

Eurobodalla Community Recovery Day

Reconnecting in the wake of the bushfires



What?

The Eurobodalla region of NSW was left reeling in the wake of Australia's Black Summer of 2019-2020. Among many affected communities, the isolated communities of Nerrigundah, Cadgee, Belowra and Tinpot were particularly hard hit. Only 15 homes were left standing out of around 50 properties, essential services were out for several weeks, and most residents were forced to re-locate to take up temporary accommodation elsewhere.

The Nerrigundah Agricultural Bureau Community Support Get-Together was a community recovery event held on 15 March to help locals in the region reconnect and re-engage, and to provide a much-needed boost to community morale.

Why?

The 2019-20 bushfires were unprecedented in their scale and duration and, in many areas, compounded the already substantial impacts of extended drought. In the South Eastern NSW region, the impact of these natural disasters on our regional and rural communities has been devastating.

COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN is leading a coordinated primary mental health care response in this region and is working in partnership with local health districts, councils, and grassroots organisations to provide targeted support to help local communities recover and rebuild.

Social connectedness and emotional well-being are critical elements in the recovery process. Events such as the Nerrigundah Agricultural Bureau Community Support Get-Together represent an important opportunity for people to connect and support one another during this very challenging time.

“The day was especially significant to those who hadn't had a chance to get together with other locals since the fires.”

– John Cowan, event organiser

How?

The Nerrigundah event 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 was conceived by Nerrigundah local, John Cowan, who had been liaising with a group of Canberrans who had raised money to help those who had lost their homes in the fire. “One of the Canberra group said it would be great if they could come and meet some of the people they'd raised money for” says John. John subsequently applied for and received a community grant from COORDINARE to fund a get-together.

“I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to bring together those who had worked so enthusiastically to help people who they didn't know, but whose lives they knew had been devastated by the fires, with the very grateful recipients of their fundraising.”

“These small gestures remind us that people do actually care, and this is very important to us psychologically.”

– John Cowan, event organiser



Outcomes

Held at Bodalla's Dairy Shed, the event brought together about 40 people for a meal and an opportunity to share their experiences. Although fighting the fires had been a traumatising time, John says the event itself proved "a very joyful and moving occasion."

"Several of the locals said the event was especially significant to them because they hadn't had a chance to get together with other locals since the fires, with so many of them living in temporary accommodation in other communities. It was an opportunity to compare experiences, check on the welfare of friends and neighbours, and share memories of a place that was so dear to the hearts of all of them."

Since the event, a big clean-up has been underway, although John says the community will look quite different once rebuilding is complete, with all its historic buildings now demolished. "The worst time was before the clean-up began," he says. "We were in limbo then, but now we're moving forward again, and this is a great thing."

"There is generally an air of optimism about the place, and these small gestures - the Canberra fundraising and the COORDINARE grants - remind us that yes, people do actually care about their fellow citizens, and this is very important to us psychologically."

