

THE GRANITE NEWS



The Granite News - serving the communities of Caveat, Highlands, Hughes Creek, Ruffy, Tarcombe, Terip Terip & Whiteheads Creek.



26th February 2026 | Volume 20 Issue 25

Welcome, Wumindjika & G'day

DON'T FORGET that this week is going to be one for not one, but two, special occasions at Highlands and both are definitely worth adding to your diaries. First up - Fanfare please

GOVERNOR AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT MINISTER TO VISIT HIGHLANDS HUB

The Governor of Victoria Margaret Garnder AC and Emergency Management Commissioner Tim Weibusch will be visiting the Highlands Hub on **Thursday 26th February at 12.15pm** to meet with fire impacted residents and support agencies.

Morning tea will be provided. ****Please note NEW time!!**

AND

You've read about The Unbreakable Farmer in previous issues of TGN now you can meet him in person





Gearing up for Autumn but feeling the weight of the "what-ifs"? We're getting the farming community together at the Highlands Hall for a night of tactical planning to take the guesswork out of the coming season.

Special Guest:

 **Warren Davies (The Unbreakable Farmer)**

Warren is one of Australia's leading voices on resilience and mental health in the bush. After years of facing everything from drought to financial ruin on his own farm, he now travels the country sharing his "Unbreakable" mindset to help fellow farmers navigate the highs and lows of life on the land.

We're covering the practical stuff:

-  Water Management: Securing your dams and budgets.
-  Pasture Recovery: Planning your next moves for the grass.
-  Stock Return: Safe containment and health management.
-  Timelines: Walking away with a clear plan of action.

Dinner and soft drinks are on us!

BYO other drinks

 **Where: Highlands Hall (1603 Ghin Ghin Road)**

 **When: Friday, 27th February | 5pm - 8pm**

From the Highlands to our surrounding fire-affected neighbours: let's bridge the gap, share the load, and plan for a stronger season ahead. See you on Friday 27th!

If you know of someone who needs to be kept in the loop but isn't a TGN reader please tell them to sign up at pdphroberts@gmail.com The editor@tgn.org.au email is still dysfunctional.

Kia kara,
Pauline



NB: Over the last 6 weeks many local people have given up huge amounts of time, compassion and energy to ensuring that the 3 hubs - Highlands, Ruffy and Terip - all run smoothly and accommodate every last need. I'm really hoping that one such person actually took yesterday 25/2 off...because it was her birthday! So...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ANDREA - Hope it was a good one!!

What's On - February, March & April 2026		
Details? last TGN	Mondays all day	RUFFY WELL-BEING ROOM @ Ruffy Hall Jack Sullivan will be in attendance 2 nd March
Details? last TGN	Thursdays 1.30 - 4.40	RUFFY WELL-BEING ROOM @ Ruffy Hall Gemma Parkinson will be in attendance on 26 th Feb.
Details? See p.7	Fridays 9am - 3pm	YEA & DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES @ Highlands Consultations on the following dates - February 27 th & March 6 th , 13 th , 20 th and 27 th
N/A 8 th March	Sundays @ 11am	CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY GATHERING @ 44 Yorston Rd, Highlands This is a non-denominational meeting, Everyone is welcome to this calm, compassionate and open environment. Tea, coffee & lunch provided. Enquires? John - 0425 840999
	Thursday 26th Feb. 7am-12	RAPID RELIEF TEAM (RRT) FENCING DAY @ Ruffy Hall Fencing wire collection (for those already registered) FREE BBQ lunch, barista coffee and access to local support services.
NB New time!	Thursday 26th Feb. @ 12.15	VISIT - VICTORIAN GOVERNOR & TIM WEIBUSCH (EMC) @ Highlands Hall/Hub
	Thursday 26th Feb. @ 5.30pm	SECRET MEN'S BUSINESS @ Michael K's 890 Caveat-Dropmore Rd All people in the district are welcome, pink note (\$5) donation towards BBQ, BYO & chat.
Details? See p.7	Friday 27th Feb. 9-1	HIGHLANDS VISITING SERVICES - lots to choose from @ Highlands Hall/Hub Feeling buried in paperwork? The Experts are here to help.
Details? pp.1&3	Friday 27th Feb. 5-8pm	TACTICAL PLANNING FOR FARMERS @ Highlands Hall/Hub
	Wednesday 4th March 5.30-8	COMMUNITY DINNER @ Highlands Hall/Hub Murrindindi and Mitchell Shires are generously providing a meal for the community.
	Friday 13th March @ 6.30	DRINKS on the DECK YAY it's back! @ Highlands Hall/Hub Drinks on the Deck (on the grass actually) is returning on the second Friday of the month @ 6pm at the Highlands Hall for a bit of normality. Please bring finger food.
	Saturday 18th April @ 7pm	HIGHLANDS BOOK GROUP @ Venue TBA Come along to share your favourite reads and to enjoy a little slice of normality.
Check dates first 5772 0333	Every Second Wednesday 10.30-12.30	MURRINDINDI MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE @ Highlands Community Hall The Mobile Library visits the TGN area, based at the Highlands Hall every fortnight. Why not pop in? Possible forthcoming dates 11th & 25th March and 8th & 22nd April



AUTUMN ON FARM TACTICAL PLANNING

**Community,
Support, Advice**

**BBQ DINNER +
SOFTIES ON US**

BYO ESKY FOR FROTHIES

What to expect

- Farm Water Management -**
Protecting farm dams and building water budgets
- Pasture Assessment -**
Assessing pastures and planning next recovery steps
- Bringing stock back to farm -**
Managing stock return, containment, feed and health
- Action timeline -**
Creating a clear timetable for action to support recovery and on-farm decisions

Details

Friday 27th February 2026

5pm - 8pm



Highlands Hall

1603 Ghin Ghin Road
Highlands



Supported by



How does nature respond to fire, and how can we help?

Our ancient landscape has withstood fire for millennia. Plants and many animals have adaptive behaviour to cope with fire events. However, our recent Longwood fire will surely create local extinctions for some species due to the extent and in some areas the intensity, in a landscape already stressed with drought and fragmentation. So, what are the signs nature is recovering and what can we do to assist this process?

Our eucalypts are showing some of the most visual signs of recovery currently. From blackened, scarred trunks, green, juvenile leaves are emerging. Far from looking dead, the epicormic buds, scattered up the trunk and branches of eucalypts beneath the burnt bark begin to emerge. Sometimes growing up to 26cm per day, these little shoots and branches allow the tree to photosynthesise and recover their supply of sugars. Roots deep in the earth, connected to fungal threads, continue to seek nutrients and moisture, and distribute these to the plant in exchange for sugar. Our eucalypts are on the mend.



Unfortunately, the hollow bearing trees, the matriarchs and ancients of our landscape, have taken a heavy loss. Many centuries old, supporting countless insects, birds, possums, gliders, bats, lizards; many now lie fallen. Early estimates might suggest 90% of these ancients have succumbed, numbering into their thousands across the burnt country. Their very feature, their dry, hollow core, has allowed fire at the base of the trunk to act as a chimney, drawing smoke and flame into the heart of the tree. Such a loss is unbearable and will have repercussions for decades for hollow dwelling animals. Trees take at least 100 years to develop hollows, and many birds, bats, owls, possums, gliders and phascogales either depend on them year round or seasonally to breed, thus there is urgency to begin the task of building artificial hollows.

Our soils after fire are exposed and vulnerable, showing our landscapes very bones, and sometimes exposing artefacts thousands of years old. They repel water initially, with water unable to penetrate and sheeting off the surface, risking erosion. However, our native grasses, adapted to fire, respond already with new green shoots. Deep rooted and surprisingly old grass tussocks, rivalling even our ancient trees and dated to 500 years of age in some cases, send up green shoots despite the lack of rain. Introduced perennial grasses respond too, stabilising bare soils and providing a protective cover. In the damper gullies and creeks, the much-maligned Common Reed, *Phragmites australis*, has great capacity for filtering water. Underground tubers have withstood the fire, and shoots are already a foot high. It is braced and ready for the first rains, ready to filter water and trap soil particles. Our sedges and grasses around waterways are truly our first responders for protecting our water quality.



Quietly, patiently, waiting in the soils rest our seeds and native tubers. This is their moment! Each year, wattles, peas, grasses, wildflowers, trees – they all shed thousands of seeds. Some are short lived, some quickly become food for birds and insects, but many lie dormant in the soil. The wattles and peas are hard seed coated so they need the jaws of an ant to scratch their surface, boiling water in our nursery, or a fire event to break their dormancy and crack their seed coat. They can survive in the soil for at least one hundred years. Finally, they have sunlight, warmth and a lack of competition. All they wait for is rain. Careful what you wish for! The wattles will be first and they will be abundant. They are the pioneers. Short lived, fast growing, they change the humidity at the ground level quickly, sheltering the way for the next species, and fix inorganic nitrogen in the soil, making it available to other plants. They are an abundant food source – sap, leaves and seed. Finally, there is food to go around. **Continued next page...**



How does nature respond to fire, and how can we help? - continued...

Also, dormant but patiently waiting for a gap in the grass cover are the wildflowers. If our season brings rain, just wait for spring this year or next, those tuberous plants, growing naturally in the gaps between grass tussocks, will be colourful and bring much joy.

So, nature is getting on with what she does, but she does need your help. Here are some initial tips:

- Our soils are very fragile right now. Avoid driving over them. Leaf litter creates a tiny bit of soil cover. If you have branches down, lay them across the slope around gullies or creeks or in areas of remnant habitat. Allow some small stacks of timber in remnant areas. There is no cover right now, and any surviving animals, (bandicoots, lizards, native mice) are terribly vulnerable to predators. If you do suspect you have found cultural heritage, leave it in place. Let us know and we can ensure you follow the right protocols for reporting.
- Surviving paddock trees are terribly precious. They are important for stock shade, but more vulnerable than ever to stock compaction and high nutrients around their trunk. Fencing to the edge of the drip line for those trees is ideal, allowing stock to still seek shade on the south side of the tree. However, with so much fencing to be done, laying large fallen branches away from the trunk can provide a perimeter of protection for the tree. Stock can rub on branches, rather than the trunk, and there is a chance of regeneration of the old tree. It does make future weed control a challenge, but it can buy time and bring important, immediate protection.
- Creating artificial habitat with nest boxes and modified hollow branches will be a major focus for the Biodiversity Recovery Alliance and supporting landcare groups in the months and years to come. We are currently confirming designs and sourcing funding for material supply but will love your help with construction! If you are a Men's Shed with ability to pre-cut nest boxes, or a community group keen to build boxes, we would love to hear from you.
- Lastly, while nature is primed and ready to germinate, the animals who have survived the fires are hungry and ready to munch. We have watched over the last decade or two, many plant species become locally rare due largely to the impact of deer, or in some cases weeds. Plants have this one chance to grow again. We are keen to monitor deer populations, and act quickly with culling. If you have a creek or river corridor on your property, we would love your permission to begin monitoring. Please register your interest.

One final word. This time in our country is hard. Don't turn your back because it is too painful. Take photos, visit, observe, make nest boxes and art. Celebrate each of those incremental signs that our landscape is recovering and take time out for yourself.

Register your interest or your property, through the website, www.biodiversityrecoveryalliance.com.

We're keen to help too.

Cathy Olive
Euroa Arboretum



**** HIGHLANDS ****

The Hub @ the Highlands Hall is open Mon, Wed & Fri 10am to 3pm & Sat 9-12

1603 Ghin Ghin Road, HIGHLANDS VIC 3660

Email: thehighlandshub2026@gmail.com

- **HIGHLANDS VISITING SERVICES - Friday 27th February 9am - 1pm**

Council, government agencies and community organisations are working together to provide support that responds to current needs as the community begins transitioning toward longer term recovery.

9am – 12pm - Services Fair: Feeling buried in paperwork? The experts are at Highlands Hall to help.

10am – 1pm - Planning & Rebuilding: Mitchell and Murrindindi Council planning teams will be on-site to answer your rebuilding questions.

Murrindindi Health Van: Mental health help and advice (On-site 9am – 3pm).

Farm & Land: Agriculture Victoria (feed, soil, water) & AgBiz (financial advice).

Financial: Services Australia (Disaster Payments & Recovery Allowances).

Housing: DFFH (Emergency Relief & Re-establishment Assistance).

Wellbeing: VCC Emergencies Ministry for a chat and a listening ear.

- **YEA AND DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE**
will be visiting the Highlands Hall/Hub from 9am - 3pm on the following dates

February - Friday 27th

March - Friday 6th, 13th, 20th & 27th

- **AUTUMN ON FARM TACTICAL PLANNING MEETING**
Friday February 27th 5-8pm Highlands Hall BBQ dinner.
See pages 1 & 3 for more details

- **Wednesday March 4th 5:30 - 8pm - COMMUNITY DINNER.** Murrindindi and Mitchell Shires are generously providing a meal for the community at the Highlands Hub.

- **CLOTHING**

We have lots of clothing available and more coming in so please come and check out The Hub.

Many thanks to the volunteers who assisted to organise the clothes into sizes on racks and in crates they are much easier to access now

- **HUBBINGS** - the Highlands Hub version of Bunnings!!

Many thanks to Deb and Kev for the donation of various building and hardware materials.

Make an appointment with **John Rogers on 0478 221 311** or email thehighlandshub2026@gmail.com and he will be happy to assist you with any items you may need or answer any questions.

- **IBC DELIVERIES**

YES! THEY ARE HERE!!

Deliveries of the IBCs will take place in Highlands only over the coming weekend Feb. 28th - March 1st.

If you have ordered some you will receive a phone call to verify delivery arrangements in the next few days.

Contact: Andrea Bauer 0417 369 225 - now heard every Monday on UGFM @ 11.30 Tune in for Hub news



Yea handyman Richard Wojcik has generously donated a beautiful handmade kennel for someone who has lost theirs in the fires and needs shelter for their furry king or queen. It is fully insulated (roof walls and floor), and is beautifully constructed (including spouting).

It will suit a pooch around the size of a kelpie. Pick up from Highlands Hub, you will need a trailer or Ute!

HOW TO ACCESS Rapid Response Grants

Open: 4 February 2026

Close: 4 March 2026

Payments via ACF fortnightly once approved

**\$1,000 per individual
max of \$2,000 per household**

Fire-Impacted residents of Strathbogie & Mitchell Shire eligible

WHAT CAN IT BE USED FOR?

- Transport, food and shelter (people or animals)
- Medical, health and well-being needs
- Connectivity and essential technology
- Repairs or replacement of critical assets and belongings

HOW TO APPLY

1. Prepare your info
2. Complete the form
3. Check your email
4. Send documents



Scan to apply



Administered by Australian Communities Foundation
Guided by a local Community Advisory Committee



Letter to the Editor

Avenel Active is working with Strathbogie Shire Council to offer a Mental Health First Aid in the Community course in Avenel in May 2026.

The course will teach participants how to provide initial support to another adult who may be experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis, until professional help is received or the crisis resolves.

Please contact avenelactive@gmail.com if any further information is needed.

Warm regards,
Helen Gwilliam.

NB: See next page. Ed

STOP PRESS!!

There are 2 wild dogs out and about around Brigadoon Rd

One is a bull Arab and the other a terrier cross.

They have attacked horses!
Be vigilant.



Free
for Strathbogie Shire
Residents

Mental Health First Aid Training



Register at:
www.trybooking.com/DJQRC
or via the QR code

Please note -
You must complete
both sessions to
receive qualification
as a Mental Health
First Aider.

Session 1

Saturday 16 May 2026
10am-4pm

Session 2

Saturday 30 May 2026
10am-4pm

Avenel Memorial Hall,
15 Queen St, Avenel

For further information contact: avenelactive@gmail.com

Standard Mental Health First Aid in the Community Setting



Standard Mental Health First Aid® (MHFA®) in the Community Setting course teaches participants how to provide initial support to another adult who may be experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis, until professional help is received or the crisis resolves.

With course materials tailored for the community, course participants learn about the signs and symptoms of common mental health problems in a friend, family member, loved one or another adult, how to recognise and respond to an emerging or worsening mental health problem, and the treatments and supports available.



Intervene early
Recognise the warning signs of mental health problems in other adults.



Offer support
Learn the skills to speak openly and accurately about mental health.



Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course participants will be able to:

- Recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health problems in adults
- Use an evidence-based action plan to initiate a mental health first aid conversation
- Assess for a range of crisis situations and provide initial support
- Understand the prevalence and impact of mental illnesses, risk factors and treatments and supports available
- Apply self-care practices as a Mental Health First Aider.



Respond in a crisis
Respond across a range of crisis situations where an adult may be at risk of harm.



Reduce stigma
Reduce stigma and increase support for adults experiencing and living with mental health problems.



Letter to the Editor

I'm setting up a program called 'Gardeners for Recovery' to help those people who have lost their gardens in the Longwood fire. I know that some people have lost their house and garden and others where the house was saved but the gardens were not. As a gardener myself, I know how I'd feel if this was me, and we all know gardens are so important for mental health as well as physical.

In order for local communities to do something towards helping gardeners, 'Gardeners for Recovery' aims to grow ornamental/perennial plants to order for fire affected people who want to replant next spring (or possibly earlier if people are ready). I have been in contact with the Euroa Arboretum (which is growing natives) and garden groups and all have been positive about joining the program.

At present, my focus is to assist communities closest to Violet Town, eg. Longwood, Ruffy, Creightons Creek, Gooram and across the Tablelands to Terip, Caveat and Highlands.

I would appreciate it if you were able to let your community know about this offer to assist and if anyone would like plants to come their way, please tell them to get in contact with me, when they're ready. I know many are still making decisions about whether to stay or go, so there is no urgency.

Rather than people being given plants they don't want or like, we are trying to grow to order, eg. if you would like lavender or salvias or succulents, then we will try and grow them for you. I intend to contact big companies who have garden sections to see if they can help too.

As the Violet Town CFA Secretary, it was incredibly sad to hear of how many CFA members lost their homes at Ruffy, and I feel compelled to help, so this is my fire recovery contribution.

Best wishes,
Kirsty Harris
Violet Town - 0422 208 779



GARDENERS FOR RECOVERY
growing hope and beauty for fire-affected gardeners



Aerial Photography

CASA certified drone operator and pilot.

Photography of properties/infrastructure for insurance and historical purposes
Located in Highlands.



Contact Mel Cornell: mel@thepaddockpractitioner.com or **0498 643 608** for further information or booking.

Are YOU in need of some crafting therapy?

I'm a crafty person - that's as in arty, not sneaky - and as a result I've been fielding several offers of various types of craft materials over the last few weeks for those people who no longer have their favourite past-time resources to hand.

If that is YOU - be it knitting, card craft, patchwork, etc and you would like to be the recipient of such largesse please email the Editor - pdphroberts@gmail.com and indicate what type of creative crafts you are interested in. I will then forward your request and details onto those people who may be able to assist with supplies.

The Art of Deception

Ron Litjens
The Butter Factory
13 Rattray Street, YEA

FRIDAY, 13 MARCH 2026
7.15 pm supper; 7.45 pm presentation

YRCL members free Landcare members \$5
Non-Landcare \$10 Kids free (CASH only)
RSVP: JUDY BROOKES: juncball@icloud.com

Community Recovery Survey

We value your input as our community continues its recovery. Your feedback will help shape future support and planning.

Scan the QR code to provide feedback.



Recovery eNews

Keep updated with a newsletter emailed directly to your inbox.

Scan to sign up today.



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Bushfire Casualty

Murrindindi Shire Council

Cr Paul Hildebrand

Koriella Ward
phildebrand@murrindindi.vic.gov.au
0428 758 617

Bushfire Casualty

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Bushfire Casualty

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0419 551 882

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ROGAINING • 50th Anniversary •



Tallarook 2026



The Granite News is widely distributed on the lands of the Taungurung clans - First People of the Rivers and Mountains.

We thank the Taungurung ancestors and elders who, for millennia, have cared for this country on which we now live, work & play. May the current generations of Taungurung, HCCC residents & landowners continue this important custodianship into the future.