

NOM23/002 - UPGRADES TO EVACUATION CENTRES**SHASA presentation to Council on 25 July 2023.****The need to prepare for the 2023/24 bushfire and heatwave season**

As mentioned in Councillor Mayne's Notice of Motion, for the last three years the Eurobodalla has experience relatively wet weather as a result of La Nina systems which bring above average rain and cooler temperatures. This has resulted in three years of prolific regrowth of vegetation since the Black Summer Bushfires.

The Bureau of Meteorology has confirmed that we are now heading into a super El Nino which means hotter and drier conditions. Eurobodalla has had the driest June on record and the vegetation and soils are rapidly drying out. We can expect much higher temperatures from the El Niño in the latter half of the year, from October/November onwards.

Bushfires

As our world heats up bushfires are more common and severe. The 2019/20 black summer bushfires burned 24 million hectares. The Canadian wildfires of 2023 have already burned 8 million hectares and blanketed Canadian and U.S. cities with smoke. Bushfires are raging in Spain, Greece and Siberia.

Air pollution from wood smoke immediately increases the risk of heart problems. For every 10 micrograms more of PM2.5 (the primary particle size in wildfire smoke) in one cubic metre of air, a person's combined odds of experiencing at least one of four heart issues is increased by 5.5%. A Monash University study of the health effects following the catastrophic New South Wales (NSW) bushfires of 2019-20 has found a significant increase in emergency department visits for respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

Pregnant women suffered more birth complications, including decreased birth weight and preterm births.

This highlights the urgency of limiting even short-term exposures to wildfire smoke to avoid smoke-related rises in both heart attacks and respiratory issues.

Heatwaves

Around the globe, temperatures are soaring as the world enters a multiyear period of intense warming, fuelled by man-made climate change and a naturally occurring El Niño weather pattern, which is releasing a gusher of heat into the atmosphere. Crippling heatwaves are currently being experienced in Asia, America and Europe. The World Meteorological Organization said that July began with the hottest week on record. The high temperatures are caused by a “heat dome” – created when an area of high pressure stays over the same place for an extended period of time, trapping hot air underneath.

Globally renowned climatologist Michael Mann last week said the impact of the coming summer’s heat on Australia is likely to be profound. An ABC media piece on Sunday said that NSW communities are warned to prepare for bushfires after crews battle 800 blazes this month.

Heatwaves are Australia’s deadliest natural hazard. Our elderly population are particularly vulnerable. Doctors say the ageing process makes older bodies generally less capable of withstanding extreme heat. Older bodies tend to hold more heat than younger ones, and as people age, they produce less sweat, making it tougher to regulate body temperature and dissipate heat. It can be harder for even healthy older adults to tell if they’re dehydrated or overheated. Medical experts have advised that common health issues — including heart problems, high blood pressure and diabetes — put older people more at risk of consequences from heat stress. Pregnant women and the very young are also at higher risk of health complications.

Heatwave Havens

To assist with achieving a more resilient community, SHASA has worked hard over the last 4 years to upgrade suitable community owned facilities to operate as heatwave and bushfire havens. So far 6 community facilities have been completed:

- Red Door Hall, Anglican Parish Moruya
- The Moruya Pre School Kindergarten
- CWA Moruya
- CWA Narooma
- Narooma Men's Shed
- Uniting Church Batehaven.

SHASA in partnership with other community organisations and Council has developed a Eurobodalla Heatwave and Bushfire Haven Plan which includes businesses cases to upgrade an additional 11 community owned facilities and five Council Halls. We need just under \$2m to upgrade these facilities and have a network operating across the Eurobodalla as havens from the heat and/or wood smoke for our more vulnerable members of the community.

SHASA has also installed solar on 18 community facilities and solar and batteries on 9 community facilities to provide more energy resilience. This includes both Marine Rescue Narooma and Marine Rescue Tuross Head/Moruya so that can keep operating the radios when the power goes down.

What other Councils are doing

A number of Councils in areas impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires have collaborated with their communities to upgrade community halls in preparation for future extreme weather events.

Clarence Valley Council has upgraded community halls in Nymboida, Coaldale, Dundurrabin, Ewingar, Glenreagh, Ilarwil, Kungala Lanitza, Jackadgery, and Wooloweyah. The work included kitchen upgrades; drainage and water supply improvements; fire egress and resilience upgrades; accessibility improvements; solar power, battery system and back-up generators and air conditioning installations.

Shoalhaven City Council has set up Community Information Hubs at 19 Council owned community halls across the Shoalhaven which includes solar, batteries, back up generators, satellite communications, so that telephone and internet can operate when the power goes down.

Councils in NE Victoria have upgraded a number of halls including Tawonga Community Memorial Hall, Corryong and District Memorial Hall and Harrierville Community Hall.

Some actions that Eurobodalla Shire Council could undertake to ensure the community is better protected from the impacts of from bushfires and heatwaves

1. Upgrade the Evacuation Centre buildings to include air conditioning, and HEPA filters to provide people with refuge from heat and/or smoke during catastrophic weather events.
2. Shade Council car parks to reduce heat impacts in the middle of our towns.
3. Partner with SHASA to secure funding to implement the Eurobodalla Heatwave and Bushfire Haven Strategy. Heidi Stratford, Director Illawarra and South Coast, Reconstruction NSW, has recommended that SHASA work with Council to submit and application for funding under the second round of the Disaster Ready Fund. Reconstruction NSW sees heatwave havens as a very high priority for the Eurobodalla. Project proposals would include maintenance agreements for solar and battery systems.
4. Set up community information boards at key Council facilities to keep the community informed in the event of power and telecommunications failures.
5. Engage with the Shoalhaven City Council about its Community Information Hubs at 25 community halls across the Shoalhaven to see what could be replicated here in the Eurobodalla.
6. When Evacuation Centres are established, ensure they provide a separate area for families with babies and young children.
7. Encourage people to remove combustible materials from their yards by removing the green waste fees at the tip for all of Spring, not just for one weekend in September.
8. Allow residents to plant appropriate shade trees on verges in urban areas to reduce heat impacts in urban areas in the future.

Every dollar spent on disaster risk reduction, yields an estimated \$9.60 return on investment.