

Southern Downs Regional Council

LOCAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Recovery Narrative

About our community

The Southern Downs Regional Council area is located in South East Queensland, about 160 kilometres south-west of the Brisbane CBD. The Southern Downs Regional Council area is bounded by the Toowoomba Regional Council area and the Lockyer Valley Regional Council area in the north, the Scenic Rim Regional Council in the north-east, the New South Wales border in the south-east and south, and the Goondiwindi Regional Council area in the west. The Southern Downs region has a land area of 7122km², a population of 35,601 (2018) and a density of 0.05 persons per hectare. It was created in 2008 from a merger of the Shire of Warwick and the Shire of Stanthorpe. The original inhabitants of the Southern Downs area are the Githabul and Kambuwal people.

The Southern Downs Regional Council area is predominantly rural, with numerous small townships. The largest townships are Warwick and Stanthorpe, with smaller townships at Allora, Killarney, Wallangarra and Yangan. The Council area encompasses a total land area of about 7100km². Rural land is used largely for agriculture, particularly sheep and cattle grazing, orcharding, and vegetable and grain growing. Forestry and viticulture are also important industries.

Key features of the Council area include Girraween National Park, Main Range National Park, Sundown National Park, Mount Dumaresq Conservation Park, Morgan Park Regional Park, numerous wineries, Australian Rodeo Heritage Centre, Glengallan Homestead & Heritage Centre, Southern Downs Steam Railway, Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery, Warwick Art Gallery, Pringle Cottage, Connolly Dam, Glenlyon Dam, Leslie Dam, Storm King Dam, and various state forests.

The Southern Downs local government area has been drought declared which has substantially impacted residents. In September 2019, the Southern Queensland Bushfires impacted communities across the Southern Downs, specifically Stanthorpe, Applethorpe, and Ballandean. Over 3,000 hectares of land was impacted, with a larger number of rural residential landholders directly affected in these bushfires with damage to houses, fences, farm sheds and other infrastructure. Several horticulture enterprises sustained significant damage to crops, cool rooms, irrigation and water supply infrastructure, tree and vine crops, along with a significant amount of hail netting and fencing. Communities around Swanfels, Maryvale, Tregony, Upper Freestone and Emu Vale were impacted by the Eastern Queensland Bushfires in November 2019. An estimated 50,000 hectares of agricultural land was destroyed/damaged, primary producers lost stock and there was significant damage to infrastructure, including many hundreds of kilometres of fencing.

Council and vision statement

Our recovery will be founded on a collective, community led approach, enabled by inclusive communication and partnerships. Our approach will be to ensure the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt communities are able to improve capacity, grow and prosper to enhance community resilience. The Southern Downs Recovery and Resilience Plan was endorsed by Southern Downs Regional Council on 19 February 2020.

Council values

- Success
- Determination
- Resilience
- Commitment

Recovery and Resilience Group

Established: Monday 9 September 2019

Chaired by: Cr Jo McNally, Deputy Mayor Southern Downs Regional Council

Recovery and Resilience Taskforces

- Human and Social
- Economic
- Environment and Water
- Infrastructure and Roads and Transport
- Buildings

Key stakeholders

Lead state government agencies, community groups, non-government organisations/non-government associations, local businesses and trader associations, service providers and other invested parties. Stakeholders included the following to name but a few, Southern Downs Regional Council, Southern Downs region community members, Australian Red Cross, Lifeline, Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, Department of Housing and Public Works, Queensland Health, Queensland Fire and Emergency Service, Queensland Police Service, Rural Fire Services Queensland, State Emergency Services, Queensland Reconstruction Authority, GIVIT, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Ambulance Service, Department of Environment and Science, Department of Education and Ergon Energy.

Recovery and resilience themes

1. Response: ensure community safety.
2. Rebuilding: bring the community forward to a new normal.
3. Restoration: working together to repair and re-establish community linkages across the lines of recovery.
4. Resilience: embed the principle in all activities to mitigate, improve and build betterment for the community.

Damage and Impacts

Human and Social

- Community wellbeing - experiencing lasting effects of the Region's most severe drought, compounded by the bushfire impacts.
- Community wellbeing – short-term evacuations of Stanthorpe, Applethorpe, Ballandean and Thulimbah communities – 135 people in Stanthorpe evacuation centre, 185 people in Leslie Dam evacuation centre and 12 people in emergency accommodation in Warwick.
- Community wellbeing – residents not able to return to the areas of Happy Valley, Glenlyon Drive, Nelson Crescent, McLeod Court for an extended period of time due to bushfires / road closures
- Community wellbeing/mental health – pockets of acute disadvantage presented at Recovery Hub
- Community wellbeing – psychosocial wellbeing of individuals / families affected.
- Community wellbeing – psychosocial wellbeing of Killarney community members as a result of 25,000 litres town water supply being used by QFES for fire suppression across Cunningham's Gap – reduced quantity of water available for community use.
- Community wellbeing - Two people injured by vehicle and taken to hospital.
- Isolation – land owners unable to return to their properties in the area west of the New England Highway, between Arico and Matthews Lane in the north and Plant Lane in the south.
- Isolation for children due to school closures - Amiens, Applethorpe, Ballandean, Dalveen, Pozieres, Stanthorpe, The Summit and Thulimbah State Schools; Stanthorpe High School and St Joseph's School, Stanthorpe – closed for 2-3 days. Decrease of 23 per cent in school enrolments across the region.
- Essential Services - loss of power and water to affected communities.
- Community Engagement – postponement of Chamber of Commerce awards events in Warwick and Stanthorpe.
- Community Engagement – challenging community dynamic due to de-amalgamation process.
- Community strength and willingness to support each other, donate and help others in need.
- Public health concerns – increase in presentations of respiratory related illnesses at local hospitals and health services due to reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- Public health concerns – decrease in attendance at community events due to reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- 11 staff evacuated from Spicers Peak Lodge from the 11 November until the 29 November 2019.
- Increased burden on Council funding resources through requests for event funding and increased urban design planning processes required to support communities in recovery.

Economic

- Loss of income to community members due to forced weekend closures of small businesses.
- Loss of income to community members due to evacuations.
- Increased financial burden to community members – reports of community members not being able to work due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- Increased financial burden to community members having to care for family members experiencing respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- Increased financial burden to community members having to move away from the region for extended periods due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.

- Increased financial burden to community members having to purchase additional medication due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
- Increased financial burden to community members as a result of having to replace tank water due to continued effects of ash and fire suppressant on water supply quality due to smoke generated from bushfires.
- Increased financial burden to community members due to loss of employment as a result of businesses closing due to impacts associated with bushfires.
- Increased financial burden to primary producers due to loss of feed – 50,000 hectares of agricultural and forestry land lost as a result of bushfires around Swanfels, Tregony, Upper Freestone, Emu Vale and Maryvale.
- Loss of income/profits to landholders across the region – water allocated against pre-existing commercial agreements (private water licenses) used by QFES for fire fighting purposes.
- Loss of income/profits for local suppliers due to donations of goods to the region.
- Loss of income/profits to McDonalds and Caltex service station due to loss of power and burst water main.
- Loss of income/profits to specific businesses along the New England Highway such as Gap Creek Moto Club and Bestbrook Mountain Farmstay – due to road closures from 13 November to 20 December 2019 from bushfire damage.
- Loss of income/profits for tourism industry - perception that visitors were unable to attend local tourist attractions – accommodation occupancy reduced by 45 per cent.
- Loss of income/profits for tourism industry and small businesses due to closure of Cunningham's Gap between 13 November to 16 December 2019 – tourists used alternate road routes.
- Loss of income/profits for tourism industry and small businesses - decrease in the number of tourists visiting the region due to reduced air quality as a result of smoke generated from bushfires.
- Increased freight costs for agriculture and viticulture industries, primary producers and small businesses due to closure of Cunningham's Gap (freight transportation diverted through Gatton and Toowoomba 13 November to 16 December 2019) – Cunningham Highway is a national freight transportation route.
- Loss of income/profits to agriculture and viticulture industries, transportation and freight companies, stock agents due to major highway closures
- Loss of income/profits to primary producers - \$111,000 worth of livestock lost.
- Loss of income/profits to Girraween National Park – no camping permits issued due to threat of bushfires and major impact on tourism for the Region.
- Fire impacts on good quality agricultural land.
- Increased financial burden on Council to pay for costs of laundering bedding from Warwick evacuation centre.
- Increased financial burden on Council due to storage and logistics associated with donated goods.
- Increased financial burden on Council due to impacts on capital and operations works program.
- Increased financial burden on Council due to having to undertaking a marketing campaign to promote the region to counteract media's portrayal of bushfires impact.
- Financial burden as some properties not insured and some properties are under-insured.

Damage and Impacts (cont.)

Environment and Water

- Large pockets of vegetation destroyed, native bushland around and inside affected areas.
- Threat to unique flora and fauna endemic to the region.
- Generation of additional waste and landfill as a result of burnt items.
- Public health concerns due to continued effects of ash and fire suppressant on roofing, water supply and air quality due to smoke generated from bushfires.
- Closure of Glen Rock State Forest and Girraween and Sundown National Parks.
- Biosecurity concerns – risk of weed and seed spread due to influx of fodder received from across Australia.
- Public health – potential incorrect handling and transport of asbestos materials burnt/destroyed by bushfire.
- Public health concerns – need to ensure quality of donated water delivered in cubes and trucks.
- Public health concerns – reduced air quality as a result of smoke generated from bushfires.
- Power outages for 14 hours across affected communities and at Stanthorpe Hospital.
- Ongoing water restrictions due to drought.
- Wildlife carers have been supporting impacted animals.
- Damage to water supply assets.
- Water main burst outside McDonalds on the New England Highway.
- Damage to Spicers Peak walking trails.
- 3,000 hectares of agricultural land burnt across Stanthorpe, Applethorpe, Ballandean, Swanfels, Tregony, Upper Freestone, Emu Vale and edge of Maryvale.
- 50,000 hectares of agricultural land impacted across Swanfels, Tregony, Upper Freestone, Emu Vale and Maryvale.

Buildings

- Damage to Energy Queensland Infrastructure.
- Damage to Queensland College of Wine Tourism.
- Damage to housing, community facilities and fence lines, farms sheds and other infrastructure.
- Several horticulture enterprises sustained significant damage to cool rooms, irrigation and water supply infrastructure and hail netting.
- Concerns regarding reduced life of Stanthorpe waste facility due increased volume of waste received from bushfire. Current life expectancy is until December 2020.
- One pump at water treatment plant damaged – reduced capacity at facility for 24 hours.
- Damage to two state schools in the region.
- Hundreds of kilometers of fencing damaged/destroyed around Swanfels, Tregony, Upper Freestone, Emu Vale and Maryvale.

Infrastructure and Roads and Transport

- Road closures occurred when evacuation orders were issued – Plant Lane (BWT); Applethorpe (Glenlyon Drive, Sims Lane, Pugh Lane, Roessler Avenue and Johnson Lane); Stanthorpe (Nelson Court, McKenzie Street, Passmore Road, Caves Road and Old Caves Road).
- Road corridors of concern due to burnt trees threatening to fall on road.
- Damage sustained to roadside furniture - Plant Lane (BWT); Applethorpe (Glenlyon Drive and Sims Lane); Stanthorpe (Nelson Court, Connor Street, Passmore Road, Caves Road and McKillop Lane).
- Aboveground power cabling damaged.
- Power poles in Applethorpe damaged.
- Cunningham Highway closed in both directions at Aratula (Cunningham's Gap) – 13 -28 November 2019 due to bushfire and rock falls. Some damage to road pavement.
- Spring Creek Road reduced to one lane due to boulder on road.

Recovery Tasks

1. Undertake rapid damage assessments.
2. Establish a Community Recovery Hub.
3. Provide emergency hardship payments.
4. Inspect and remove burnt trees as required from road corridors.
5. Identify and manage personal hardship cases.
6. Issue community messaging that “we are open for business”.
7. Assess human, health, and social impacts.
8. Attend Rural Fire debrief to capture learnings.
9. In partnership with the relevant agencies, provide access to psychosocial support services when required.
10. Facilitate wellbeing support to council staff affected by the bushfires.
11. Assess the economic impact on tourism, small business, agriculture, viticulture and primary producers and promote opportunities to drive economic recovery.
12. Assess resilience of critical infrastructure.
13. Assess environmental impacts across the bushfire affected areas.
14. Seek funding opportunities to support recovery and resilience across Human Social and Economic with particular attention to accumulative effects of disasters.
15. Seek funding opportunities to develop a database to capture baseline data of ecosystems across the region, in order to measure impacts from bushfires.
16. Coordinate donations and ensure that community/volunteers are recognised and thanked for their efforts.
17. Investigate opportunities and lobby for more resilient infrastructure and programs that support the short and long-term wellbeing of the community.
17. Work in partnership with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services to conduct hazard and risk assessments for bushfires, and develop education initiatives to build resilience through knowledge of their risk.
18. Assist short and medium-term recovery, and be a conduit to support services as required.
19. Embed Planners, Economic and Community Development Officer/s into the community to build long-term resilience strategies. Capture this forward direction in the form of the Granite Belt Vision and Action Plan.
20. Support community recovery through community events.
21. Develop and implement weed and seed management programs.
22. Repair property fencing.
23. Test water quality.
24. Test air quality.
25. Develop and implement a communication strategy regarding water and air quality.
26. Immediate repair of roads and roadside furniture.
27. Provide water to those affected properties not on town water supply to assist with wash down of houses to remove suppressant used by QFES on bushfire (2000 litres with an option to purchase an additional 2000 litres).
28. Repair community facilities.
29. Reopen schools.
30. Reopen national parks.
31. Develop and implement a tourism campaign.
32. Payment of SDRC Rates Notice – an additional month approved for all residents.
33. Stanthorpe Waste Facility – Waste levy fee waived for bushfire waste.
34. SDRC temporarily lifted the water restrictions of 100L/day/person.
35. Work with Chamber of Commerce to assist in rescheduling awards events.
36. Update region maps to include bushfire overlays and ensure accurate mapping of fire breaks.
37. Transition community members from evacuation centres into temporary/long-term accommodation.
38. Establish and implement re-skilling project for those community members who have lost their jobs.
39. Manage requests from community for sponsorship, events and funding towards activities and fundraisers to help promote and celebrate region.
40. Manage the waste disposal associated with the bushfire events and ensure appropriate waste levy and grants are obtained.

Recovery Objectives

- Essential services - Power, water, waste, telecommunications – repaired and restored -short term
- Community health, wellbeing and safety restored and resilience improved - short term
- Economic activity restored and resilience improved - short and medium term
- Support for and continuation of key community events - short, medium, long/ongoing
- Confidence in the tourism market restored - medium
- Infrastructure is restored – property fencing, roadside furniture and water supply assets - short and medium
- Environmental restoration and protection (prevention of spread of weeds and seeds)- short and medium
- Environmental restoration and protection (unique flora and fauna endemic to the region) - short and medium
- Develop a database to capture baseline data of ecosystems across the region- medium to long term
- Develop a revegetation plan to enhance natural buffers and critical ecosystems that contribute to resilience (funding dependent) - medium to long term
- Increase community awareness and preparedness for all hazards through community engagement- ongoing
- Quarterly meetings of Southern Downs Recovery and Resilience Taskforces reporting to LDMG - short to medium
- Continue to implement long-term resilience strategies as part of the Granite Belt planning process - ongoing
- Establish a long-term vision and action plan that helps reposition the community - medium to long term
- Secure the economic future of the region - medium – long term
- Community members reach a state of recovery, including being able to make decisions about destroyed or damaged property - short, medium-long, ongoing
- An effective waste management program is implemented - medium-long and ongoing

Measures of Success

Human and Social

- Community members have returned home.
- Community members have transitioned from evacuation centres into temporary/long-term accommodation.
- Community members have returned to work.
- Children have returned to school.
- Community members have accessed financial assistance where available.
- Community members have accessed psychosocial support where required.
- Community and visitors support and participate in community events.
- Funding secured to support community recovery and resilience strategies.
- Education initiatives to build resilience through knowledge of risk assessments has been implemented.
- Planners, Economic and Community Development Officer/s have been embedded into the community to support recovery initiatives.
- Coordination of fundraising and donation activities.
- Stronger partnerships and relationships built with communities and local non-government organisations.
- Residents choosing to stay and remain in communities, schools and sporting organisations

Economic

- Small businesses are trading at capacity.
- Community events are held and well attended, adding value to civic life.
- National parks, reserves and camping grounds have reopened and are receiving tourists.
- Tourism campaign has been implemented and results in an increase in tourism numbers.
- Strategies to support agriculture, viticulture and agriculture industries have been implemented and are successful.
- Community members have been reskilled and secured new employment across the region.
- Council has finalised and implemented the *Granite Belt Urban Design Framework* and is utilising the document to support initiatives and seek funding sources.
- Chamber of Commerce awards events have been held in Warwick and Stanthorpe.
- Tourism and visitor number have increased and are supporting a healthy economy.

Infrastructure and Roads and Transport

- All roads inspected for damage and risk of fallen trees - all now open.
- All water assets, pumps, treatment plants inspected and operating at full capacity.
- Road furniture has been repaired.
- Water treatment plant is fully operational.
- Resilient infrastructure programs implemented and are successful.

Environment and Water

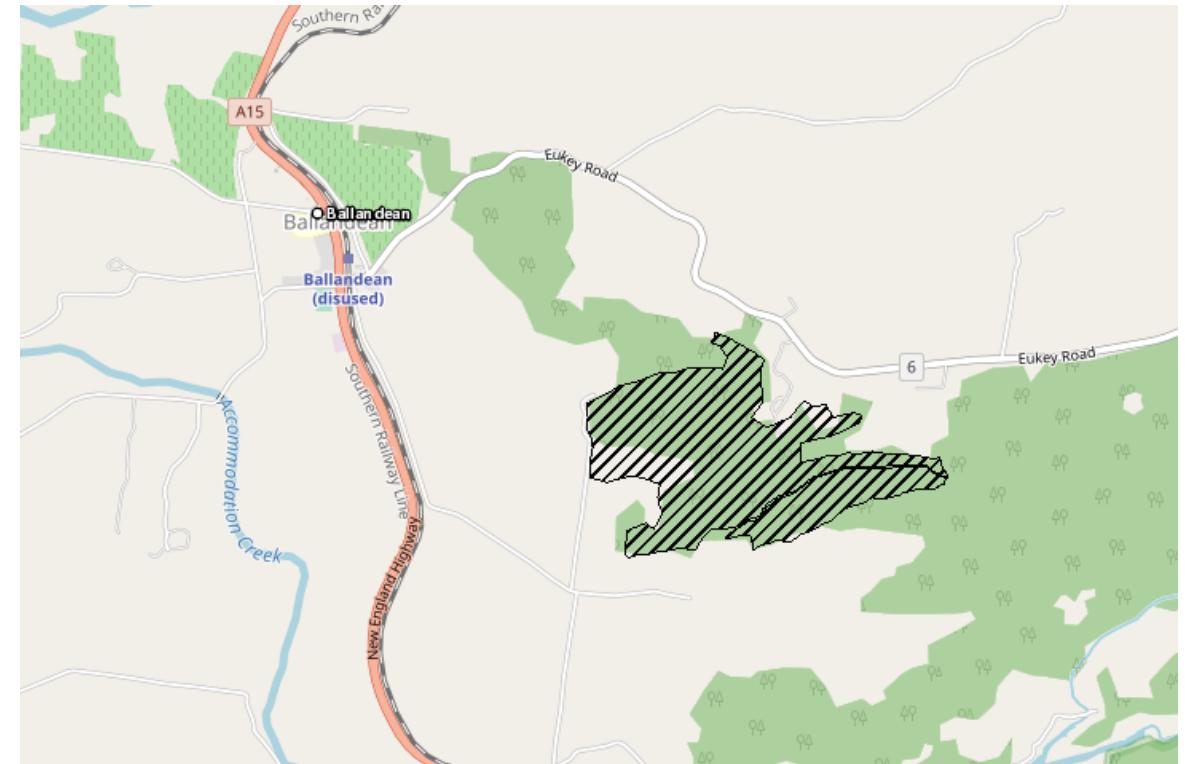
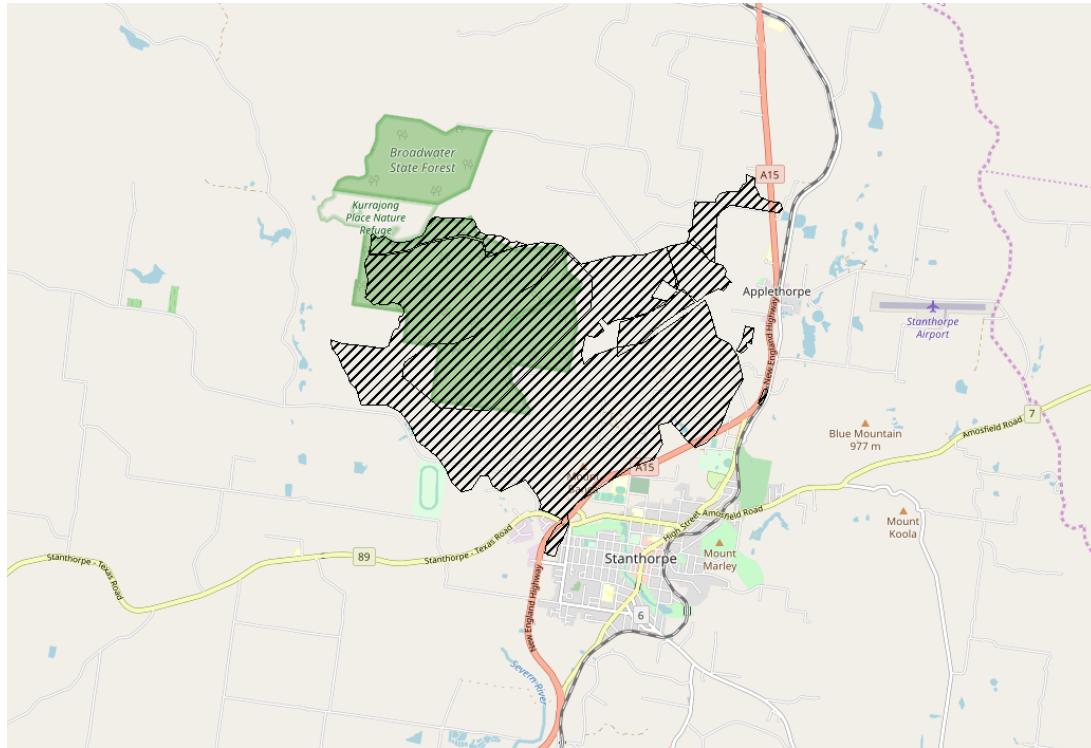
- Waste transfer stations open and unmanned bin compounds fully operational.
- Domestic waste collection services restored.
- Waste program is identified and implemented in order to support recovery efforts .
- National parks, reserves and camping grounds have reopened.
- All parks and public spaces open.
- Trees blocking road and rail corridors have been removed.
- Safety procedures for handling and transporting asbestos materials have been implemented and communicated to the community.
- Weed seed spread awareness and management program has been implemented, and is successful.
- Water quality issues have been resolved.
- Public health restored.
- Essential services – water and waste has been repaired and restored.
- Support and additional resources have been provided to wildlife carers.
- Rehabilitation plans in place for impacted rare and threatened flora.
- Funding secured to develop a database to capture baseline data of ecosystems across the region.

Buildings

- Energy Queensland infrastructure has been repaired and is fully operational.
- Repairs to Queensland College of Wine and Tourism have been completed.
- Housing, community facilities and fencing has been repaired.
- School facilities have been restored.
- Affected roof wash downs complete.
- Owners of destroyed residences have been supported to make recovery decisions to support their needs.

Damage – Southern Queensland Bushfire

(6-12 September 2019)



Applethorpe and Stanthorpe Fire Area

Ballandean Fire Area

Activations for Disaster Recovery Funding Assistance – Southern Queensland Bushfire

(6-12 September 2019)

For details of activations and assistance measures visit www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations

Disaster relief measure

- Counter Disaster Operations
- Essential Services Safety and Reconnection Scheme **
- Personal Hardship Assistance Scheme (PHAS) **
- Disaster Assistance (Not-for-Profit Orgs) Loans
- Disaster Assistance (Essential Working Capital) Loans Scheme for not-for-profit organisations
- Disaster Assistance (Small Business Loans)
- Disaster Assistance (Essential Working Capital) Loans Scheme for small business
- Disaster Assistance (Primary Producers) Loans
- Disaster Assistance (Essential Working Capital) Loans Scheme for primary producers
- Freight Subsidies for primary producers

Activation date

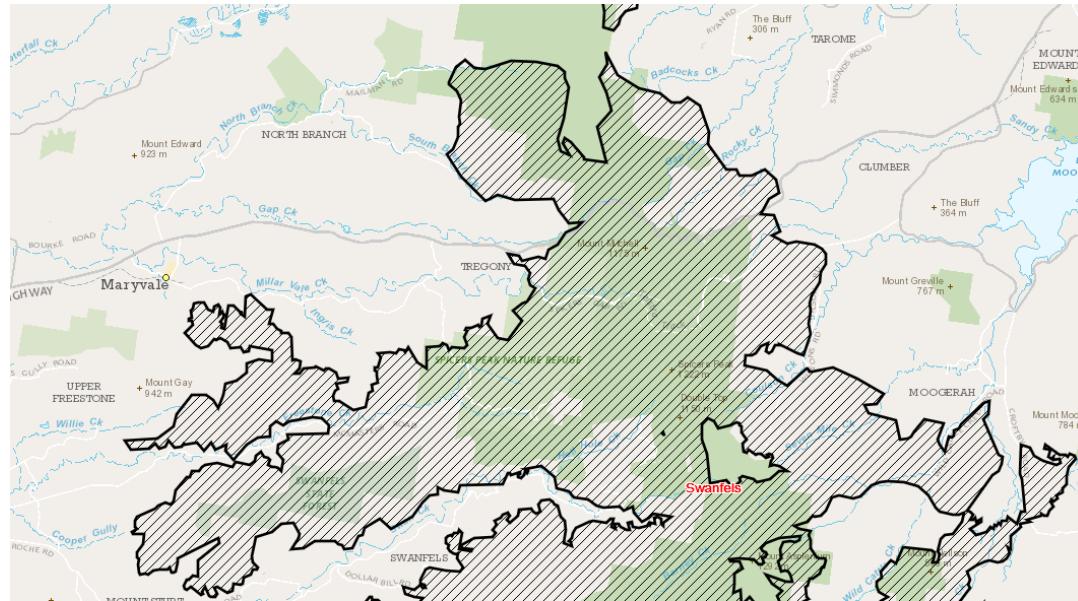
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** The PHAS and ESSRS for Southern Downs is limited to Applethorpe and Thulimbah. The Emergency Hardship Assistance component of the PHAS commences for Applethorpe on 7 September 2019 and on 16 September 2019 for Thulimbah.

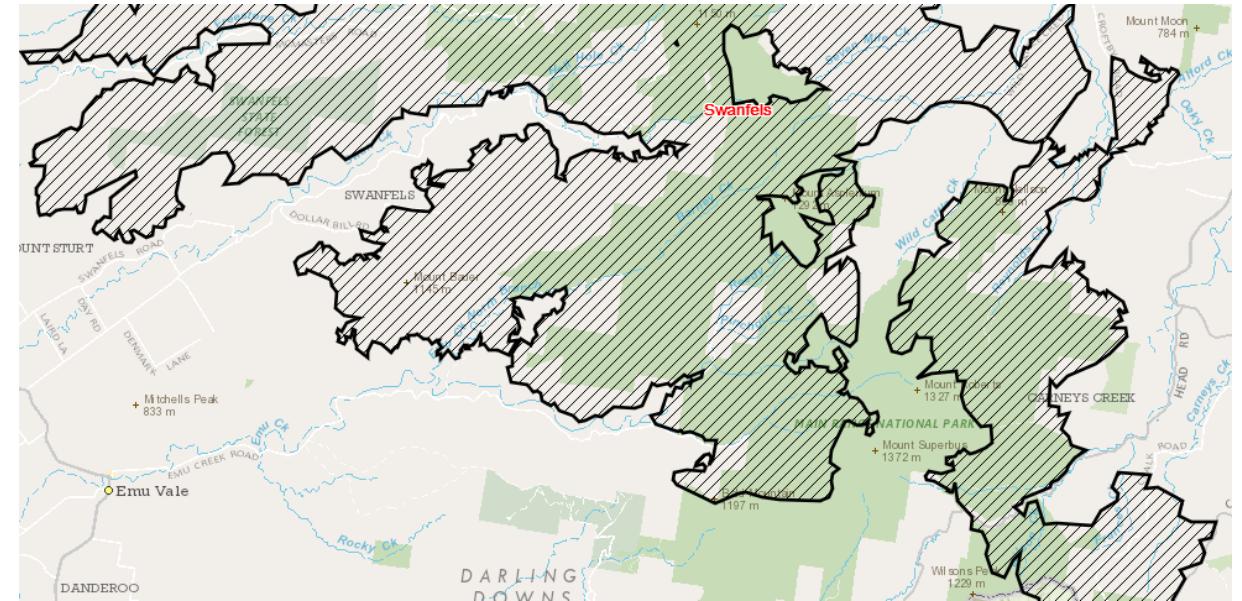
Damage - Locations

Activations Summary

Damage – Eastern Queensland Bushfire (8 November – 19 December 2019)



Maryvale, Tregony, Upper Freestone - area



Swanfels and Emu Vale - area

Activations for Disaster Recovery Funding Assistance - Eastern Queensland Bushfire (8 November – 19 December 2019)

For details of activations and assistance measures visit www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations

Disaster relief measure

- Counter Disaster Operations
- Reconstruction of Essential Public Assets (REPA)
- Extraordinary Bushfire Assistance (Primary Producers) Loans**
- Freight Subsidies for primary producers

** Category B concessional loans up to \$500,000 for small businesses and primary producers for replacement of assets destroyed by bushfires or for essential working capital

Activation date

- 18/11/2019
- 20/11/2019
- 31/01/2020
- 13/09/2019

Exceptional Category C and D assistance measures

DRFA Category	Package Type	Assistance Measures
Category C	Community Recovery Package	Mental Health and Wellbeing
		Community Development Fund
		Flexible Funding Grants
Category D	Increased special disaster assistance grants (including Category C component)	Grants for primary producers of up to \$75,000
	Payment to bushfire affected governments	\$1M payments to severely impacted local governments