



COBARGO

Working together in Bushfire Recovery & Resilience

Cobargo, located on Yuin Country, halfway between Narooma and Bega, is a village with a diverse, yet tight knit community, with a population just under 800.¹ As the northern gateway to the Bega Valley, Cobargo has a long history as a working village and plays a vital role in servicing the surrounding localities as a centre for local agricultural industries and a highly acclaimed annual agricultural show. The village and surrounding area is home to a range of small businesses, artisans, arts and crafts businesses and its main street businesses support and connect rural residents in the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla shires. Cobargo is a popular RV friendly town and hosts an internationally renowned folk festival.

¹ The Cobargo village supports the nearby surrounding catchment localities of Yowrie, Wandella, Coolagolite, Verona, Upper Brogo, Dignams Creek and the neighbouring smaller village of Quaama - all of these localities were affected by the Badja Forest Rd fire. The population total of this region is approximately 2500 - https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC10951

COBARGO: fire impacts

In the early hours of New Years Eve, 2019, the Badja Forest Road firestorm moved rapidly from Wadbilliga National Park, to the west of Cobargo village, and ravaged the Cobargo district - destroying critical infrastructure in a handful of hours: power, water, town sewerage, telecommunications were all lost; over 300 homes were destroyed, a significant proportion of the village main street was razed, roads and bridges were overrun by fire, hundreds of kilometres of fences were destroyed; entire dairy and beef herds and countless native species were incinerated. Tragically, the fire took the lives of 4 locals.

The Badja fire wiped out much of the historic heart of the main street of Cobargo: almost one third of main street businesses were destroyed - these represented 50% of the tourist-oriented businesses in the main retail sector of town².

Of the 94 Local Government Areas (LGAs) affected by the 2019-20 fires, the Bega Valley Shire was officially reported as the second-most affected LGA in NSW.

Official figures for the Bega Valley LGA report a burn scar over 60% - this represents the loss of over 75% of forests and parks and over 30% of agricultural land in the Bega Valley LGA.³ Ernst and Young have costed the economic damage to the shire at \$218M.⁴ In every measurable way, Cobargo was the most affected area within the Bega Valley Shire; one of the most affected LGAs in NSW.

*“There’s not a single person in the entire region that is not traumatised”.*⁵

² 2016 ABS figures compared to official damage report for region.

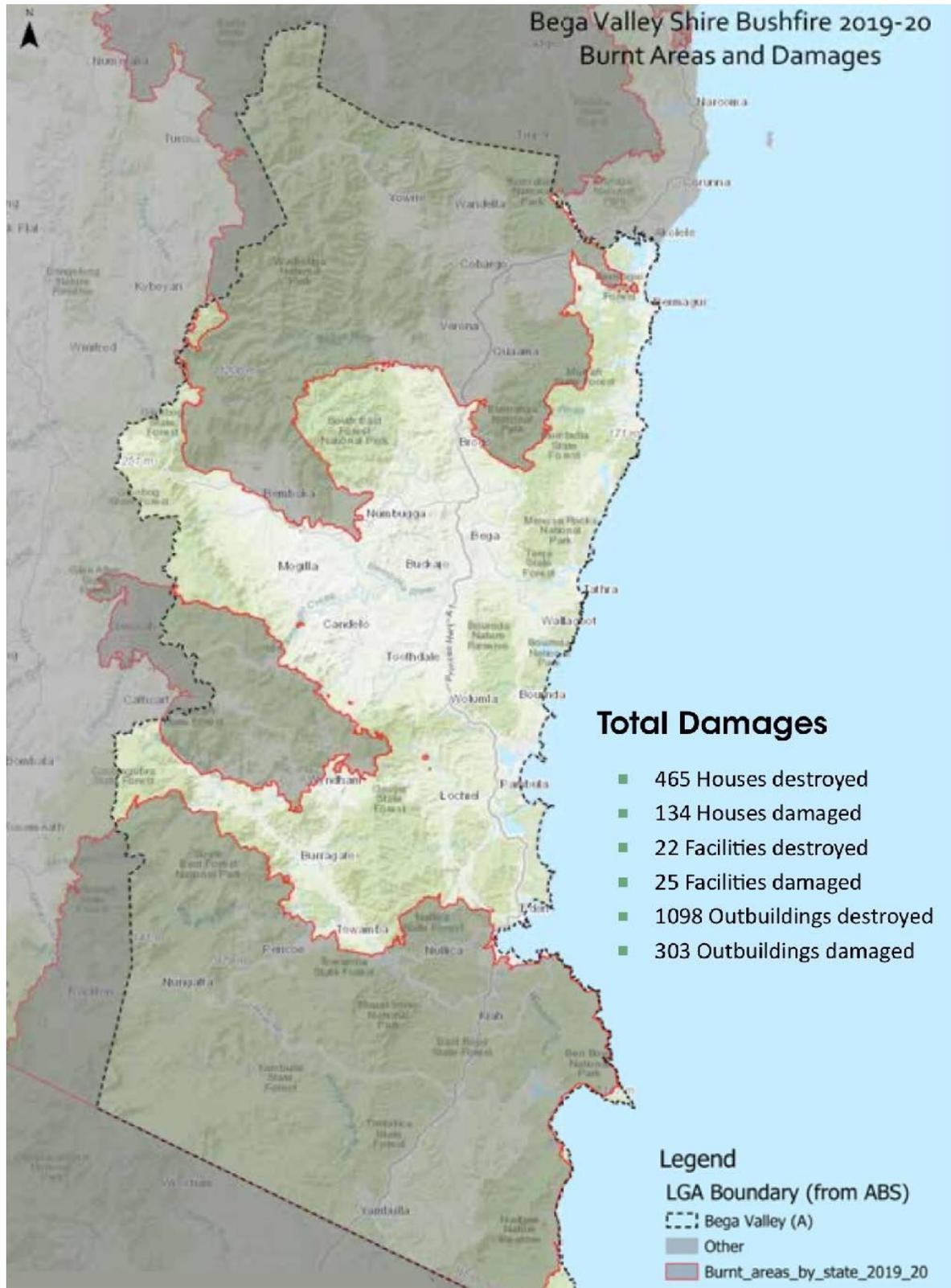
https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC10951

³ <https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/your-community/local-area-profiles#/map>

⁴ <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:i-QsmbM1tfEJ:https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/sites/default/files/local-government-economic-exposure-data.docx+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=au&client=firefox-b-d>

⁵ Jenni Bruce

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2020/12/one-year-on-horrific-fires-australians-struggle-to-rebuild/>



Bega Valley Shire Bushfire 2019-2020 Burnt Areas and Damages map: source NBRA

COBARGO: a resilient recovery

Since the firestorm our community has displayed an unwavering commitment to a community-led recovery. Together we have critically examined what our community needs to recover from this fire and have identified a shared vision for the future.⁶ The recovery process will acknowledge what we have lost and strive to restore what we value about Cobargo.

This will be achieved by ensuring we:

- Prioritise a community-led approach
- Ensure inclusive community consultation
- Value our diversity and honour all aspects of our history equally
- Support development of long-term, locally based, sustainable business
- Nurture a caring community, foster strong connections and build shared resilience.

Cobargo has a clear, demonstrable need for external investment to recover from the devastation of the Badja fire and to implement effective recovery projects. Our aim is to build back, respecting Cobargo's heritage, reinvigorating our economy and strengthening all our infrastructure, economic, social, cultural and environmental assets against future disaster.

⁶Recovery priorities identified via Australian Business Volunteers' facilitated community rebuild vision workshops and community consultation events and processes.

COBARGO: our proposed projects

In designing our recovery we have identified Cobargo as a precinct with a bundle of assets that are being planned, designed, financed and operated with economic recovery, resilience and climate adaptation front and centre.

From extensive community consultation processes four pivotal projects have emerged:

- 1. Cobargo CBD redevelopment.**
- 2. Cobargo Bushfire Resilience Centre**
- 3. Cobargo Showground Community Centre/Disaster Refuge**
- 4. Cobargo Community Microgrid**

Each project is linked by the shared objective to rebuild our shattered village, reinvigorate our weakened economy, restore community confidence and connectedness, regenerate the village environment assets, and build resilience to future shocks. We share a sense of urgency about the need for this work to proceed swiftly and stress that without significant investment our recovery will be slow and potentially incomplete.

A key element of these proposals is the capacity to work within an integrated framework to maximise the value of each project, collectively deliver augmented resilience outcomes for the town and region and maximise the dividend of investment in the community.

The Badja Forest Road firestorm caused enormous physical and emotional damage to our people, our historic village and our surrounding localities. As often happens in times of disaster, the pre-existing social capital of our community has come to the fore and is providing the vision and leadership that is helping us build back and recover strongly. Over the past year, our community, with the help of outside organisations and individuals, has developed sound community-led recovery projects which will deliver far-reaching economic, social and environmental value to our community, the region and beyond.



Destroyed Western side of the Cobargo main street, January 2020; Source AAP

Cobargo: Working together in Bushfire Recovery and Resilience was developed by Zena Armstrong, Rhonda Ayliffe and Shona Taranto with assistance from Australian Business Volunteers drawing from material provided during extensive community consultations: February 2020 to January 2021.⁷

⁷ Zena Armstrong, President, Cobargo and District Energy Transition Inc and Co-convenor, Cobargo Showground Community Centre and Disaster Refuge working group; Rhonda Ayliffe, Vice- Chair, Cobargo Bushfire Resilience Centre Inc.; Shona Taranto, Chairperson, Cobargo Quaama Business Recovery Group Inc; Director Cobargo Community Development Corporation Ltd.