



## Submission to the Independent Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season

by

The Bruthen & District Citizens Association (BDCA) Inc.

Date: 8 April, 2020

### Background to the BDCA.

The Bruthen & District Citizens Association (BDCA) is an incorporated entity which exists to serve Bruthen and surrounding Districts. The Association has been in existence for over 25 years. The Association provides an interface between the community of Bruthen and the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) on community issues. Likewise, to the local state MLA for issues that extend to Victorian Government Departments.

The BDCA auspices the local Neighbourhood House, a Community Newspaper (Tambo Rambler) and Bruthen Art and Information Centre. It is also responsible for development and review of the Local Incident Management Plan (LIMP) with assistance from the local East Gippsland Shire Council.

- **Community Profile:** Local population of Bruthen & immediate surrounding districts (Mossiface, Wiseleigh, Tambo Upper, Kilmore, Ramrod, Sarsfield) has increased (ABS Census Data) from 870 people (2006) to 1659 (2011) and finally to 2058 (2016). In the ten years to 2016 this represents a growth rate of 136.55% (+13.5% per year).
- Future population growth in the BDCA catchment is expected to continue for the next decade (evidenced primarily by the number of housing allotments being developed) and growth is reflective of that being experienced across East Gippsland.
- **Community Needs:** With population growth comes the need for a coordinated approach to community initiatives, development, new or arising community needs and community resilience due to the high fire danger (second highest fire risk town in the East Gippsland); as demand for services increases.

The BDCA in providing this submission to the Inspector General for Emergency Management has sought feedback from the following member groups:

- Bruthen Fire Brigade
- Bruthen & District Neighbourhood House
- Bruthen Lions
- Bruthen Art & Information Centre
- Tambo Rambler Community Newspaper
- Individual businesses operating in Bruthen & District
- Bruthen Sporting Clubs (Football, Cricket, Tennis and Netball)
- Bruthen Men's Shed
- Bruthen Senior Citizen's
- local Bruthen businesses (assorted)
- local Committees of Management (Halls and Reserves)

The BDCA will respond to the questions posed on the Inspector General Emergency Management (IG EM) website. Responses will be in dot point for the purposes of brevity. Additional explanation can be sought during the community consultation phase.



## Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season

This submission also includes as an attachment an additional submission by the Bruthen Fire Brigade that has been endorsed by the BDCA. This can be found at Attachment 1 to this submission.

### COMMUNITY RESPONSE.

#### 1. What Worked.

##### 1.1. How the community shared and used warnings.

- In general, the community of Bruthen and District were able to access fire warning related notifications by a range of media (TV, Radio, Web sites, Face book and the Vic Emergency App).
- The hard work that had been done by the Victorian Government (incl CFA and DELWP), in the opinion of the BDCA, paid off as local residents were extremely aware of developments in the emergency situation as they occurred.

##### 1.2. How the community responded to State of Disaster declaration?

- Extremely well. Indeed, we believe the community was relieved the decision was made and additional help would be provided.

##### 1.3. How the community self-evacuated or responded to evacuation instructions?

- Two township meetings, both requested by the BDCA, prepared the township for what lay ahead. After the first meeting most people evacuated, those remaining tended to be farmers and business owners who elected to protect their business. The second township meeting, conducted Thurs 2 January 2020 at the Bruthen Mechanics Hall, reinforced the messages provided by the Deputy Incident Controller, DELWP and the Bruthen Fire Brigade.
- Bruthen Fire Brigade put out key evacuation notices (see Facebook Screenshots the end of this submission); designed to get people to evacuate due to the impending fire front. One notice had over 500 shares and ensured that the community knew what they were about to face.

##### 1.4. What you and your community did immediately before and during the fires in your area.

- Fires commenced Bruthen 22 November 2019. Fire-fighting ensued on the Little Dick Range Road and Dead Horse Creek Road complex of fires (in excess of 11000 hectares in the end), up until just before Christmas when they were brought under control.
- Active back burning by CFA and DELWP units to the north of Bruthen was undertaken. Risky – but the risk paid off and both CFA and DELWP need to be congratulated on the work which probably saved the township from a fire running from the north.
- During the fires in and around Bruthen (Wiseleigh, Mossiface, Sarsfield, Tambo Upper and Nicholson), Bruthen crews and locals fought and defended properties continuously. Some seventy plus (70+) fires were responded to by the Bruthen Fire Brigade. Two 100hr shifts of straight fire-fighting was conducted by Bruthen Fire Brigade Members leaving Brigade volunteers exhausted at the end of these shifts. Efforts of the fire fighters and towns folk in particular may well have saved Bruthen from burning which is a win.....but saving the township has come at great cost.

##### 1.5. Use of ADF Assets.

- Road clearing assets seemed to work well in re-establishing main supply routes to the township.



## 1.6. How the Victorian Government and emergency services supported Bruthen when isolated because of the fires?

- Not applicable see items in section 2 below.

## 2. What didn't work?

- Some residents complained that the warning information was not current as it had not been updated for an hour. This is probably linked to not understanding the warning application itself and that if no developments had occurred, information for a particular fire and how it was rated was not updated.
- Use of Code Red during the fire season.
  - (a) This should have been used on the 30 & 31 December 2019 fire event as fires this night destroyed 68 houses on the approach to Bruthen. **Question:** *If Code Red is not used in this situation – when is it used?*
  - (b) Code Red should also have been used for Friday 3 January 2020, leading into Saturday 4 January 2020. At 11.00 pm on Friday 3 January 2020, advice from the Deputy Incident Commander located at Bairnsdale to the Bruthen Fire Brigade Captain (via TELCON) was that the Township would definitely be hit by ember attack between 4.00-5.00 am on Saturday morning and was likely to result in mass loss of houses. If this was the case, Code Red would have reinforced evacuation alerts from the Incident Control Centre. As a result, the Bruthen Fire Brigade Captain sent his own message to local Community regarding the risk of fire impact for the community on the Friday evening and Saturday morning in question.
  - (c) For additional information with reference to item (b) above please see **Attachment 2**.
- At the second Township meeting the Deputy Incident Controller promised assets, two CFA Strike Teams and a DELWP Task force to protect Bruthen. These assets were later withdrawn without notice leaving Bruthen all but defenceless for the expected second fire attack for Saturday 4 January, 2020.
- Information provided to attendees invited to participate at the two Community meetings failed to acknowledge or provide support options for community members who either had no capacity to evacuate due to lack of resources, ability, age, culture, health and mental health or other special needs conditions such as disability and homelessness who also lacked the finances or other family or social connections to relocate and find a place to evacuate to. The messaging made it clear evacuation was an individual responsibility and highlighted the absence of established plans and procedures to accommodate people with limited capacity to respond in such circumstances.
  - The local VICPOL S/CONST did have a developed vulnerable persons list and he assisted with removal of those persons who requested assistance to evacuate.
  - The criteria and process of defining who is a vulnerable community member remains unclear.
- As a result of failed communication infrastructure (see CFA letter **Attachment 1**), residents drove to the station and advised of fires that needed a response. Any truck that could carry water, any personal fire-fighting assets privately owned as well as CFA units had to be thrown into the fire fight.
- The Army should have been tasked to bring in a generator to run the Communications Centre (which is fitted for but not with Generator power) – as Telstra failed miserably to implement any easy-to-install recovery works. Telstra had been forewarned years in advance of the need for generator power.
- How the Vic Government and Emergency Services supported Bruthen when isolated because of the fires?
  - (a) Nil support was evident, no contact was made with the elected community body (the BDCA), Council resources were so stretched that support could not be obtained (we are not blaming the Council here by the way – it's a statement of what occurred).



- (b) In the lead up to the fire events, VIC ROADS failed to maintain safe vegetation clearance on the road into Bruthen (Great Alpine Highway). This resulted in the road being cut and fire fighters were unable to get to houses that were on fire along the highway.

### 3. What don't we know?

- 3.1. Was there any plan to ensure a more robust Communication system for Bruthen (e.g. were generators ever planned to be brought in)? What knowledge did Telstra have of the probable failure of the Communications node? This issue had previously been raised to the Federal Minister for Infrastructure so Telstra were aware. The Community asks why didn't Telstra act earlier to ensure power supplies were maintained to the site?
- 3.2. What occurred with water failure (loss of pressure), given the fact this has occurred in other Bush fire situations in years past? What did East Gippsland Water know when the Community and Fire Services were likely to lose water services? (see **Attachment 1**, local Brigade letter on both of these infrastructure issues).

#### What do we need to know more about?

- 3.3. Referencing the Red Cross Framework, *Communication in Recovery* (2010), what infrastructure and/or training might be needed to enhance skills and capacity of community members and volunteers to provide support to community members impacted materially or psychologically by emergency events?

**RELIEF ACTIVITIES.** How were the community's immediate needs supported following the fires?

### 1. What Worked

#### 1.1. Local relief support made available to Bruthen Community.

- Not applicable, see items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 below.

#### 1.2. Relief from the Victorian Government.

- Not applicable, see items 2.4, 2.5 below.

#### 1.3. Financial support.

- Feedback suggests that those who evacuated were able to obtain financial support.

#### 1.4. Donations, goods and services.

- Not applicable, see items 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11 below.

#### 1.5. How volunteers were used to support the community.

- Volunteer fire-fighters worked for nearly 9 weeks straight. Most of those volunteers suffered considerable financial loss (wages) in defending the township.
- Bruthen & District Neighbourhood House commenced operations and worked seven days a week with a paid coordinator, administrative assistant and a host of volunteers.
- Veteran Assist (volunteers) – came into town and started to work on people's houses that were affected by fires. Just cleaning up and doing whatever physical work they could do to assist. They based themselves out of the Bruthen Caravan Park and the Community cannot speak highly enough of what they achieved.
- Blaze-Aid then followed and set up at the Bruthen Recreation Reserve to commence the re-fencing of farms and properties. Their work has been invaluable. Cost to the Recreation Reserve in lost trade is in the vicinity of \$40,000.00.



## 2. What didn't work?

- 2.1. Travel to Bairnsdale required to access relief – delayed many as roads were blocked for about a week, more dangerous back road and cross paddock options were taken. There are many barriers why Bruthen residents cannot always get to Bairnsdale, lack of transport (personal & public), lack of support persons to assist.
- 2.2. Feedback is that the Relief Centre was hectic and many of those getting relief were not from bush fire affected areas (e.g. Bairnsdale residents themselves) – which added to the lines and placed strain on the services being provided.
- 2.3. EGSC came to Bruthen and set up a relief information centre in the Hall – BUT – told no one they were coming. There was no note on local Facebook pages and no contact with the BDCA who could have very efficiently informed residents. Elderly people and those without transport could have used this service – but did not know it was in operation. This represents complete communication failure of one of the key local government groups to ensure they engaged with the community.
- 2.4. Similarly, feedback from the Bruthen Mechanics Hall Committee was that the Shire did not advise they were setting up a Relief Centre in the Hall. As a result, existing bookings for the Hall were affected which could have been avoided if the Shire had communicated regarding bookings.
- 2.5. DHS (Federal) van visited – didn't advertise their presence until they were in location, no locals knew unless they saw the information van in the street.
- 2.6. DHHS (State) van visited – as per above. When both questioned as to why we as a community were not given fore-warning that they were coming we were told that they *don't really know what is happening too far in advance* – so it was hard to pre-tell of their presence. If true this is an absolutely unacceptable way of conducting business from the subject matter experts in Health and Human Services (state and federal level).
- 2.7. Financial Support. For businesses (if you weren't burnt by the fires), but suffered basically no trade – then the financial support offered at state and federal level could not be accessed due to not meeting very stringent requirements. This feedback has been provided by nearly all businesses that were not burnt but suffered from the bush fires in the Bruthen, Sarsfield, Tambo upper areas. Financial hardship was felt in the first week of December (fires started 22 Nov, 2019) through to the end of February 2020. This has now been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the main fire front existed from 30/31 December 2019 onwards, agencies administering bush fire relief do not acknowledge financial hardship that existed from the first week in December 2019.
- 2.8. Financial Support. Volunteer fire-fighters suffered substantial personal economic loss due to fighting fires and taking leave without pay. There are reports of Bruthen Fire Fighters fighting fires up to 9 weeks in duration where they did so without pay (done willingly in a bid to protect their community). Others could not commence work due to road closures. There has been no financial support extended to this group whatsoever. This is extremely disappointing given that if they had not fought fires Bruthen may not exist and this is not an understatement!
- 2.9. Some community members missed out on immediate financial support due to lack of clarity as to which agency was providing what financial assistance, other community members missed out completely.
- 2.10. Goods donations need to be: *appropriate, timely and properly distributed & coordinated*. None of this occurred. Victorians and other Australians were very generous but there needs to be a coordinated approach to not only supply of goods, but distribution which is responsible and appropriate and not just a free for all. So much food and welfare came in that stores such as the Bruthen General Store could not sell produce and had to lay off workers; the Nowa-Nowa General Store had a 75% reduction in trade.



Goods literally flooded in to those who did not need it and this resulted in either job losses or hours cut back for local employees (some employees from the store had husbands who had been without wages for weeks due to fighting fires – this was like the double whammy for them).

This is the last thing small communities need. How do we resolve this?

- The state government needs to conduct a basic TAFE course for all key personnel within Council (who may be in an Incident Control/Recovery position, to undertake. This would reinforce correct protocols and provide effective training to those organisations at the ground level (councils and local authorities), who will be responsible for relief efforts.

The EGSC did their best to coordinate and distribute donations, but individuals turning up in Townships across East Gippsland with trailers and trucks of good and essentially dumping them on Townships who may or may not have needed those goods, was not appropriate.

### **3. What don't we know?**

- 3.1. It is generally accepted that in the Emergency relief context, the principles of Psychological First Aid (promoting safety, calmness, empowerment, connectedness and hope), represent one component of the broad response to needs arising from a given emergency. How were these principles embedded into the broader range of relief activities actually delivered to Bruthen to help the Community cope?
- 3.2. The added complexity of the ongoing disaster response to Covid 19 is now contributing cumulatively to the trauma experienced by the Bruthen community from the bushfires and from the three years of drought prior to the fires. What preventative and support measures are envisaged to promote social connectedness and support community members experiencing PTSD or other bushfire related mental health conditions?

### **4. What do we need to know more about?**

- 4.1. Both Government Agencies and NGO capabilities and responsibilities, along with activation points.
- 4.2. Courses that would prepare councils and communities to create those efficiency of practice, in response to a natural disaster. Delivered locally in smaller communities.



**RECOVERY ACTIVITIES.** How Bruthen and environs started to recover from the impacts of the fire season.

## **1. What Worked.**

### **1.1. Immediate recovery services provided by local and state government and charity organisations.**

- Lions, St Matthews Parish Church and St Vincent De Paul, Rotary and Salvation Army have been doing much of the charity work and assistance to the population in and around Bruthen.
- Not applicable, see items 2.1, 2.2 below.

### **1.2. The creation of Bushfire Recovery Victoria.**

- Not applicable, see item 2.3 below.

### **1.3. How Bruthen & District worked together during recovery?**

- The volunteer groups worked well within Bruthen. The Neighbourhood House conducted two Community meetings and had local groups discuss what they were doing and what they could offer. This allowed clarification of key tasks and volunteer activities so that we did not double up.
- Recovery activities have basically been done internal to Bruthen Community with little or no external funding – but with just Community and individual effort. This will slow recovery efforts in an already tired Community.

### **1.4. All aspect of recovery {emotional, rebuilding, financial, community and business}.**

- The community impact of the bushfires are now exacerbated by COVID-19 (we acknowledge this is outside the terms of reference BUT it is a consideration for Community recovery). This new emergency will affect Bruthen's capacity for resilience and recovery for the next 2-3 years compounding the impact of cumulative trauma experienced as a result of the bushfires.
- Emotional. People are that busy that they are trying to put the fires behind them. But the effect of driving past it every day, the effect of surviving the nightmare is a sleeping beast which will raise its head at some stage in the future. The emotional effects on individuals, family and social connectedness within the community are likely to last years.
- Community. We have many local projects that will make the Community more resilient and robust. But these are contingent on volunteer time (while they continue to work in their paid employment) to get things done.
- The Community needs help (maybe just one paid position for a year to have key Community projects identified through the BDCA) to get the ball rolling, secure funding and commence project implementation.
- All local businesses are struggling. Some businesses linked to logging and wood supply have just been decimated and it is unknown whether they will every recover. Bushfire Recovery Victoria should be playing a key role in this area.
- An organisation called Corporate 2 Community, has recently commenced work in and around Bruthen in an attempt to obtain corporate support and more important guidance for business recovery. This is also being utilised by the Bruthen & District Neighbourhood House in an attempt to make the NH more robust and versatile for future emergency events (which occurred on the scale it did). The mentors from the C2C program will continue to work with the Bruthen Community as we progress through the recovery phase (especially economic recovery). It is likely that Bruthen will participate in some pilot programs that may develop further understanding of how Communities across Australia and organisations can mutually assist each other.



## 2. What didn't work?

- 2.1. Services that came into town – came in unannounced and were in Community opinion – underutilised and under prepared about how to communicate effectively with communities in crisis.
- 2.2. See also points made in the Relief Activities, *What Didn't Work* section above. These are basically mirrored.
- 2.3. Bushfire Victoria. Yes, it's been created. To date very little contact with Bruthen (or any of the Bruthen organisations has been made). A council representative wanted to know why Bruthen had been 'left off the map' with Bush Fire Recovery Victoria. That said now – there are plans for Bruthen to establish contact with BRV. Communities to our East and West have had engagement very early on, but for some reason BRV were not able to conduct that initial engagement the Bruthen Community. In their defence this may have been due to the overwhelming amount of communities that they had to sort through and assist. Bruthen community looks forward to developing this relationship in the future.

## 3. What don't we know?

- 3.1. Particularly around the prolonged smoke we were subject to and mental health issues arising from the trauma of the event.
- 3.2. Are there any immediate funds available to Bruthen & District for increased services through our local Community Health Provider GLCH (COVID-19 restrictions adherent) to increase GP and nursing services to better monitor the health and well being of our Community at a local level during recovery and beyond?
- 3.3. What systems and approaches can be put in place to ensure communication with community is a two way process with input and feedback exchanged over a given period in the post-recovery phase?
- 3.4. How can access to information be enhanced for people and communities in with a range of communication needs, diverse access to media and other information pathways and variable capacity (physical, cognitive, emotional) to respond to emergency situations?

## 4. What do we need to know more about?

- 4.1. What has been done and who has done the same (relating to goods, money and services).

What services the Bushfire Case Managers and Coordinators both state and locally recruited will be offering and delivering to the Bruthen Community and how we can access these services.



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**ATTACHMENT 1  
TO BDCA SUBMISSION**



**Bruthen Fire Brigade**

8 Church Street,  
PO Box 150  
Bruthen Vic 3885

12 March 2020

**TO: Bruthen & District Citizens Association**

**RE UTILITIES INFRASTRUCTURE BRUTHEN & DISTRICT**

References:

- A. Township meeting of 14 January 2020
- B. BDCA special interest meeting of 28 January 2020
- C. BDCA meeting of 10 March 2020

Dear Bruthen & District Citizens Association (BDCA),

1. As per the reference this letter seeks BDCA support raising the contents of this correspondence to state and federal Members of Parliament, the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC), the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, Inspector General Emergency Management and other likely interested parties (as you see fit); on the short comings of key infrastructure during the recent catastrophic fire events suffered in Bruthen & District and indeed across East Gippsland.
2. The letter is written with the intent of seeking improvements to infrastructure that have been allowed to operate below optimum levels or are unable to cope with high levels of peak demand when required. While this correspondence will discuss in general terms the issues at hand and propose solutions; it is not intended to be a technical analysis – that is under the purview of the utilities providers and it is their responsibility to undertake further assessments.
3. **Overview:** Bruthen & Districts population has increased during the last two census periods by approximately 137% (source ABS). Key council planning documents show population growth is expected to continue placing additional pressure on community infrastructure. In addition, Bruthen sits at an intersection of two key road (both of which have just been recommended to be categorised as strategic roads of importance). In terms of emergencies, the town is an obvious transit and staging point for people needing to evacuate from farms or remote communities further afield. Bruthen plays a critical role in facilitating safety and wellbeing across an area, wider than the town border.



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4. **Water:** During the recent bush fire crisis the water infrastructure was unable to cope with the demand for fire-fighting by the CFA and home defence by residents. CFA big fill pumps were brought into supply water from the river (which had suffered from three years of drought), to negate CFA appliances draining the town supply. Regardless of the CFA drawing whatever water they could from the river and from pre-existing static tanks (and leaving town water solely for residents); supply across many areas of Bruthen and Wiseleigh in particular, dried to a trickle or stopped. The water held in the town tank (even though untouched by the CFA) was not sufficient; and pipe infrastructure did not allow effective flow to residents homes for fire self-defence.
5. At one stage I ordered fire fighters to go from house to house (to residences that had been evacuated), to turn off hoses, in order to save water for the main fire fight. The water utility provider may well highlight that it is not within their remit to provide water for firefighting. This point is respectfully and firmly refuted, as why install hydrant points for the purpose of firefighting if that is the case? What is within the remit of any utility provider, is to ensure that the service which they charge service fees for is fit for use and robust, when surge capacity is required.
- a. **Proposed solution:** With funding available for Bush Fire recovery; it is requested that a second larger water supply tank (twice the size of the existing tank) be sited with (to compliment), the existing township tank supply. There is currently more than sufficient room on the present East Gippsland Water site. This would ensure adequate township water holdings so that not only is there enough water in times of recurrent emergency, but there is also enough water for a growing Bruthen & District population in coming decades. The last two bush fire emergencies of significance (2006/07 & 20019/20); Bruthen has encountered failures in the supply of water.
  - b. In addition, ageing piping infrastructure also needs to be examined and replaced where it is not capable of enabling higher volume flow in peak use. While it is acknowledged that funds are always tight for projects such as this, any decision not to implement increase capacity of township water holdings could be viewed as negligent. Time to invest in infrastructure which assists with the safety of the community, has arrived.
6. **Communications: Communications infrastructure was also adversely affected during the emergency** – which (in its defence) is often the experienced during a large scale emergency event. However, the response of communications providers in re-establishing vital communications infrastructure was nothing short of dismal.
7. When power was lost across many areas of Bruthen & District, communications infrastructure then relied on standby batteries (where installed), to continue operating. These batteries lasted approximately four hours before they were discharged and cut off voltage resulting in a communications black out.



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8. Power loss to exchanges was an issue that affected smaller exchanges at locations such as Ensay, Bruthen, Nicholson just to name a few – and basically across fire affected locations in East Gippsland.
- a. Rural exchanges work in a linked chain fashion back to a main exchange (for Bruthen & beyond the main exchange would be Bairnsdale). Like a chain, should one link (exchange or repeater) fail, then any service beyond the failure point will be isolated. There is no alternate path back to Bairnsdale exchange so each link in the chain is a vulnerable point of failure, therefore they require operation capability to be maintained during mains power failures.
9. The Bruthen exchange is a Priority one township defence asset such is the importance of communications infrastructure for:
- a. 000 calls.
  - b. Emergency personal bracelet activation.
  - c. Notifying friends and family of personal circumstances during the emergency via phone calls and social media.
  - d. Banking, business and other government agency support (generally all done on-line now).
10. But defending an asset which is functionally unusable after four hours of power interruptions, has to be questioned in terms of merit. That said – it is clearly acknowledged why protection of a communications facility needs to remain a priority for fire defence.
11. After the initial fire fronts had passed, the communications organisation responsible for maintaining their exchange, failed to transport in generators for days (in fact at all for the township of Bruthen) - as apparently they did not see it as a priority. No other feedback has been offered to the community by them on this issue; deafening silence continues to be the norm. Communications providers may argue that road access to Bruthen was cut along the MSR Great Alpine Road; however, other minor local road access still existed. There was no reason why generators could not have been transported in.
12. Resultantly, during and after the initial fire activity, with communication nodes being out of service due (due to no power and battery supply being spent); residents were unable to get signal (due to. The local CFA brigade literally responded to fire calls by residents driving up to the Fire Station and notifying of a fire requiring response. This is akin to early 1920's response capability, and is unacceptable in the modern day (especially when cost efficient solutions exist to the issue).
- a. **Proposed solution:** What ought to have occurred is that permanent back up generator's should already have been installed, with a system that enables automatic start up once batteries discharge below a safe operation voltage. Robust communication infrastructure (for example the fitting of diesel or petrol generators), should therefore be implemented. This would have enabled communications to be maintained for a much longer period of time.



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Most communications nodes (we know Bruthen has); are actually fitted to receive generator power (they are fitted for but not with for some reason). What needs to occur is that generators should already be permanently in place, with a system that enables automatic start up once battery levels drop to 50% capacity.

- b. If the community were cynics, they would believe that placement of permanent generators to each site may not have transpired due to cost considerations versus that of community safety. Fitting of generators would actually achieve resilience for local communities, as opposed to it being a word which is bandied about to little effect.

13. The fact that Bruthen & District lost communications capability which was entirely preventable is simply not good enough. The same situation would never have been allowed to exist in a major metropolitan or regional area (and if it did occur, the action to fix the problem would have been swift). The issue of battery failure has been raised previously through our local member to the Federal Minister responsible for communications and infrastructure. There is a history of failure and it is not acceptable.

14. While I'm sure that respective agencies for water and communications will present detailed arguments of what transpired during the crisis – it matters little to the local populace affected during the recent bush fire emergencies. What matters is money being spent on making our current infrastructure more robust and resilient, when peak demand and natural disaster on a large scale demand such.

15. Accordingly, the Bruthen Fire Brigade – on behalf of the local community respectfully request the BDCA present these issues for resolution to the appropriate stakeholders. It is hoped that the community of Bruthen will have an outcome orientated and focused response, that enables operation of key utilities in times of need and disaster.

16. On a final note: failure of afore-mentioned utilities could have led to deaths during the recent bush fire crisis. Let's hope that bolstering the capability and capacity of utilities, will assist in protecting our commun

Respectfully

**James Nicholas**  
Captain  
Bruthen Fire Brigade

Tel: [REDACTED]



Community Warning by Bruthen Fire Brigade Captain

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**Bruthen Fire Brigade**



Published by Jody Haberfield [?] · December 28, 2019 · 🌐

Dear Residents of Bruthen & surrounding districts. As you are no doubt aware there is increased fire danger locally, and with that the need for heightened vigilance for our community. Monday is a particular day of concern (Saturday & Sunday are days to watch also), where the conditions that have been forecast for Monday are adverse. As at the time of publishing this message (Saturday 28 Dec AM), all residents and visitors need to be aware of their surroundings, know their fire plan, have their residence prepared if they decide to stay. Once again you need to know YOUR fire plan. The Bruthen Fire Brigades advice is: be aware of developments, listen to radio and monitor Vic emergency website etc); talk to your neighbours, assist them where possible; know what your triggers are for staying or leaving (and if you do, leave early).

Make sure you have supplies you need: cars fully fuelled, fuel for pumps and generators, appropriate clothes for any fires on your property you decide to extinguish; and if you are leaving make sure your bags include medications, key documents and other items as you see fit. Finally, this post reiterates the message received yesterday from the emergency messaging system: Dangerous fire conditions in East Gippsland. Fires may spread toward communities. Roads may close. Know what to do. Keep safe all. James Nicholas, Captain Bruthen Fire Brigade

[CFA Gippsland](#). [CFA South East Region](#) - [ACO Trevor Owen](#). [Tambo Group](#).

**18,898**  
People Reached

**3,136**  
Engagements

**Boost Post**



## Bruthen Fire Brigade

Posted by Amy Johnson

Sunday at 15:58 · 🌐

To all Bruthen and district residents.  
Expected weather has changed. Bringing  
with it a strong winds from the north.  
Which have the potential to impact on  
Bruthen and surrounds. It is now time  
you your to ENACT YOUR FIRE PLAN.

Leaving tomorrow (Monday) will be too  
late. Leave now if this is part of your  
plan. We will have additional CFA assets  
in town to assist. Keep safe ,  
communicate with your neighbours and  
be aware of the changing conditions as  
the develop.

James Nicholas  
Bruthen Fire Brigade Captian.

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## ATTACHMENT 2-c

### Community Warning by Bruthen Fire Brigade Captain

EVACUATION NOTICE AFTER DEPUTY INCIDENT CONTROLLER HAD WITHDRAWN ADDITIONAL CFA ASSETS PROMISED TO DEFEND BRUTHEN TO OTHER AREAS.

This left Bruthen with a Heavy Tanker and an Ultralight fire fighting vehicle to defend the township.



All residents of Bruthen. (advice provided as at 11pm Friday 2nd January)

There has been an evacuation notice issued on Vic Emergency.

Expected CFA & DELWP appliances for fire fighting and asset protection will now NOT be in Bruthen until approx 6-8am Saturday. Multiple fires across the region have led to reassignment of assets. Expect fire activity to our northern perimeter approx 4-5am. Ember attack likely afterwards (at times unknown). Accordingly, with the fire fighting assets I have at my disposal I have been forced to make some hard decisions.

First. LEAVE for the Relief Centre (latest advice is people should head to Sale Relief Centre), NOW.

Second. We are physically unable with remaining assets to conduct perimeter defence of the township. That's why you should leave NOW.

Third. All firefighting appliances and personnel will be withdrawn to the centre of Bruthen to defend critical infrastructure and preserve life. This will be based on the Bruthen Hall. Once again leave NOW for a relief centre and get out of town. If you come to the Hall do not obstruct traffic (where you park your car), grab a seat from inside and wait for further instruction.



Bruthen Fire Brigade's post



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This is not a decision that I wanted to make, more so needed to make. I encourage you to comply and leave now. I will not have time to comment on Facebook posts left on this site. Keep safe all.

James Nicholas  
Captain  
Bruthen Fire Brigade