

Recovery Survey Report

Wye River and Separation Creek Recovery Group

11 March 2016



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Foreword

The Wye River and Separation Creek Recovery Group (WSRG) was formed in early January 2016 in response to a request from the Emergency Services Commissioner. WSRG was asked to advise on recovery issues in the days and weeks following the Christmas Day fires. WSRG was formed with representation from major services groups, businesses and property owners in the community.

WSRG established a strong connection with the Spirit Foundation and other charitable organisations wishing to provide assistance. Spirit was identified by government and Colac Otway Shire as an appropriate vehicle to manage donated funds. On advice from WSRG, funds have been distributed to help as many people as possible while abiding by the criteria set by donors.

There are limited funds available and care has been taken to direct funds to those most vulnerable in the immediate aftermath of the fire. Donated funds have been used to assist residents who lost their homes in the fire and those who have not been able to access their primary home. Government funds have been allocated to a wide range of projects that were initially identified, including geotechnical work, property clean-up and some community amenities. WSRG became aware very quickly that there were insufficient funds to allocate money to everyone and directed attention to determining those projects that would benefit the community as a whole. While donated funds will not cover all potential projects, the WSRG determined that it wanted to hear the priorities of the whole community to inform potential donors and all responsible agencies of the community's views.

The purpose of this survey was to obtain input from the Wye River and Separation Creek community, regarding priorities for future projects that will benefit the whole community. The survey aimed to capture the many voices of the community.

The term "recovery" was taken to refer to a broad range of activities, both short and longer term. We are conscious that the amenity of our community is a major attraction for visitors. Attracting people to the area is critical to the future economic recovery of the area.

The response has been excellent. We achieved the goal of hearing the voice of the community.

Nous Group (a management consulting firm providing pro bono assistance to the Interim Recovery Group) was responsible for the custodianship and analysis of the survey responses.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and took the time to tell us what is important to you. This report will be provided to the newly formed Resilience Committee, Colac Otway Shire and government agencies.

1 Executive Summary

The purpose of the survey was to hear the views of all members of the community. At the close of the survey, there were 139 complete, unique responses.¹

The survey asked respondents to rate the priority and importance of a set of nine potential projects. The responses to these questions form the quantitative sections of this report. Respondents were also invited to make their own suggestions for future priorities. These responses are reported in the section

¹ There were many partial responses. Many of the partial responses were very limited in the response and not included in the analysis.

on qualitative results. An explanation of the methodology and the detailed results of the survey are provided in the Appendices, linked to this report.

Quantitative results rate protecting the environment highest. Protecting the environment encompasses developing a plan to control the regrowth of weeds, replanting to prevent erosion and taking the opportunity to increase the number of indigenous plants, including more fire resistant species. Underground power lines were rated as highly important by most respondents.

Several projects not listed as a preference but still considered important included additional walks in the bush as well as improving access to the beach and general amenity of the area.

The comments in the free text sections of the survey reinforce the quantitative data, namely the importance of environmental protection, public amenities and underground powerlines. Other issues identified by many respondents include roads, parking and assistance to those who lost their homes. Respondents gave a wide range of suggestions and alternative priorities for the recovery of Wye River and Separation Creek. Many additional ideas are identified and should be further tested and explored during the consultations being planned by government agencies working with us on the recovery.

Respondents also commented on well-being, water quality and fire safety. A few respondents made suggestions on assistance to business, improving internet and phone coverage, support for volunteers and memorials.

The survey results and the comments provided by respondents give valuable insights on the preferences and priorities of the community. Donated funds are extremely limited and restricted in how they can be applied. The views expressed through the survey will inform the different agencies and government groups coordinating the recovery.

2 Quantitative results rate protecting the environment highest

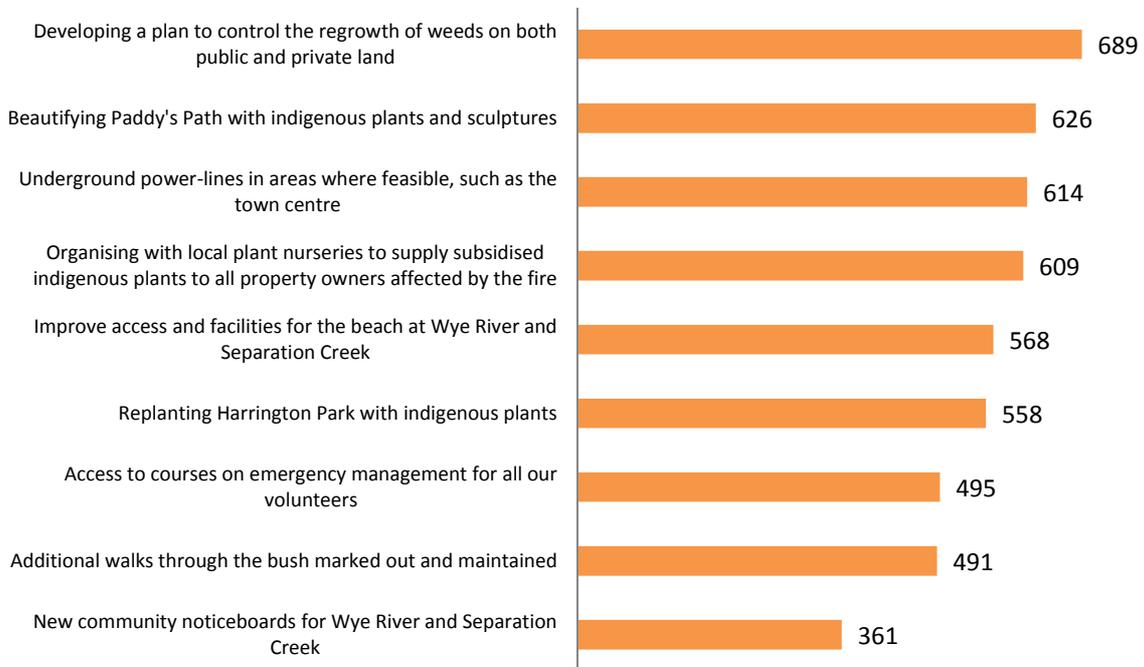
The survey listed nine potential projects that could be undertaken over the medium term. Many of the identified projects are larger than can be undertaken with donated funds. The preferences and ratings will form advice to all agencies on the priorities of the community.

Highest preference was given to those projects designed to protect the environment, particularly controlling the regrowth of weeds and planting. Many respondents pointed out that vegetation is important for controlling landslip and erosion as well as improving the overall environment. Underground power lines rated high among preferences and importance. General community amenity was supported but not as highly as the environmental issues. Controlling regrowth of weeds received the highest preference from listed potential projects

In the first question of the survey, respondents were asked to rank a set of nine suggested recovery activities in order of preference. Developing a plan to control the regrowth of weeds on both public and private land was considered a high priority, while new community noticeboards for Wye River and Separation Creek was generally a low priority. Alongside the comments provided by respondents the overall conclusion is that there is a high preference for protecting the environment. The reasons for this preference included prevention of erosion, taking the opportunity to increase the number of indigenous plants and encouraging more fire resistant species in the community. Figure 1 below shows the

preferences of all respondents. Weights from 1 to 10 were applied to each preference (score of 10 for first preference, 9 for second preference, and so on) and then the sum of the weights was used to rank the recovery projects. More detail on weights can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Figure 1: Recovery projects ordered by preference score



Importance ratings still support the control of weeds and underground powerlines

In the second question of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the same set of nine suggested recovery projects on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0="Not at all important" and 5="Highly important". Figure 2 shows that the ranking of average ratings for the suggested projects mirrors the ranking of preference scores, with a couple of notable differences. Additional walks through the bush had the second highest average rating of the suggested recovery projects, whereas it ranked eighth on the ranking by preference score. Generally, respondents did not rate additional walks through the bush as a high priority, but considered the project to be important. Most projects sit within the band of average ratings of 3 to 3.5, suggesting that many respondents considered these activities to be important, but not "Highly important".

Figure 2: Average rating of importance of suggested recovery project on scale of 0 to 5

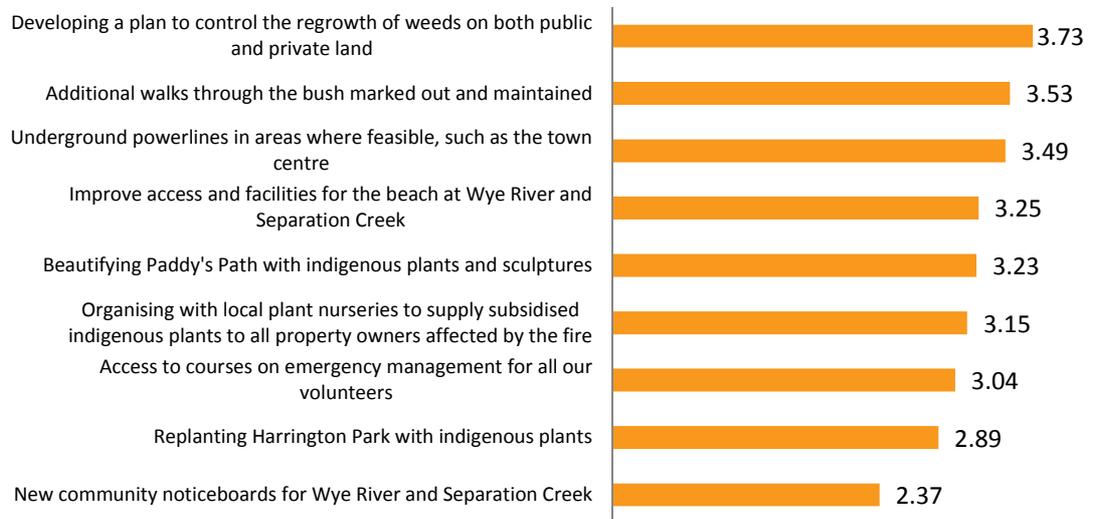


Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of ratings across the suggested recovery projects. Developing a plan to control the regrowth of weeds and underground powerlines had the highest number of “Highly important” ratings, with counts of 54 and 41 respectively. Replanting Harrington Park with Indigenous plants and new community noticeboards for Wye River and Separation Creek were generally seen as the least important of the suggested recovery projects.

Figure 3: Count of ratings for suggested recovery projects



3 Comments reinforce the quantitative data and identify many other issues

The comments section of the survey allowed free text from respondents. Many community members left detailed suggestions for new projects, comments on how the recovery ought to progress and feedback on priorities for the recovery. A summary of the themes from the comments and a detailed record of comments are provided in Appendix B.

The comments received were wide ranging. Some criticism of the survey itself was identified and these have been included in the detailed comment summary.

The comments provide more in depth understanding of the diversity of voices within the community and the thinking that has informed the selection of priorities and preferences. Many additional ideas are identified and should be further explored during the consultations currently being planned with the community.

Table 1 lists the theme of the comments in order of frequency. The free text comments reinforce the level of concern for environmental protection and outline some additional areas for focus.

Table 1: Issues identified through comments

Environment protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent erosion through replanting • Consider the landscape in the rebuild • Further tree removal to remove future hazards • Educate all about replanting for future fire prevention • Deal with the feral animals
Public amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While some thought the suggestions were opportunistic the improvement of public amenities to attract visitors back received a lot of comments • Support for the upgrade of the playground, River Walk, public toilets and beach and a range of specific suggestions.
Powerlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underground powerlines would make the community safer
Roads and parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repairs and maintenance a high priority • Widen roads to make them safer • Signage could be improved • New solutions for parking are needed
Assistance to those who lost their homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statements to assist permanent residents • Suggested ideas to assist those who are re-building (including keeping the temporary accommodation at the caravan park)
Well being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the well-being of community members is important in the recovery
Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including Paddy's path
Water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water management should be improved
Fire safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects are needed to improve the community's fire safety
Assistance for businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary to support local businesses
Internet and phone reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both phone reception and internet noted as important
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers could be better utilised and supported
Memorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorials were suggested to commemorate the tragedy
Survey feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some positive and some negative feedback on the survey