

# The ‘Mongarlowe Mozzies’ Debrief

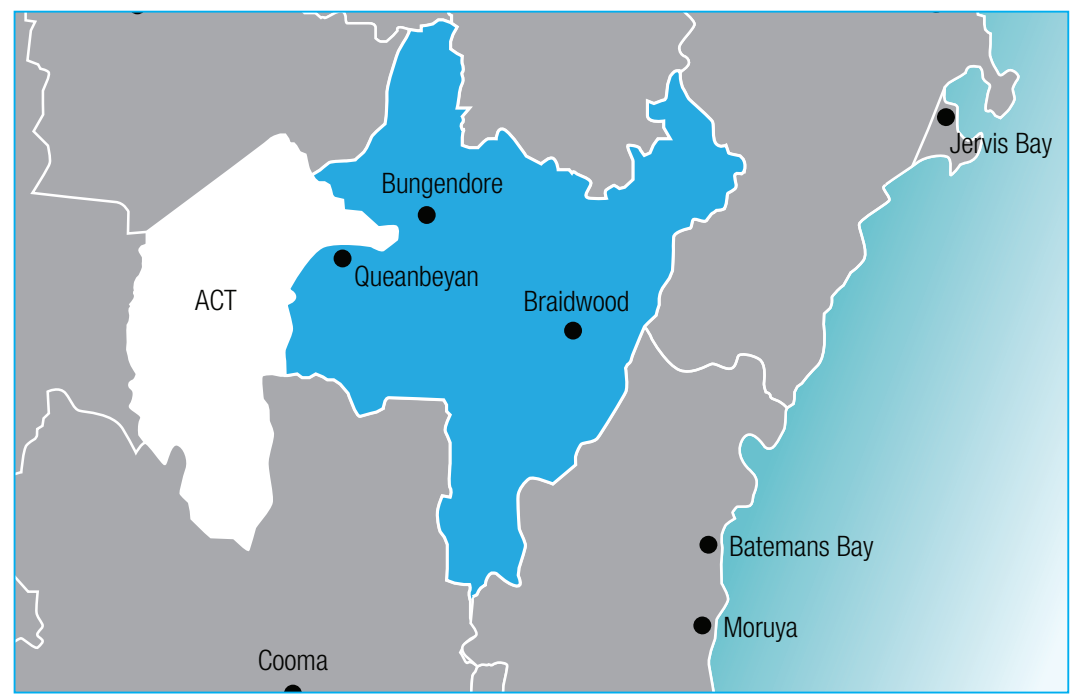
## Closure and a new beginning after the Currowan fire

### What?

For several weeks during what is now known as the Black Summer of 2019-2020, and normally a time of year dominated by tourism, fighting the massive Currowan fire became the number one priority for those living in Braidwood in the Queanbeyan Palerang region.

During the crisis, a group of people from surrounding properties banded together to help local Rural Fire Service crews protect the community of Mongarlowe (near Braidwood), becoming known as the ‘Mongarlowe Mozzies’.

In March 2020, a community event was held to bring all those who had been involved together to debrief, and to thank and honour the army of volunteers who had worked so hard to defend lives and properties.



### Why?

In the Queanbeyan-Palerang area and throughout the South Eastern NSW region, extended drought and bushfires has taken a serious toll on local residents, particularly in terms of mental health and well-being.

COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN is leading a coordinated primary mental health care response in the region. In partnership with local government and community organisations, a range of support measures are being offered with the aim of helping affected communities recover and rebuild.

One such measure is supporting community events such as the Mongarlowe Mozzies Debrief, which facilitate social connectedness and can help bring closure as well as a renewed sense of community spirit moving forwards.

### How?

The Mongarlowe Mozzies Debrief was one of several community projects awarded funding by COORDINARE through their Natural Disaster Community Grants program, aimed at supporting locals to deal with the stress of drought and recover from the recent bushfires.

The event – held in the shearing shed of a property that had been defended five times during the fires – brought together about 100 locals, including those who had fought the fires as well as all those who had supported them.

“We wanted to give everyone a sense of closure, and also a sense of ongoing community,” says Hollie Bakerboljkovac, who applied for the grant to fund the event. “We also wanted to let people know how grateful we were for what they had done, no matter what their role.”

*“The event gave people the chance to come together and connect without all the stress of the fires.”*

– Hollie Bakerboljkovac

*“People trust each other and know they can call out for help if they need it.”*

– Hollie Bakerboljkovac





## Outcomes

Locals who attended the event not only took up the opportunity to debrief after all the trauma of the fires, but also to relax, unwind, and reconnect with one another. The teenagers took charge of a hired pizza oven, younger kids had fun with a piñata, and the adults enjoyed screen-printing their own t-shirt with a special logo commemorating the Mongarlowe Mozzies.

A light-hearted awards ceremony was held to recognise people's contributions during the fires, followed by the screening of a trailer for a documentary film being made about the Mongarlowe Mozzies.

"After a high-pressure situation is over, people can feel a bit lost and like they're not needed anymore," explains Hollie. "We needed to get people together to celebrate what had been achieved as well as to talk about a forward vision... how our community could carry forward the positives from all this. I heard a lot of conversations about future plans and projects, and for me, that was the most important outcome."

Not long after the event, a farmer in the Mongarlowe area had a back injury and a group of locals went out to his property and chopped enough wood to last him the whole of winter.

"Now we've proven that we've got each other's back, people trust each other and know they can call out for help if they need it."

