

# **FIRE RELIEF FUND FOR FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES**

**FINAL REPORT**  
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## **PROVIDING DIRECT FIRST NATIONS SPECIFIC SUPPORT**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

In late 2019 / early 2020, bushfires swept across much of the sacred land mass of so-called Australia. These fires devastated vast parts of the East Coast with heavy impacts particularly to the South Coast of NSW and Gippsland.

Witnessing the devastation of the fires to First Nations mob across these regions, I could feel my heart breaking for our peoples. Observing fundraising campaigns set in motion for many things but nothing for our peoples, amidst a lack of response from the government and a fund that could provide a resource specifically for First Nations peoples to access, I felt moved to create some form of action to assist those impacted. It was clear there would be a lot of assistance needed.

After talking with some impacted community who had tragically lost their homes, on 1 January 2020 I set up [a crowdfunding campaign](#) with a modest target of \$100,000.

Funds were to be used for culturally sensitive direct support to First Nations communities affected by the fires in New South Wales and Victoria. Funds were to be available directly to individuals, or to Indigenous-led organisations for regranting.

Funds were to be used for the following:

1. Temporary relocation costs such as emergency accommodation and travel costs
2. Replacement of vital items such as clothing, food, toiletries, medical supplies or equipment
3. Refurbishment of uninsured, fire-damaged property
4. Expenses incurred when resettling.

## 2. DONATIONS

What ensued was an unprecedented display of generosity from across the globe.

23,800 donations were made by individuals, groups and organisations. Fundraising events were held, the page was shared 35,929 times by the community locally, nationally and internationally.

Recognising that I would need support to redistribute the larger amount of funds, I established the Fire Relief Fund for First Nations Communities within the [Australian Communities Foundation \(ACF\)](#). ACF is a charitable body able to support the administration of the Fund to meet funders' requirements. The advantage of this setup was that it would not erode the funds raised and ensure all funds raised would make it to community and community-based First Nations organisations.

By the time the crowdfunding campaign was deactivated, \$1,883,380 had been collectively raised. All funds were transferred into this vehicle in late February 2020.

A further \$618,414 was donated into the ACF fund between February 2020 and September 2020 bringing the final fund total to \$2,501,794.

After the overwhelming openness of heart that was given to this campaign, the Fund is no longer accepting donations.

## 3. COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The distribution of funds from this fund has been guided by conversations and consultations with a variety of community across regions including community consultations via phone, in person where applicable and with key contacts in communities, direct to individuals in need, and discussions with Aboriginal Organisations.

The fund recognises the hard work of key community leaders to seek out individuals affected and support them to apply and receive funding.

The aim of the Fund was to ensure whoever was impacted and requested support that was an Aboriginal Person from the affected regions of the South Coast NSW and Gippsland would be supported in accordance with their demonstrated needs for support.

#### 4. GRANTING GUIDELINES

A set of granting guidelines were developed in line with the crowdfunding campaign's purpose (Appendix A).

#### 5. DISTRIBUTIONS

Since late February 2020 all eligible proposals for funding had been approved and the fund was closed as of December 202

##### **Total funds to the community:**

**\$2,376,361.61\***

\*Discrepancy between total donations and total expenses is due to fluctuation in investment market that had a significant effect on sub fund balance due to COVID19. Total investment losses and administration fees equate to 5% of fund balance. Less than 1% was used for administration of the fund.

##### **Recipient category:**

Funding was distributed across the following categories: 27 individuals (\$532,500), 57 families (\$829,042), 8 organisations (\$900,310) and 5 community projects (\$114,510).

Organisations that received funding were responsible for redistributing funds directly to individuals and families in their local areas. Community projects included supporting groups to clear debris and fire damaged property and supporting community well-being.

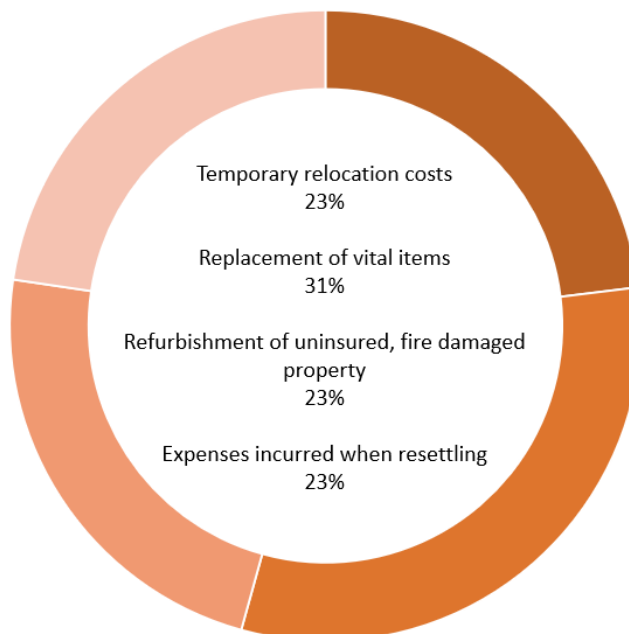


**Relief area:**

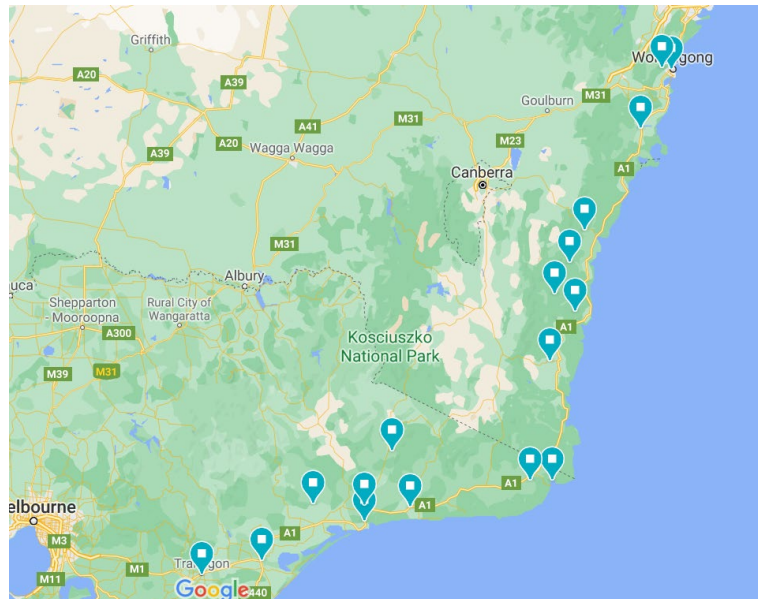
In accordance with the fundraising outcomes, funds were to be used for the following relief areas:

1. Temporary relocation costs such as emergency accommodation and travel costs
2. Replacement of vital items such as clothing, food, toiletries, medical supplies or equipment
3. Refurbishment of uninsured, fire-damaged property
4. Expenses incurred when resettling.

There was an even spread across these areas.



## Locations where funding has been allocated:



## 7. CASE STUDY # 1: ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS IN COLLABORATION

There is an existing network and infrastructure across the fire affected area of NSW and Victoria – it is that of local Aboriginal Corporations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. In a great show of collaboration in the wake of a disaster, 15 Aboriginal organisations across NSW partnered together to form the Indigenous Bushfire Disaster Partnership Agreement (IDBPA), and eight Aboriginal organisations across Victoria partnered together to form the 2019-2020 Bushfire Disaster Appeal.

### Indigenous Bushfire Disaster Partnership Agreement (IDBPA)

The IDBPA was established to operate, administer, deliver and implement relief, recovery, reconstruction and provision of essential, appropriate and timely humanitarian assistance to Indigenous residents located through the NSW South Coast who have been directly affected and impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfire disaster.

The partnership agreed to establish a register of impacted properties, to manage an assessment and triage process and to remain accountable, transparent and efficient in the handling of funds.

One member of the partnership, Walbunja Aboriginal Corporation, was nominated to receive funds on behalf of all members and redistribute resources in a streamlined way throughout the network. Funds have been used for the purchase of caravans, vehicles, shipping containers as storage facilities, essential food and household items, essential clothing and supplies, trailers, water tanks and accessories, and equipment. As well as this, funding has been used towards providing accommodation support and waste and debris removal.

### 2019-2020 Bushfire Disaster Appeal (BDA)

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc. (VACCHO), as the peak body and leading advocate for the health of Aboriginal peoples in Victoria, was selected by the eight organisations participating in this partnership, to co-ordinate and centralise the distribution of funds raised (via the BDA) in order to provide relief for the Aboriginal communities in Victoria impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfire disaster in Australia.

An independent Appeal Advisory Panel was established and convened to guide the distribution of the Appeal moneys and other Relief Funds.

## 8. CASE STUDY # 2: INDIVIDUAL RECIPIENT

Sharon (not her real name) lived in her family home with five children and two other relatives. She has lived there for decades. In December 2019 the fires swept through her area. She and her family were forced to evacuate their home with nothing but the clothes on their backs and some sentimental items. They watched from a relative's home in town as the smoke thickened over where their house would be.

The next morning they received news that their home has been destroyed by the fires.

*"This was not just our house it was our connection to our mum & dad, our nan & pop, our old nan & old pop, our family meeting ground, our yarning place whether it be political or just having a yarn, our cultural connection to land, our meeting place... It was our little piece of paradise that was now all gone."* - Sharon

**Sharon and her family have secured a 6-month rental, and the Fund provided them with support to replace lost items, access support services and with travel, utility, food and rental costs until they can get back on their feet.**

## 9. CASE STUDY # 3: ABORIGINAL ORGANISATION

**Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)**

After consultation with Indigenous-led philanthropic fund, Koondee Woonga-gat Toor-rong, GLaWAC received funding for redistribution to East Gippsland First Nations communities affected by bushfire.

A philanthropic officer will oversee the payment and distribution of funds to families and individuals whilst also identifying and promoting new funding opportunities for the community. The officer will be responsible for developing and maintaining a database of those affected to ensure funding is allocated appropriately.

## 10. CASE STUDY # 4: INDIVIDUAL RECIPIENT

Mary (not her real name) was staying at a campsite in Southern NSW in late 2019 with her husband and three children. They were experiencing homelessness, and awaiting temporary housing in a nearby town. When the fires hit, both their campsite and the temporary housing property were destroyed, leaving them in an even more difficult position.

*"These funds have help me and my family in the most biggest way possible. I have brought my chrildren new beds and bed room suite, also have pay all my outstanding rent and storage fees, clothes, kitchen good ,white goods ect, also blankets.*

*My Son is now working again.*

*It Also helped and brought food for elders in my Community and brought one family a washing michean and dryer.. I know I didn't have to do this but that's me.*

*So once again my self and family would like to say Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. And that you have saved my family in a big way, cultural, spiritual, and mentley..*

*And I know from here and it will be easy to start looking forward in life. Thank you again."* - Mary

**Support from the Fund allowed Mary and her family to secure an alternative rental, replace items that were damaged or lost, and get back into employment.**

## APPENDIX A: GRANTING GUIDELINES

The Fire Relief Fund for First Nations Communities provides funds for culturally sensitive direct support to first nations communities affected by the fires in New South Wales and Victoria.

This document sets out the guidelines for individuals and organisations applying for funding from the Fire Relief Fund for First Nations Communities.

### GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS

Grants are available to individuals that meet the following criteria:

- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- live in New South Wales or Victoria
- are over 18 years of age; and
- have been adversely impacted by the fires.

Funds can be used for the following:

1. Temporary relocation costs such as emergency accommodation and travel expenses
2. Replacement of vital items such as clothing, food, toiletries, medical supplies or equipment
3. Refurbishment of uninsured, fire-damaged property; or
4. Resettling expenses.

Any needs outside of the above are not eligible for funding. Individuals can apply for additional funding only after they have acquitted any existing funds.

### GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISATIONS

Grants are available to organisations that meet the following criteria:

- are Indigenous-led
- are based in NSW or Victoria
- have connections to local Indigenous communities that have been adversely affected by the fires; and
- have capacity to administer a regranting process (organisations can reserve up to 10% of the funds to cover administration costs).

Funds can be used for regranting via the distribution of grants to local individuals or families for the following:

1. Temporary relocation costs such as emergency accommodation and travel expenses
2. Replacement of vital items such as clothing, food, toiletries, medical supplies or equipment
3. Refurbishment of uninsured, fire-damaged property; or
4. Resettling expenses.

Any needs outside of the above are not eligible for funding. Organisations can apply for additional funding only after they have acquitted any existing funds.

*We acknowledge that these tragedies have occurred on sacred Indigenous lands where sovereignty has not been ceded. The ongoing connection of First Nations peoples to land and culture is critical to life on this land. We acknowledge our ancestors and elders past present and future.*