

Date: 19 December, 2024

Towong Community Sets Priorities for Continued Bushfire Recovery

Border Trust, the Community Foundation for the Albury Wodonga Region, has shared the results of recent community consultation that highlights the ongoing needs and priorities of the Towong Shire as it continues to recover from the 2019-2020 Victorian bushfires.

Entrusted by the Victorian Government to manage Victorian Bushfire Appeal funds, Border Trust established the Towong Community Bushfire Disaster Relief Fund in 2021. Border Trust has worked closely with the community over the past several years to ensure funds have been efficiently and effectively directed to address local needs. This latest consultation is further demonstration of Border Trust's ongoing commitment to working alongside the community to identify local priorities and ensure the remaining funds are directed where they will have the greatest impact.

Since its launch in 2021, the Towong Community Bushfire Disaster Relief Fund has distributed \$2.05 million to support a wide range of recovery initiatives, from community gardens and hall refurbishments to health and wellbeing programs. However, as recovery evolves, this consultation highlights emerging priorities that reflect the community's current and future needs.

The survey and consultation identified several critical areas requiring investment:

- **Mental Health and Community Connection:** Respondents emphasised the importance of programs that reduce social isolation and build resilience, particularly in the face of ongoing challenges from the disaster.
- **Youth and Education:** Initiatives to assist young people, including driving programs and career pathway opportunities, were highlighted as essential to keeping young residents connected to the region.
- **Infrastructure and Community Spaces:** Upgrades to community halls, outdoor recreation facilities, and disaster relief centres were prioritised to enhance safety, usability, and preparedness.
- **Sustainable Recovery Projects:** Suggestions included environmental initiatives, preventative health programs, and support for local organisations to ensure ongoing benefits for the entire community.
- **Economic Growth and Tourism:** Community members proposed projects to promote tourism, develop micro-industries, and support local businesses to create sustainable economic benefits.

Community members also recognised the importance of balancing immediate funding needs with a long-term approach. Many supported the distribution of remaining funds for future or longer-term initiatives, noting that recovery is a multi-year process and that additional time would allow for the development of impactful and sustainable projects.

Sharyn Nankervis from Towong, who is also Towong Soldiers Memorial Hall committee member reflected on the process, saying, *'It's reassuring to see Border Trust working closely with the community to ensure these funds are managed and distributed responsibly. Their commitment to understanding our priorities and directing support where it's most needed gives us confidence that funding of the recovery process is in good hands.'*

Sue Gold, Executive Officer at Border Trust, added, *‘These survey results provide invaluable insights into the current and emerging needs of the Towong Shire. The results mirror feedback we’ve received via our on-the-ground community engagement and will help us prioritise projects that not only address urgent challenges but also create enduring benefits for the community. Border Trust’s approach has always been about listening to the community, and this consultation ensures we can continue to direct the remaining funds to where they will have the greatest impact.’*

Border Trust is committed to working alongside local organisations and residents to ensure the remaining \$800,000 is allocated effectively. Future grants will focus on initiatives that foster community resilience, enhance mental health and wellbeing, and support vulnerable groups, while also promoting community connection.

For More Information

To learn more about the Towong Community Bushfire Disaster Relief Fund or the projects it has supported, visit [Towong Community Bushfire Disaster Relief Fund – Border Trust](#).

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ABOUT THE TOWONG COMMUNITY BUSHFIRE DISASTER RELIEF FUND

The Towong Community Bushfire Disaster Relief Fund was established in response to the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires. Entrusted by the Victorian Government to distribute these funds on behalf of Bushfire Recovery Victoria and the Victorian Bushfire Appeal, Border Trust has worked in partnership with the local community to identify needs and priorities for recovery.

Alongside the Community Enterprise Foundation (covering the Alpine LGA) and the East Gippsland Community Foundation (covering East Gippsland), Border Trust oversees the distribution of \$2.85 million through targeted grant programs to support long-term recovery initiatives across the Towong Shire.

We thank the Victorian Bushfire Appeal and the generosity of public donors for enabling this place-based distribution, and we look forward to continuing to invest in significant, community-identified priorities that strengthen and support Towong’s recovery journey.