

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group - Weekly Bulletin No.5

Wednesday 10th January, 2007

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Priority Fire Update

Predictions for the next couple of days are serious. East Gippsland is most likely to bear the brunt of the fire activity.

DSE/CFA and PV are working very hard to ensure that community and visitors in East Gippsland are aware of the risks and can make informed decisions about whether to stay or go.

The changing nature of the fire situation is a source of frustration for everyone. Please be patient. The Tourism industry in Gippsland has earned significant respect and credibility with government and community because of our positive and united approach over the last 4-5 weeks.

It is possible that we will be dealing with a changing situation for at least another month. Hang in there, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The GTRRG will continue to support industry, community and government efforts in the response and recovery process.

Rate Relief Now Available for Tourism Operators in Baw Baw Wellington and Latrobe

Baw Baw, Wellington and Latrobe Tourism Operators can apply for rate relief as part of their Local Governments' Financial Hardships

Policies. Operators requiring support in paying rates are encouraged to contact:

John Court (Baw Baw Shire): 5624 2475
Narelle Stevens (Wellington Shire): 5142 4445
Jan Smith (Latrobe City): 1300 367 700

Telstra Country Wide Supporting Their Business Customers

Telstra have established a payment deferral process for tourism operators that have experienced financial hardship as a result of the bush fires across Gippsland.

Telstra are willing to offer deferral of up to 3 months for Businesses on their Telstra Accounts.

Businesses that need assistance must contact Loretta Willaton ph 5142 4546 or email Loretta.Willaton@team.telstra.com to determine eligibility. Information will then be forwarded through to Telstra's Hardships Credit Management Team.

Yarragon Business Community 'Inspired By Gippsland' and Pay it Forward

On the weekend before Australia Day (January 21st and 22nd) Yarragon will host a two day community event with live music and loads of atmosphere to support the regional bushfire recovery efforts.

Every trader in Yarragon has committed to donating 10% of their total turnover generated for the weekend to the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund.

The event is being supported by Gippsland Gourmet Country LTA and Baw Baw Shire.

Well done Yarragon!

Fine Foods and Soothing Jazz Tunes at Mt Baw Baw

This Sunday will see Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort burst into a celebration of local music, wines and produce! The Resort will capture the tastes and scents of summer bringing together live jazz entertainment, fine dining and sampling of a range of local wines. Melbourne Jazz Group, Zebra Lady will headline the day commencing at 11am and concluding at 3pm.

Field Trips

Members of the GTRRG and Local Government representatives will visit Dargo, Licola, Omeo and Walhalla in the next fortnight to

gauge the level of assistance needed by the communities. The group will meet with operators to discuss local concerns and show support.

The GTRRG Crisis and Communications Plan is being edited to reflect the changing circumstances. As the situation develops we are seeing different communities in different stages of response and recovery.

At this stage we have communities that are:

- Under threat, directly impacted and unable to cater for visitors.
- Directly impacted, no longer under threat and unable to cater for visitors
- Directly impacted, no longer under threat and able to receive visitors
- Not directly impacted by the fires, in recovery and able to receive visitors

The updated document will be available for download by the end of the week at www.gippslandtourism.net.au

Inspired by Gippsland - Celebration of Food and Wine

The \$25,000 funding announcement made by Minister Holding for the Celebration of Food and Wine in March will be used to support a \$20,000 advertising campaign and a \$5000 consumer competition.

Original plans included a staffed display at the Federation Square VIC, but given the current fire situation and the pressure on human resources, we will be deferring this activity.

Support Services for operators

If things are getting you down and you need someone to talk to, call:

LIFELINE GIPPSLAND 24hr telephone counseling 13 1114

To access business planning support and advice through State Government please contact **Business Line 13 2215**

Information on Disaster Relief from the Australian Government

Go to www.disasterassist.gov.au or for further assistance call the **Australian Government Bushfire Assistance Helpline on 1802233** or visit your local Centrelink Office.

The **Department of Human Services** has further information on grants, based on eligibility, to assist fire affected businesses, farms and non-for profit organizations.

To be eligible, applicants must have suffered direct damage as a result of the bushfires, be unable to affect the necessary repairs from their own resources and have exhausted alternative sources of assistance. **Please visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency for details.**

Accounts will still be received as per normal, but customers will have the relief that they will not be disconnected or credit managed due to non payment. This deferral is for a maximum of 3 months.

Media/ Public Relations

We welcome ideas and suggestions from operators and industry associations as to how we can leverage additional positive PR for the region.

'Good news' and recovery stories from fire-affected communities and operators are also welcome, and can be forwarded to: jennybr@wellington.vic.gov.au.

The need for a strong and unified response to bushfires is critical. If you are contacted directly by the media regarding the impact of the bushfires, please refer them to Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 638.

Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund

The Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund is continuing to accept donations to assist fire-affected families across the region.

Victorian businesses and communities are being urged to support those who have lost homes and belongings by making a donation by post or at any National Australia Bank. Cheque donations can be posted to PO Box 508, Traralgon, 3844.

The Last Word...

The GTRRG is committed to working with the industry to provide a unified and effective regional response and recovery process.

To achieve this we need your feedback, suggestions and ideas. Please feel welcome to make contact with us via the phone or email.

If you want more information on the Response and Recovery effort please go to the dedicated tourism industry website: www.gippslandtourism.net.au

People looking for inspirational experiences in Gippsland can go to:
www.destinationgippsland.com.au and www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

If you require assistance during this time please contact Jenny Brown on 5142 3426, or for urgent matters call Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 638.

Chris Buckingham

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General Manager, Gippsland Tourism

Chairperson, Destination Gippsland Inc

0429 869 638

www.destinationgippsland.com.au

For information on the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group and industry information please go to
www.gippslandtourism.net.au