and vegetation range from coastal heathland to subtropical warm temperate and cool temperate rainforests. This broad variety of habitats support a large diversity of fauna.

The Macleay Valley has strong foundations in cattle, dairy and cropping and, in recent years, has witnessed further growth through new and higher-value agriculture production on smaller parcels of land. The Upper Macleay communities are predominately supported by the small towns of Willawarrin and Bellbrook. Both towns have a small primary school, a local pub and general store.

Farming enterprises are established throughout the shire, however those most impacted by the recent drought and bushfires are the broad range of primary producers across the Shire as well as those residents living on small acreage on the Upper Macleay.



THE BUSHFIRE EVENTS

Bushfires intensified in rural areas west of Kempsey on Saturday 26 October 2019, triggering a section 44 declaration under the Rural Fires Act 1997.

Whilst fires had burned from 10 August, the horrific day of 8 November was the day residents of the Shire are unlikely to forget. On that Friday multiple local townships were devastated as the Carrai East bushfire breached containment lines and spread rapidly in multiple directions. The fire passed through the village of Willawarrin and threatened the historic village of Bellbrook.

The fires continued for many weeks and the small communities of Bellbrook, Millbank, Five Day Creek, Boonanghi-Wittittrin, Nulla Nulla, Temagog, Wittittrin, Willawarrin, Moparrabah were all impacted.

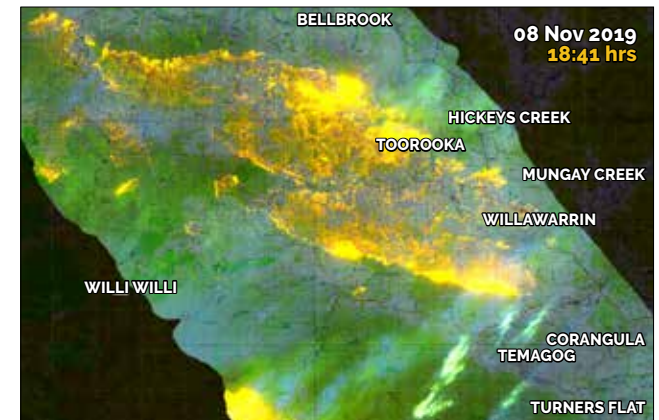
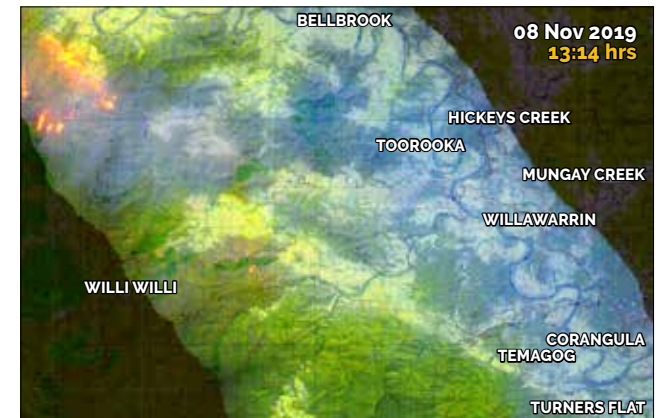
In this time, one person lost their life and over 1,050 members of the community sought shelter at the Evacuation Centres. Many

properties were left isolated without power, phone or suitable drinking water.

From the day after the disaster first struck, work began on the clean-up and recovery for these small but resilient communities even as the fires still threatened. The primary focus was to restore road access, electricity and provide potable water to the impacted areas.

Council has played a vital role in the coordination of both recovery and the emergency response as the bushfire event continues to impact our region.

In total, from 1 July to 31 December 2019, 616 Major Fire Incidents were reported in the shire, compared to 342 in the same period the year before. Overall, Kempsey Shire has been significantly impacted by the bush fire events with 46% of the local government area burnt.



BUILDING IMPACT

Destroyed:

67 houses, 3 Facilities and 170 Outbuildings

Damaged:

23 houses, 7 Facilities and 70 Outbuildings

COUNCIL BRIDGES

Destroyed: 5 Damaged: 6

TOTAL AREA BURNT

150,750 ha



NATIONAL PARK

69,345 ha (46%)



STATE FOREST

16,582 ha (11%)



PRIVATE PROPERTY

61,807 ha (41%)



RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Kempsey Shire Council commenced recovery work in the days immediately after the Carrai East fire devastated the Upper Macleay communities. The primary areas of focus were to restore access for both emergency services and those seeking to return to their properties, with many roads and bridges impacted, to restore essential services and to provide potable water to the impacted community.

In addition, numerous Council staff members worked at the Emergency Operations Centre, Rural Fire Service Centre and the Emergency Evacuation Centre during the response phase to provide support to the community. Soon afterwards the Willawarrin Recovery Centre was opened and coordinated by Council.

Council has appointed a Recovery Coordinator and regular community meetings have been held. Recovery drop-in centres continued until March 2020 to keep communities informed on the status of the fires, the progress of the recovery and the available resources. Engagement meetings were held across the shire to ensure the community has the opportunity to participate in the process of recovery.

A thank you parade and concert with music, entertainment and kids activities was planned for late March as a way for the community to thank the fire fighters and to mark the end of the bushfire season,

however this was sadly postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to the significant infrastructure works to ensure people could return home as soon as it was deemed safe, since the outset Council has worked with local organisations, charity and not-for profit groups to link them with community members for whom they could provide much-needed immediate physical and emotional support.

This includes St Vincent De Paul, Team Rubicon, Red Cross, BlazeAid, Rotary and Lions Club. Collectively these organisations have done incredible work to support the communities affected by the fires from raising funds and collecting donated items, to clearing vegetation and repairing fencing.

Council is now moving into a longer-term strategic approach to recovery with this action plan.



Figure 1 - Integrated & Holistic Recovery (EMA Community Recovery Handbook 2011).



INTENT OF THE RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

This Recovery Action Plan aims to address the damage done by both drought and bushfires which devastated the Kempsey Shire. Developed in conjunction with the community, the list of initiatives are an example of the holistic strategic approach that the organisation is taking to all recovery planning.

This plan is more than just a list of tasks required to clean up after a disaster event. It outlines programs that are designed to go "beyond immediate relief, to assist affected people to rebuild their homes, lives and services and to strengthen their capacity to cope with future disasters".*** We will assist the whole community to drive their own recovery and retain a sense of control over their lives.

Council will deliver a significant program of work involving multiple facets of the organisation, including the infrastructure services team, property and facilities, economic development and community development, all coordinated by a dedicated recovery role.

The plan was developed through a deep and ongoing level of engagement. This has involved numerous engagement events, ongoing conversations with the community and partner organisations, discussions with disaster recovery experts, as well as organic engagement through our extensive on-ground involvement right from the very start of the emergency.

Longer term recovery can only be achieved with partnership between all tiers of government, non-government agencies, the private sector and the broader community. Of these, local government is the level closest to the people affected and strategically placed to assist in the coordination of recovery program to assist rebuilding the community.

These programs will be primarily be funded via:

- \$1.416M Federal Government National Bushfire Recovery Agency
- \$1M Federal Government Drought Communities Program
- \$250,000 Bushfire Community Resilience & Economic Recovery Fund
- Additional successful competitive grant applications

The action plan outlines a locally-led approach structured around the recognised OEM framework that categorises actions into four streams of Built, Environment, Economic and Social and is expected to deliver genuine and lasting recovery support to the whole community. This Action Plan is a working document to ensure a flexible approach to recovery and will be updated as new opportunities or priorities are identified.

*** International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies, 'From Crisis to Recover





COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL

A sense of community, as well as a connection to place and the people that share it, has long been an important part of recovering from disasters in the Macleay Valley. A bushfire of this scale coupled with the preceding drought has increased the need for connection, helping neighbours and having places to meet, gather and share.

It is a priority for Council to invest in our rural communities and villages, creating opportunities for new growth and even stronger connections. Activities, events and projects focused on social outcomes will be a critical stream in helping the community have a sense of ownership in their recovery.



Community and Social

| Objective | | Actions Needed | Outputs | Actioned by | Timeframe | Status (as of 04/04/2020) |
|-----------|--|---|--|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | The Kempsey Evacuation Centres operate efficiently and effectively to support displaced residents. | KSC to provide personnel to assist operations at the Kempsey Evacuation Centres located at the Kempsey Showground and the Kempsey Macleay Bowling Club. | KSC provided over 500hours of staff support. KSC provided 24hour support at the Kempsey Showground Evacuation Centre. | KSC | 11- 27 Nov | Completed |
| 2 | Road verges are clear of burnt debris. | Council staff to undertake assessment of roadside trees to ensure motorist safety. Australian Defence Force requested to assist with the clean-up of felled roadside trees. | Over 150km of roadside trees inspected and removed where necessary. ADF personnel undertook 2 deployments to assist with the clean up of the road verges. | KSC | Nov-Dec 2020 | Completed |
| 3 | Facilitate immediate assistance for those people impacted by the bushfires | Assist the Department of Office Emergency Management in the setup of Disaster Welfare Assistance Points (DWAPs) in Willawarrin and Kempsey. Support Mobile Disaster Welfare Assistance Points. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable sites identified & leased - Furniture ordered and delivered - KSC personnel in attendance to provide advice on Council services - DWAPs promoted on social media and in the local community Mobile DWAPs undertaken in Moparrabah, Millbank and Bellbrook | KSC | November 2019 | Completed |

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|---|---|--|--|------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| 4 | Ongoing support provided to impacted landholders by linking people with key services and charitable organisations | Council led Recovery Centre to be established. | Willawarrin Recovery Centre established. | KSC | November 2019 – April 2020 | Ongoing |
| | | Relevant support services invited to be present at Recovery Centre and public meetings. | The following agencies and charities contributed to the Willawarrin Recovery Centre - Local Land Services, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP), Lifeline, Red Cross, Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul, Aussie Helpers, Team Rubicon, National Parks and Wildlife Services, Rural Fire Service and the Insurance Council of Australia. | Various agencies | | |
| | | | Community meeting held at the Park in Bellbrook – approximately 80 people in attendance | | | |
| | | | Over 70 new entries were developed to form a new 'Disaster Recovery & Relief Services' section of the Directory. | KSC | December 2019 | Completed |
| | | Online Community Directory to include details of support service directly related to Bushfire Recovery assistance. | Additional staff member from OEM working with Kempsey Shire Council on a fulltime basis | KSC/OE | December 2019 | Completed |
| | | Case management provided to impacted residents who require additional assistance. | | | January – May 2020 | Ongoing |

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|---|---|---|--|-----|---|-----------|
| 5 | Coordination of monetary donations and donated household goods | <p>Identification of Council's preferred charities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) receive monetary donations b) receive & distribute donated goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Council resolved to promote the 'Rotary Compassionate Grant for Macleay Valley Bushfire Relief' as the preferred charitable organisation for monetary donations to assist the Kempsey community. The Rotary Clubs of the Macleay Valley collaborated to facilitate this arrangement. b) Council became a registered charity for the purpose of the GIVIT online platform | KSC | <p>November 2019</p> <p>December 2019</p> | Completed |
| 6 | Impacted resident to receive offers of direct monetary assistance | Linking charitable organisations to residents who lost their homes without breaching necessary privacy requirements. | <p>Correspondence was sent to residents on behalf of the following charitable organisations offering direct assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rapid Relief Team - Tzu Chi Australia - Catholic Diocese - Anglican Church | KSC | January - April 2020 | Completed |

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| 7 | Develop a Recovery Action Plan which is reflective of community recovery priorities | A range of community engagement activities are undertaken following engagement with residents across the Shire. | Recovery Planning Workshops held at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willawarrin - Kempsey - Wittittrin | KSC | Feb- April 2020 | Completed |
| 8 | Kempsey Shire residents have the skills to effectively and safely respond to future bushfire events. | Facilitate increased community capacity to ensure improved preparedness and response capabilities. | <p><u>Individual preparedness</u> A range of free workshops will be developed and delivered focusing on the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication (personal) - Operation of key equipment (eg generators, fire pumps etc) - Preparation of the home/farm individual fire plans <p><u>Community preparedness</u> Development of a Local Bushfire Preparedness Plan</p> | <p>KSC</p> <p>KSC and the Joint Organisation of Council's</p> | After COVID 19 social distancing restrictions are lifted. | <p>Not commenced</p> <p>Not commenced</p> |

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|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| 9 | The bushfire event in November and December 2019 are suitably commemorated. | A public piece of art to be installed at Willawarrin or Bellbrook. | <p>A local artist will donate a sculpture depicting the rising phoenix. Materials to be sourced from destroyed homes and outbuildings.</p> <p>A plinth and safety fencing to be provided by Council.</p> <p>A short documentary depicting the background story to the bushfires and the sculpture</p> <p>The Macleay Bushfire 'Thank you' Parade to be undertaken through the streets of Kempsey. Parade to involve emergency response vehicles and personnel.</p> | <p>Sam Hawkins</p> <p>KSC</p> <p>KSC</p> <p>KSC</p> | <p>November 2020</p> <p>Planned for Feb 2020. Postponed until the COVID 19 restrictions are lifted.</p> | <p>Progressing</p> <p>Waiting for details of requirements</p> <p>Not commenced</p> <p>On hold</p> |
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BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Critical infrastructure has been put under incredible strain during the bushfires including road, bridges, telecommunications and water. Essential services have been restored to our communities, yet there are actions which remain outstanding and require attention in order to facilitate the needed social and economic recovery actions.

The focus of the built line of recovery encapsulates actions that will facilitate the recovery process, replace and improve community infrastructure, restore transport and access for rural communities and create a greater level of preparedness and security against future disasters, particularly flood, fire and drought.



Built Environment

| Objective | | Actions Needed | Outputs | Actioned by | Timeframe | Status (as of 04/04/2020) |
|-----------|---|--|---|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Facilitate assistance for landholders who lost stock fencing in the bushfires | Establish a BlazeAid Camp at Willawarrin | Negotiations undertaken with user groups of Willawarrin Rodeo Ground for the camp to be established at that location. Cleaning, amenities access, additional electricity and access to camp kitchen facilitated. Camp established | KSC & BlazeAid | December 2019 | Completed |
| | | Registration of landholders seeking assistance prior to the arrival of BlazeAid to the area. | Registration of approximately 100 landholders, taken, collated and forwarded onto BlazeAid. | KSC | December 2019 | Completed |
| | | Request Australian Defence Force (ADF) for assistance with fencing that directly fronts roads, National Park or State Forestry. | ADF personnel undertake two (2) deployments to Willawarrin to assist with farm fencing. | KSC & BlazeAid | February 2020 | Completed |
| | | Promote NSW Government commitment of \$209 million to support landholders to rebuilding essential boundary fencing (\$5,000 per kilometre) | Correspondence sent to 55 landholders who were registered with BlazeAid and identified as potentially eligible for this funding. | KSC (assisted by BlazeAid) | April 2020 | Progressing |

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|---|--|---|---|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2 | Destroyed homes, outbuilding and general bushfire waste is cleaned up and disposed of to assist resident's recovery. | Provide impacted residents with the information required to assist with the clean up of private property, including destroyed homes. | Waste meetings held at Bellbrook and Willawarrin. Agencies present included the Public Works Advisory, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program and NSW Farmers. | KSC | January 2020 | Completed |
| | | Team Rubicon officially invited to the Shire to assist individuals with clean-up of their properties. | Team Rubicon personnel provided assistance throughout the Shire for approximately 5 weeks. | KSC/Team Rubicon | Nov – Dec 2019 | Completed |
| | | Laing O'Rourke to be provided with relevant data to ensure all eligible residents have accessed clean-up assistance where eligible. | All contact details held by Council forwarded onto Laing O'Rourke. All known properties on the destroyed list individually contacted. | KSC/OEM | March 2020 | Completed |
| 3 | Provide residents with upgraded gravel roads to ensure adequate access for emergency vehicles. | Identify and undertake maintenance of key Council 'unmaintained' roads. | Maintenance undertaken on the following roads: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Davis Road, Wittittrin- Stoney Creek Road- Roses Road- Hickeys Creek Road (the unmaintained portion) | KSC | June 2020 & again later in 2020 | Planning underway |
| 4 | Bellbrook and Willawarrin have multi-functional community venues which are accessible to all the community. | Identify improvements to the Bellbrook & Willawarrin halls to ensure these facilities support everyday community gatherings as well as shelter in the case of an emergency. | <u>Willawarrin Hall</u> Exterior of the hall repaired, lead based paint removed and repainted. <u>Bellbrook Hall</u> New toilet block and disabled access to the hall built. Disabled carpark installed. | KSC | 30 June 2020 1 Dec 2020 | |

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|---|---|--|---|----------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 5 | Alternate accommodation options are offered to those who lost their homes who wish to stay on their properties. | Support the Minderoo and NSW Government partnership providing accommodation pods to 112 families across NSW. | KSC representative appointed to the sub-committee to assess and recommend allocation of pods. | KSC | March 2020 | Ongoing |
| | | | Eleven applications prepared and sent for consideration. | KSC | March & April 2020 | Completed |
| | | | Seven pods allocated to families in the Kempsey Shire. | Minderoo | April 2020 | Six of the seven pods installed. |
| 6 | Provide a multipurpose community space which provides a range of structured and informal leisure activities in the Upper Macleay. | Upgrade the existing Willawarrin Rodeo and Sporting Grounds into a multipurpose community precinct. | Replacement of the playground equipment | KSC | 30 Dec | Planning underway |
| | | | Refurbishment of the showground canteen | | 30 Dec 2020 | Not commenced |
| | | | Replacement of the soccer field goal posts & purchase of a line marker for the local club. | | TBD | Not commenced |
| | | | Resurface the rodeo ground improve safety for equestrian events. | | 30 June | Planning underway |

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Bushfires and drought are not only environmental threats but a high economic risk. The full extent of the impact of the 2019 bushfire disaster is yet to be totally understood but with such widespread damage and impact on key industry sectors such as agriculture and tourism, it is expected to exceed millions of dollars.

Actions identified under the economic line of recovery are interventions which will fast-track the recovery process, create new opportunities which will alleviate pressure in the impacted areas and ensure communities are given the opportunity not only to restore, but to grow and take control following such devastating events.



Economic Recovery

| Objective | | Actions Needed | Outputs | Actioned by | Timeframe | Status (as of 04/04/2020) |
|-----------|---|---|--|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | Encourage Laing O'Rourke (LOR) to engage local contractors to undertake the demolition process. | Liaison with LOR to determine joint promotional opportunities | Local contractors invited to attend an information session held at Kempsey Shire Council. Approximately 30 contractors attended session. Promotion of sub-contracting opportunities with LOR. | KSC & LOR | March 2020 | Completed |
| 2 | Attracting visitors back to affected regions. | Video footage and still photographs to be shot in the Upper Macleay to use on future campaigns | | KSC | 30 June 2020 | |
| 3 | Businesses on the Upper Macleay are supported by increased tourism. | Existing primitive camping sites are upgraded | Amenities and BBQ facilities at the Blackbird Flat upgraded | KSC | 30 June 2020 | Planning |
| 4 | Primary producers are supported in returning to full productivity. | Primary producers are given guidance on how to reassess their farming practices to best meet their individual business goals. | Farm planning workshops will be provided to primary producers covering a range of topics including: - TBC | KSC | | Planning |
| 5 | Kempsey Shire has a thriving business community. | Local businesses throughout the Shire are supported and innovation encouraged. | Council to sponsor the 2021 Macleay Valley Business Awards to celebrate business excellence and support network opportunities. | KSC | 2021 (2020 event cancelled due to COVID 19) | Donation provided to the Kempsey Chamber of Commerce |

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Although recent rain has welcomed new growth and helped the regeneration of our bush and farmland to commence, the environmental impacts of the bushfires on the local flora and fauna are expected to be felt for many years.

This plan incorporates a number of initiatives to address this important component and to increase community involvement in ongoing environmental protection.



Natural Environment

| Objective | | Actions Needed | Outputs | Actioned by | Timeframe | Status (as of 04/04/2020) |
|-----------|--|---|---|-------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Facilitate vegetation and wildlife recovery within the impacted landscape. | Engagement of Macleay Valley Landcare Network (MLN) to undertake associated programs. | <p>A series of community workshops conducted to inform landholders on methods to promote landscape recovery. Workshops to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regeneration of gully forests (wet sclerophyll). - Undertake cool season or cultural burning. - Farm wildlife habitat recovery - Replanting (in conjunction with a plant give away program) <p>Factsheets to cover workshop themes will be developed.</p> | KSC/MLN | <p>May – Dec 2020</p> <p>July 2020 (to coincide with National Tree day)</p> | Planning |
| | Road verges are clear of burnt debris. | <p>Council staff to undertake assessment of roadside trees to ensure motorist safety.</p> <p>Australian Defence Force requested to assist with the clean-up of felled roadside trees.</p> | ADF personnel undertook 2 deployments to assist with the clean up of the road verges. | KSC | | |

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