

TENTERFIELD BUSHFIRE LEARNING REVIEW: SUMMARY FINDINGS

SEPTEMBER 2024



AUTHORS

This Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review has been led by researchers Dr Zoë D’Arcy and Dr Adriana Keating at Monash University’s Fire to Flourish.

Many thanks to the Tenterfield community for contributing your insights. Particular thanks to Sharon Tierney (TAFE NSW), Josh Moylan, Wendy Skilbeck, Chrissy McLatchey (Country Women’s Association), Scott Mack (NSW Rural Fire Service) and Rob Evans (Friends of Tenterfield Aerodrome).

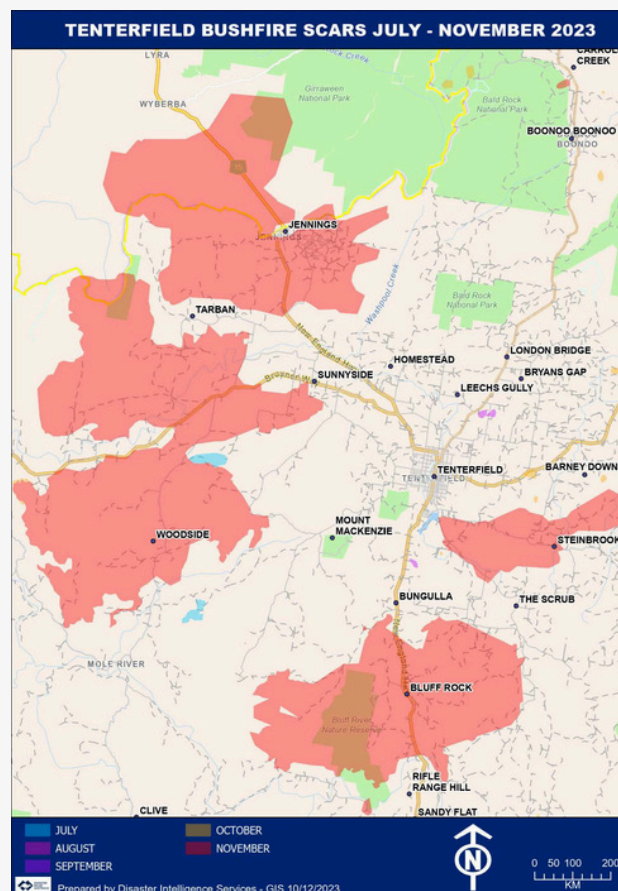
“ We can’t keep doing the things we’ve been doing for years. We have to change the way we’re doing it. We need to involve the community more to reduce the risk. ”
Tenterfield Community Advisor

BACKGROUND

Tenterfield and its surrounding region was impacted by significant bushfires in October and November 2023. Almost immediately afterwards, Fire to Flourish was invited by local residents to conduct a post-event learning review. This provided an opportunity to explore how to help facilitate community-led disaster resilience strengthening.

This community-led review is critical for Tenterfield. Much of the population within the town and in the surrounding districts have been impacted by a range of disastrous events in recent years. These include long-term drought, bushfires in February 2019, the 2019-20 bushfire season, floods in 2022, and the COVID 19 pandemic. Climate change forecasts indicate that the region is likely to continue to experience more frequent fires.

Tenterfield community members have shown significant resilience in the face of these disasters. But as personal resilience is pushed to the limits and many residents live with significant socioeconomic disadvantage, strengthening the existing community disaster resilience in Tenterfield is a must.



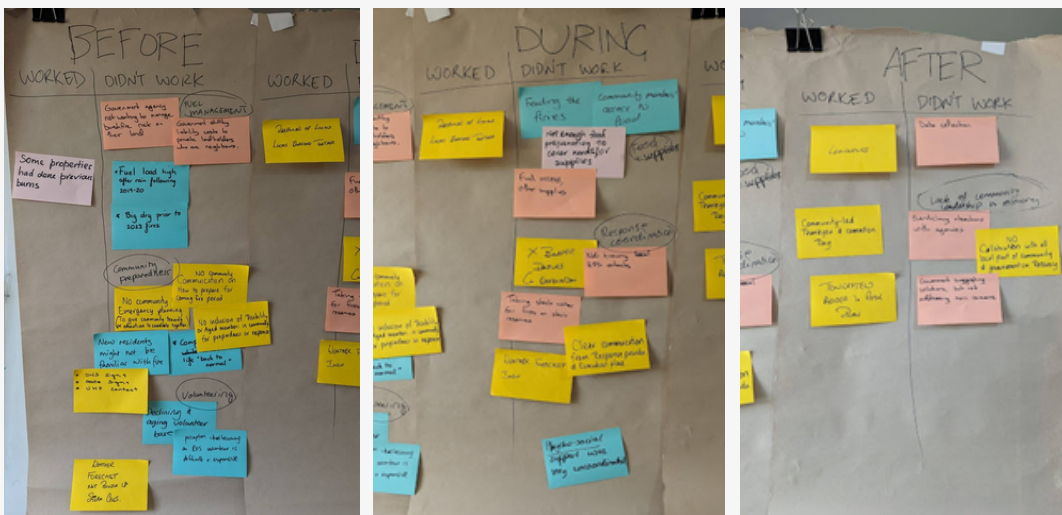
This document outlines the findings of the Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review and the community-developed strategic priorities for a new disaster resilience funding grant in Tenterfield.

WHAT WAS THE TENTERFIELD BUSHFIRE LEARNING REVIEW?

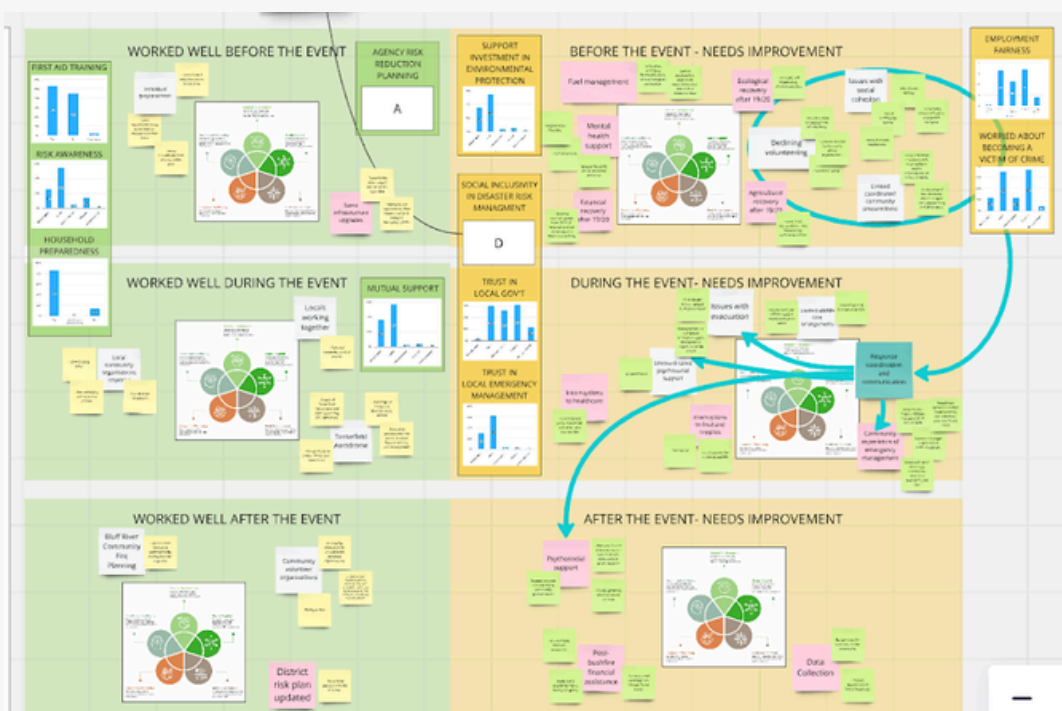
Tenterfield community members are the experts in their own disaster resilience. The aim of the Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review is to learn from community members about shared resilience-building priorities, so that community voices are prioritised when identifying, developing and delivering on those priorities. This review has identified rich community lessons that can now strengthen Tenterfield's future bushfire resilience.

Researchers from Monash University's Fire to Flourish program adapted the Post-Event Review Capability (PERC) method to be more community-centred. In addition to reviewing Rural Fire Service mapping, media and social media commentary on the bushfires, we held four community workshops and conducted interviews with community members who were either affected by the bushfires or were involved with community preparedness, response and recovery.

This process - sometimes called 'disaster forensics' - identified learnings regarding what worked well and priorities for what could be improved for next time a disaster hits the region. These priorities are focused on strengthening community resilience, not fire fighting response.



Key themes for the Bushfire Learning Review first emerged at an initial workshop with Tenterfield community advisors. These themes were explored in further detail through interviews and workshops with local residents.



In June 2024, the Tenterfield community workshop talked through this diagram of findings. Analysis of the community workshops and interviews was done with a systemic lens. It also incorporated the results from a Tenterfield community bushfire resilience assessment conducted by Fire to Flourish in early 2024.

FINDINGS: WHAT WE HEARD WORKED WELL AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Before the 2023 bushfires

WORKED WELL	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual preparedness • Some community infrastructure upgrades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery progress after the 2019/20 bushfires - financial, ecological and agricultural • Fuel management • Mental health support • Issues with social cohesion • Declining volunteering • Limited coordinated community preparedness

During the 2023 bushfires

WORKED WELL	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locals working together • Local community organisations' response • Tenterfield Aerodrome supporting RFS aerial operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response coordination and communication • Issues with evacuation • Community experience of emergency management • Interruptions to healthcare • Interruptions to food and supplies • Limited wildlife care arrangements

After the 2023 bushfires

WORKED WELL	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteer organisations • District risk plan updated • Bluff River community fire planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial support • Post-bushfire clean-up • Post-bushfire financial assistance • Data collection of direct and indirect impacts

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES

The section outlines a vision and priorities developed in a Tenterfield community workshop in response to the research findings, held in June 2024. At the workshop, community members worked together to envision what the future of bushfire resilience would look like for the Tenterfield region.



Tenterfield community members working together to envision the measures needed for Tenterfield to cope well with future bushfires.

TENTERFIELD'S SHARED VISION FOR BUSHFIRE RESILIENCE:

Future bushfires in the Tenterfield region will be more predictable, cause less community anxiety, will feature reliable communications, and will be well supported by community agencies. There will be no deaths or injuries. Community projects to increase Tenterfield's bushfire resilience will be designed to ensure they have a legacy going into the future.

Priority 1: Collaborative, collective and inclusive community disaster response and recovery planning

Assist the Tenterfield community collaboratively and collectively prepare for the next emergency event, to increase the community's resilience. Projects might include:

- providing and maintaining community emergency infrastructure
- strengthening lines of communication between community and emergency services during events
- evacuation preparation and planning
- planning for shortages of food, water, fuel and other essentials.

Priority 2: Caring for ourselves and our neighbours

Build caring social community networks that engage diverse people and social groups from across the Tenterfield community, including:

- strengthening the culture of volunteering
- appropriate and accessible mental health support, in general and particularly in the aftermath of disasters
- strengthening of social cohesion.

Priority 3: Caring for our natural environment

Encourage ecological regeneration to support fuel management, and particularly to support ecological sustainability of areas impacted by previous fires. Projects might include:

- fuel management programs that span multiple land owners / managers in a local landscape
- planning for wildlife care during and after disasters
- local Indigenous Rangers planning and conducting cultural burning.

How many times does this town need to be under siege from fire before the town gets its act together around some sort of pre-planning, or resilience building, for the town?
Tenterfield resident

I think that's when you have to step in, and with community, start looking after your neighbours. In the long run you're still part of the one community, and if you don't look after each other, you're going to get lost.
Tenterfield resident

It's not just my little property, it's how my little property fits in with the neighbour, and then fits in with the national park down the road. It has to be. Because fires now seem to be so big. So we've got to go bigger in terms of our planning.
Tenterfield resident

Priority 4: Caring for our local economy

- Initiatives that support local businesses to take action to reduce their disaster risk, via knowledge and coordination
- Initiatives that support local businesses to take action to prepare for disasters, such as supporting contingency, continuity and recovery planning

“ If Tenterfield is going to get this post-bushfire financial support, [we] don't want to see the money get spent aimlessly on projects that aren't going to have any benefit. We want to see it going to useful projects that are going to have long-standing outcomes for our Shire.

Tenterfield resident

Please note that grant funds are not available to individual businesses, rather community-based initiatives that support all businesses in Tenterfield in their disaster resilience.

Priority 5: Collecting data on disaster impacts

Plan and implement initiatives to collect accurate data on local disaster impacts. This would provide evidence to:

- support local residents, landholders and businesses recover from the direct and indirect impacts of disasters
- assist the Tenterfield community to lobby for systemic change.

“ I can tell you that the data that comes from the government is not even a quarter aligned to what was damaged. To replace a set of cattle, to replace fencing - what it costs is phenomenal, and it's not taken into consideration properly in these disasters.

Tenterfield resident

In addition to these priorities, all community projects should have elements that address their sustainability, to ensure they have a legacy going into the future. For instance:

- build local capabilities of residents and community organisations to implement these changes
- be socially inclusive, and engage diverse people from across the local community
- encourage local skills building and use local suppliers where possible.

NEXT STEPS FOR TENTERFIELD

In response to the priorities identified through the review, Fire to Flourish has established a community participatory granting round that enables community members to identify and fund community-based projects that address those areas. Using a community-led approach, the priorities are to be refined by a granting decision-making group, and will become the strategic priorities that inform grant criteria. This grant round has \$200,000 in funding to be allocated by October 2024.

It is important to note that this review process has identified a number of potential initiatives that are no- or low-cost. The potential of a community-co-designed post-disaster review should not be lost and it is within the scope of this process to facilitate the establishment of these types of resilience-building projects.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review, contact Dr Zoë D'Arcy or Dr Adriana Keating. For more information about the Tenterfield granting process, contact Helen Duroux, Matt Sing or Gina Carpenter.

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