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Relief Fund

The Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund (GERF) is still collecting donations to directly help those who have been affected by the recent bush fires. As of the 17th February, GERF has raised \$2.2 million the bush fire victims of Gippsland. The GERF is a registered charitable organisation making all donations tax deductible. All donations are returned to the community and no costs are deducted.

Donations can be made [online](#) or at any branch of the:

National Australia Bank

BSB: 083 932

Account Number 04829 9080

Visit relieffund.org.au for more information.



State of Victoria's Environment

You are invited to a community briefing on the State of Victoria's Environment, conducted by Jane Tovey, who is Project Manager at the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability. (Due to unexpected circumstances, Dr Ian McPhail AM is no longer able to make it to this briefing)

Where: WGCMA Boardroom, 16 Hotham Street Traralgon

When: 2pm, Thursday 12 March 2009

RSVP: Mikaela Power by Friday 6th March on 1300 094 262 or mikaelap@wgcm.vic.gov.au

Under legislation, the Victorian Government is required to respond to the recommendations in Dr McPhail's report within 12 months. The report received excellent feedback from commentators, academics and environmental NGO's, including [this editorial in The Age](#), with the quote "If everyone lived like Victorians, almost four planets would be needed."

The report is a thorough analysis of Victoria's natural environment, its current condition, environmental trends and the relationships between factors such as climate change, land management, native flora and fauna, water, air quality and issues specific to Victoria's environment.

Australia's already hot, dry, and highly variable climate is more vulnerable to climate change than other developed countries, and climate change is affecting us already. The State of the Environment in Victoria report recommends a range of options for government, community groups and individuals to work towards an environmentally sustainable Victoria.

This briefing is an excellent opportunity to gain an understanding of the State of the Environment Report and to ask more Gippsland-specific questions about the report.





Landcare Expo

Where: Saturday April 18, 2009

When: Caulfield Racetrack

Landcare comes to the city in a Landcare Expo first. Be part of this amazing event and help spread the Landcare message. Free exhibition spaces are available to Landcare groups and networks to display their projects and achievements.

For more information visit www.landcarevic.net.au or contact your Regional Landcare Co-ordinator.



Gippsland Regional Exchange Summary

Upskilling, industry diversification and better transport and internet communications were among the key themes for Gippsland's development in the next decade identified in a recent DPCD forum at Traralgon.

Other opportunities on the wish list included:

Develop skills and training

- Support for training and skills development, including sponsoring of students by local businesses and agencies to encourage greater participation
- Partnerships between industries and educational institutions to align education and training to the needs of industries
- Training for farmers on water-use and land-use efficiency
- Growth of the Monash University Gippsland campus, particularly to be seen as "Gippsland's university"

Community engagement and connectivity

- Educate the community on climate change so that addressing environmental challenges is seen as a responsibility for all

Diversification of industry

- Promotion of Gippsland as the clean and green region, allied with research into clean coal and new technologies

Detailed planning work

- Undertake strategic regional planning to resolve tensions between competing land uses, and ensure sustainable use of the region's resources
- Seek State policies on water planning for towns, agriculture and industry, and for management of coastal areas
- Undertake integrated land-use, transport and growth strategies, which identify key regional centres and prioritise investment in them
- Undertake effective planning to protect biodiversity and maintain vital ecosystems
- Develop a co-ordinated response to natural disasters through a single agency

A Ministerial taskforce will now consider the perspectives identified in this and other similar regional events. Contact Chris Lord on chris.lord@dpcd.vic.gov.au for more information.



2009 Agribusiness Forum

Victorian Agribusiness Council's 2009 Agribusiness

Summit will be held in South Gippsland following a successful pitch by Agribusiness Gippsland Inc.

About 300 delegates from across Victoria are expected to attend the conference on Phillip Island in mid-2009.

Pre and post-summit field trips will also be organised to visit key agribusiness operations on the mainland.

The overall theme of the conference will be farming for profit amid a changing climate. Some of the thoughts raised by the organising committee are:

- Should we change what we are growing?
- Should we be growing/fertilising/harvesting differently?
- Should we alter our processing/marketing approaches?

Environmentally sustainable operations and energy alternatives will be a focus of the field trips. Early sponsorship deals are available. Contact Alex Arbuthnot on alex_arbuthnot@bigpond.com for more information.

Gippsland Produce on Show to Nation

Two Victorian episodes of the successful television show Mercurio's Menu will tease the tastebuds of a national and international audience this summer.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said the Brumby Government has co-sponsored the Mornington Peninsula and Gippsland episodes of the Saturday afternoon show, which showcases the work of some of Victoria's most passionate primary producers.

"The Gippsland episode airs Saturday, 9 May, and takes in some of the best produce in the region, including seafood, organic lamb and asparagus, stops at a remote but coveted restaurant and even visits an eel farm."

Mr Helper said while Victoria was small in size, the state's successful and productive agricultural sector generated around one quarter of Australia's food exports.

For more information on the program or to see profiles of the producers featured in the Victorian episodes visit the website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/mercuriosmenu

Gippsland Sustainable Agriculture Network

When: 9.30am to 1pm Tuesday 21 April 2009

Where: WGCMA Boardroom, 16 Hotham Street, Traralgon

Purpose:

- To reconfirm the aims of the Network (formerly the Gippsland EMS Reference Group)
- To catch up on what sustainable agriculture services and support are currently available for farmers in Gippsland

Please RSVP to Jo Caminiti on joannec@wgcm.vic.gov.au or (03) 5175 7865 by Friday 17 April.



EG Water to Cut Greenhouse Emissions

East Gippsland Water is pursuing solar power to help reduce the impact of its operations on the environment and cut energy costs, using the technology to help treat wastewater in a first for Victoria and installing solar water heating at a number of its premises.

The Corporation is the water industry's first in the state to utilise a solar powered water circulator at a wastewater treatment plant, as it looks to replace its ageing stock of electrically powered aerators, a number of which are some 30 years old. The SolarBee is being trialled for one year at the Lakes Entrance Wastewater Treatment Plant, where the device, similar in appearance to a space landing craft, is located on the sludge lagoon.

Using highly efficient, brushless motors and the latest in solar technology, the device uses no external power, which means there are zero energy costs compared to its electrical counterpart. It is estimated that just one of these devices could reduce East Gippsland Water's greenhouse gas emissions by up to 100 tonnes a year. There are no potential short-circuiting issues and it operates very quietly.

East Gippsland Water is also about to install solar powered hot water systems at its main office in Bairnsdale, as well as at its depots in Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance.

[Full story available here...](#)



Wildlife Booms in Eco-Survey

Revegetating Westernport Water's sites with native plants is starting to reap rewards – with bird and animal sightings more than doubling in some areas. A plant census has shown a similar leap in biodiversity, and a recent photo survey of water corporation sites also captured the first sighting of a rare possum.

The water corporation has funded the work of local Landcare volunteers for several years and Westernport Water staff have also undertaken large-scale revegetation and weed removal.

“Now we're seeing the results of that work,” said Managing Director Murray Jackson. “It's a credit to the volunteers and to our staff.”

Of the 86 birds species sighted at Candowie reservoir, 47 were not listed in the previous biodiversity register and “should be noted as improvements to the biodiversity”, according to the report authors.

Mammal numbers at the reservoir have also boomed; four of the nine mammals are first-time sightings, including the bobuck – or mountain brushtail possum – captured for the first time on infrared still cameras.

The King Rd treatment plant, which had also undergone considerable replanting, saw 16 first-time sightings among its 45-strong bird list.

Animal populations at the Cowes wastewater treatment plant were more stable, although bird-watchers were excited by the inaugural visit of a wedge-tailed eagle.

The plant list for Candowie had more than doubled since the last census. Of the 72 species found, 37 of them had not existed there previously. At Cowes, 17 of 37 were new arrivals and, at Grantville, 12 out of 36 were newcomers. [Full story available here...](#)



Bobuck image captured by motion-triggered camera