

## REGIONAL COMMUNITY RECOVERY COMMITTEES UPDATE

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Report Author:           Manager Community & Business Recovery  
Responsible Officer:    Director Recovery  
Ward(s) affected:        (All Wards);

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*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

### SUMMARY

In April 2021, Yarra Ranges Council agreed to develop a community-led recovery project, with Council endorsing “*the establishment of four Community Recovery Committees that are empowered to make funding decisions for their communities and have membership based on representativeness and skills to contribute to the recovery phase of the pandemic*”.

The remit for these groups was expanded in September 2021, to also include recovery from the June 2021 Storm. Four Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRCs) were then formed as Advisory Committees to Council covering the Hills, Valley, Upper Yarra, and Urban regions of the municipality.

This report gives an overview of the work the Regional Community Recovery Committees have achieved since they were formally established in November 2021. Regional Community Recovery Committees have worked tirelessly with their communities to support an understanding of the local recovery issues. To date, Regional Community Recovery Committees in partnership with the Community Enterprise Foundation (CEF) have engaged with community and delivered grant funding totalling close to \$279,000 for 59 community led recovery projects.

The processes undertaken by the RCRCs so far have developed skills and confidence in each of the communities they are supporting.

Regional Community Recovery Committees will continue until 30 June 2023 and will oversee delivery of further Council funding for community-led recovery projects.

The Council support for the Regional Community Recovery Committees will now transfer to Council’s Communities Directorate which requires an update of the delegations associated with the RCRCs to allow for the continued administration.

## RECOMMENDATION

### *That Council*

- 1. Note the progress made by the four Regional Community Recovery Committees and its support of the recovery of our communities.**
- 2. Note the first round of Community-Led Recovery Grants with 59 community-led projects receiving \$278,809.95 worth of funding.**
- 3. Endorse the transfer of the delegated authority from Director of Recovery and Manager of Community & Business Recovery to the Director of Communities and Manager Community Wellbeing from the from 31 December 2022, to authorise:**
  - (a) the appointment of members of the community to respective Regional Community Recovery Committees;**
  - (b) the Community Led Recovery Plans; and**
  - (c) funding recommendations of the Regional Community Recovery Committees.**

## RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Council supported the initial allocation of funding to Community Recovery Committees in the budget meeting of 11 August 2020. This initiative was also included in a later report on 8 December 2020 which outlined a range of Recovery activities.

At the [13 April 2021 Council meeting](#), Council unanimously endorsed the expenditure of \$1m for the establishment of four Community Recovery Committees under Council's Pandemic Recovery Framework.

At the [14 September 2021 Council meeting](#), Council endorsed the formation of four Regional Community Recovery Committees as Advisory Committees of Council with specific Terms of Reference and extended commitment to The Project to 30 June 2023, with the coordination and administration costs of \$175,000 from the 2022/23 Pandemic/Storm Recovery Commitment.

In addition, Council has also considered the Municipal Recovery Plan at the following meetings:

- Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 14 June 2022;
- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan Update for noting;
- Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 12 April 2022;
- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan Update for noting;

- Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 14 December 2021; and
- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan for endorsement and Storm Recovery Update for noting

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

Yarra Ranges Council is committed to encouraging community-led recovery, supporting impacted communities to be self-determining in shaping and driving their recovery from disasters. In response to the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic Council agreed to establish Community Recovery Committees to support community activation.

In November 2021, Council endorsed four Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRCs), covering the Yarra Ranges regions of the Hills, Urban, Upper Yarra and Valley, in response to the June 2021 Storm and COVID Pandemic. The term for the RCRCs finishes on 30 June 2023.

The intention for RCRCs, was to distribute funding to community organisations (through grant making) and develop local community led recovery plans.

### **Regional Community Recovery Committee Development and Achievements**

RCRC members were selected through an Expression of Interest process that was open to the whole community. Appointed members participated in induction and training activities from November 2021 which took place online due to COVID restrictions. To date the RCRCs have transitioned through several stages of team development and volunteer member have dedicated significant time in the support of their community.

Originally 45 community members were endorsed into their respective RCRCs, currently there are 30 members. There is a strong pattern of attrition with committees of this kind, and the resignation of members has been due to a number of reasons including illness, increasing family and work commitments, COVID vaccination status, members becoming Council employees and one becoming a Councillor.

A significant amount of work has been achieved in less than 12 months, including:

- All RCRCs meeting at least monthly;
- Induction, introductions, planning and goal setting;
- Engagement with communities through implementing surveys, hosting community forums, and having numerous one on one discussions;
- Understanding focus / priority areas, as represented in the funding guidelines for each Grant Round and in Council's Municipal Recovery Plan;

- Liaising with Community Enterprise Foundation (CEF) in the development of Round 1 Grant Guidelines;
- Designing promotional material and hosting information sessions to publicise their grant rounds;
- Awarding the first round of funding to grant applicants (Attachment 1);
- Contributing to an independent evaluation of this initiative and participating in an interim 'health check' of the project; and
- Starting to reflect on the initial grants process in preparation for next rounds.

RCRCs are now planning for the final 7 months of the project.

Consultation with RCRC members on 10th October 2022 has confirmed that RCRCs, in their remaining time together, are considering how to complete their plan to:

- undertake more extensive community engagement;
- implement further grant rounds including the Municipal Wide grants;
- document their experience to assist with potential future iterations of Community Recovery Committees; and
- explore becoming more strategic in their actions.

Whilst the Round 1 grant allocation has been completed, there remains funding (for Round 2 and Municipal-wide funding) to be distributed. Further, Council awaits the outcome of a funding application submitted to Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) to offer additional Community Led Recovery grants that focus on recovery from storm and flood only.

### **Partnership with Community Enterprise Foundation**

To support the work of the RCRCs, Council formed the Yarra Ranges Community Recovery Partnership with the Local Bendigo Community Banks of the Yarra Ranges and the Community Enterprise Foundation (CEF), the philanthropic arm of the Bendigo Bank. The purpose of this partnership was to support the RCRCs to create resilient and connected communities that are empowered to act in response to their own community's need, build capacity and lead positive change for all stakeholders, through the grant process.

Aside from the work they have undertaken administering the grants with the RCRCs, the CEF also play a significant role in supporting grant recipients with managing the implementation of their funded projects through to completion and providing guidance with reporting and acquittal.

The collaboration between Council and the CEF has been beneficial to all parties. The CEF have actively participated in many activities of the RCRC, such as

attending meetings, hosting grants information sessions for community groups and making themselves available to assist with community queries in assisting with grant making.

### **Community-Led Recovery Grants**

Each committee chose to focus initially on a process of grant-making, based on their initial understanding of local recovery needs.

All four Regional Community Recovery Committees have completed their first round of Community-Led Recovery Grants - a summary of the grants awarded is provided in *Attachment 1: Summary of Successful Community-Led Recovery Grants Round 1*.

Round 1 Community-Led Recovery Grants opened in July and each RCRC developed guidelines and engaged with community to promote the opportunity for funding. In total 69 applications for community led recovery projects were submitted, with community groups requesting \$448,779.70.

The members of the RCRCs engaged directly with groups that were operating in their region to identify impacts but also make them aware of the grant opportunities. This resulted in a number of applications from groups that haven't or rarely apply to Council's standard grant rounds.

All four RCRCs have completed their assessments of all applications and have recommended that 59 projects with a total of \$278,809.95 be funded (a further breakdown is included in Table 1: *Community-Led Recovery Grant Round 1 funding allocations*).

Round 1 Community-Led Recovery Grants projects (implementation) are scheduled to be completed by community groups before 30 June 2023.

*Table 1: Community-Led Recovery Grant Round 1 funding allocations*

<b>Grant round</b>	<b>Applications received</b>	<b>Funding requested</b>	<b>Applications funded</b>	<b>Funding allocated</b>	<b>Funding remaining</b>
Hills CRC	22	\$140,684.90	13	\$54,334.90	\$95,665.10
Upper Yarra CRC	17	\$177,409.00	9	\$42,984.25	\$107,015.75
Urban CRC	13	\$62,028.80	10	\$47,228.80	\$102,771.20
Valley CRC	17	\$68,657.00	13	\$49,134.00	\$100,866.00
<b>Total Round 1</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>\$448,778.70</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>\$193,681.95</b>	<b>\$406,318.05</b>
LGA-wide (via Rd 1)*	0	0	14	\$85,128.00	\$114,872.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>\$448,778.70</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>\$278,809.95</b>	<b>\$521,190.05</b>

*\*Submissions via regional Round 1 application process, however projects have municipal benefit and therefore are proposed to be considered for funding from the municipal-wide funding pool.*

Feedback regarding the grants process has been positive. RCRC members have discussed their appreciation of the opportunity to engage with their community to explore community projects in detail and are proud of the contributions they have made to assisting community with delivering applications.

Community groups have reported their appreciation for the assistance they received from each RCRC and the Community Enterprise Foundation, and the opportunity to deliver projects.

### **Delegation of Decision-making to Council Officers**

To ensure adherence to appropriate governance and legislative requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*, currently the Director Recovery and Manager Community & Business Recovery are delegated under authority of the CEO to make decisions about Community Recovery Committees.

With the longer-term responsibilities for Council's recovery support transferring to the permanent business teams, it is necessary to change delegates from the Director of Recovery and Manager Community & Business Recovery to the Director of Communities and Manager Community Wellbeing.

Such delegation manages risk and increases transparency in the decision-making of RCRC grant allocation and will continue to ensure efficiency in decision-making with respect to RCRC recommendations. The delegation of authority will remain regarding decision making pertaining to RCRC membership, and endorsement of Community Plans will reduce bureaucracy and expedite the actions of the RCRC.

### ***Options considered***

The continuation of RCRCs beyond 30 June 2023 was considered however this is not recommended as the project is a time limited model.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

It is recommended that Council acknowledges the substantial work that the Regional Community Recovery Committees have achieved in 12 months, including the achievements of the first round of grants, and their proposals to consider further grant rounds and the development of local community recovery plans where achievable within the remaining time of the project.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

No further funding is required to complete the project originally agreed to by Council in September of 2021.

Some of Council’s expected outlay has been offset through the support of the State Government’s Council Support Fund and lower than anticipated set-up and operating costs.

Table 2: Funding allocated to the Community Recovery Committee Project

<b>Funded Items</b>	<b>Endorsed / Supported</b>	<b>Council Budget Allocation</b>	<b>External Funding Allocation</b>
RCRC Grant Allocations	Council April 2021	\$800, 000	
RCRC establishment & administrative costs (incl CEF)	Council April 2021	\$200, 000	
Staff Allocation and operating costs (Pandemic/Storm Recovery Fund)	Council September 2021	\$175,000	
<b>Total of Original Budget</b>		<b>\$1,175,000</b>	
<b>Revised Cost of Project</b>		<b>\$1,118,500</b>	
*Council allocation reduced grant covering staff costs to 30 June 2023 initially	Council Support Fund (Round 1 & 2)		\$ 197,500
<b>Revised Total Council Allocation</b>		<b>\$921,000</b>	

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan: This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Connected and Healthy Communities

This report also contributes strongly to the following strategic objective(s) in the following plans:

- Municipal Recovery Plan
  - Enable Community Led Recovery
    - Implement four Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRCs) and support each to develop a regional recovery plan with ring-fenced funding.
- Pandemic Recovery Framework
  - Objective 3
    - Community members feel sufficiently safe and secure following the pandemic to engage in social activities and interactions with other members of the community.

- Yarra Ranges Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
  - Respond to public health impacts of emergencies.
    - Communities in Yarra Ranges recover from Covid 19 and other emergencies and restore social connections, mental and physical health and wellbeing, thriving local places and economies, and access to services and resources needed.
- Yarra Range Council Community Engagement Policy 2021

## **RELEVANT LAW**

*Local Government Act 2020* - To ensure compliance with appropriate governance and legislative requirements under the *Local Government Act 2020*, the Director Communities and Manager Community Wellbeing, under authority from the CEO will be granted delegation to undertake the duty of decision-making regarding RCRC grant allocation and endorsing Community Recovery Plans. This will manage risk and increase transparency in decision-making while maintaining commitment to active community participation in community led recovery.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

An initial brief analysis of the grants made to date indicates a spread between projects that will support social connection, provide services to the community or support activities that will provide some economic and environmental benefit.

### ***Economic Implications***

The economic impacts of the pandemic and the storm are significant. Loss of employment and small business closures are of particular concern in areas of Yarra Ranges. Economic and social impacts are inter-connected with a decline in mental health resulting from loss of economic wellbeing. RCRC grants are already supporting local events that revitalise local communities and inject into the local economy as well as grants that address unemployment or the social issues arising from unemployment.

### ***Social Implications***

The social impacts of the pandemic are many and still evolving and further complicated by the emotional and physical damage from the storm. The role of The Project is to understand local priorities emerging from the impacts of emergencies and develop locally appropriate, locally led responses to them where possible.

In doing this the strength of local networks, ingenuity and capability is greatly increased which not only is a significant success from a recovery perspective but also vital for preparedness and resilience.



## ***Environmental Implications***

Environmental issues are being indirectly influenced through this project via the applications to the RCRC grant rounds. Already a number of nature-based activities have been proposed for consideration through the first round of grants.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Project is founded on a principle of community driven activity which can only be achieved through effective engagement.

The current RCRCs have engaged with the community in several ways, including surveys, community forums, one-on-one discussion. The outcomes of these activities contributed to the development of the grant guidelines for Round 1 funding and identifying the community priorities for recovery. These are centred around community connection and building resilience which also formed the basis of the objective of funding for grants.

RCRCs, in conjunction with CEF, hosted a number of information sessions to assist with grant applications and CEF have been instrumental in assisting community groups complete their grant applications.

RCRC continue to liaise and engage with community to further their understanding of recovery priorities.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

A range of consultation has been undertaken in the establishment and implementation of the RCRCs. The community information sessions they held provided a strong understanding of community sentiment and evidence of community desire to be involved in recovery activities.

Council continues to work in partnership with the CEF and Local Bendigo Community Banks of the Yarra Ranges in creating strong processes for the establishment and implementation of RCRCs.

There have been two combined RCRC Gatherings where members from all regions have come together to share insights and learnings, an external health check was conducted to identify opportunities to improve the facilitation of the groups, and to consider priorities for their last 7 months as well as celebrating their successes.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Risks related to the RCRC have been considered in some depth.

The granting of authority to RCRC to make decisions regarding funding allocation is not supported by the Local Government Act 2020. The recommendation to delegate decision making to the Director Communities and Manager Community Wellbeing, enables Council to meet legislative requirements about the allocation of public

money. Each RCRC participates by reviewing funding applications and making recommendations based on specified criteria processes.

The group dynamics of the RCRCs are respectful, with clear processes for resolving differences, while also encouraging open and constructive debate and creativity and innovative thinking. Selection of RCRC members and the support given during the establishment phase and the early months of operating was important in establishing a strong foundation for effectiveness of the RCRCs. RCRC induction included council policies such as Code of Conduct.

Reputational risk for Council is present as The Project is ambitious and far reaching. Council and the RCRCs accept that challenges may arise and see them as learning opportunities to be worked through.

These risks have been considered and the proposed model has been developed to minimise these risks and support positive, locally driven, achievement oriented RCRC.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## **ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT**

1. Summary of Successful Community-Led Recovery Grants Round 1