



Disaster Resilience Plan for communities of the Omeo Region

Updated: June 2024

<https://ourrecovery.com.au/omeo-region>

Contents

Document Purpose	2
Plan on a page	3
Regional Overview	4
Community Capacity	12
Regional Vulnerabilities	14
Our Communities' Hazards	17
Community Priorities	18
Community Emergency Plans	19
Appendices	20

This **Disaster Resilience Plan for the communities of the Omeo Region** outlines our approach to mitigating the impact of disasters, based on our local strengths, our community capability, local networks and available assets and infrastructure.

This Plan describes our greatest disaster risks given the local vulnerabilities, hazards and community and agency capacity. It also outlines our community priorities to build our disaster resilience.

This Plan was developed in consultation with local communities across the Omeo Region, with the support of local and state agencies. It reflects the voices of people available during the consultation process. This Plan is also our call to action for support so that we may build our resilience. This Plan will evolve as our communities change and grow.

This Plan sits within a framework of other agency and state government plans including emergency, health and wellbeing, and community plans, and should be read in conjunction with those plans.

Our Community Disaster Resilience Plan on a Page



Our capacity

Our capacity refers to the strengths, skills, experience, education and networks of our communities.

We are made up of small townships, ranging from Anglers Rest and Benambra in the North to Ensay and Tambo Crossing and Ensay in the South.

Our residents are diverse in vocation, background and experiences, and include farmers, foresters, tradespeople, business owners, healthcare and emergency workers (volunteer and paid), people who value living remotely, and new residents looking for a tree change.

We have strong local knowledge of the region, and we understand our capabilities, our vulnerabilities and our disaster risks. Our people, networks and infrastructure are our strengths which include:

1. **Connectedness.** We are well-connected and are a resilient group of communities.
2. **Local knowledge.** We have practical experience of the land we live on, the people in our communities, our history of disasters and the hazards we face.
3. **Practical and professional skills.** We have the skills and know-how to look after ourselves with support.
4. **Local infrastructure.** Our towns have infrastructure we rely on before, during and after emergencies. Many of us have back-up infrastructure so that we can look after ourselves, with support.
5. **Emergency workers.** We have local volunteers and paid personnel with knowledge of the landscape and terrain, and the experience of past disasters, including bushfires, floods, and drought.



Our vulnerabilities

Our vulnerabilities refers to the gap between what we can do for ourselves and where we need agency support. Some of our key vulnerabilities are:

1. **Health and wellbeing.** We are an ageing population and many people live alone. The cumulative mental health impact of severe and consecutive emergency events is also felt across the community.
2. **Resource support.** Our capacity is stretched during emergency events, which can turn into fatigue and burn out of volunteers and community members.
3. **Road closures.** Access for people, trade, supplies and medical assistance is essential. Without local knowledge, applying road incident control protocols can strand locals.
4. **Communications.** Without communications we are isolated, especially during an emergency. Communications refers to both communicating with each other and agencies, as well as telecommunications infrastructure. Communications is tightly linked to power.
5. **Power.** Businesses and households rely on power for essential services. While some people live off-grid and many have their own generators or back-up power sources, many don't.
6. **Agency capacity.** Non-local agency personnel have limited understanding of how to get things done given local conditions, our needs and our preferences.
7. **Geographic isolation.** We recognise that we live in a remote part of Victoria. We understand the strengths, vulnerabilities and risks of this isolation and have planned accordingly.
8. **Landscape.** Our environment is beautiful, but fuel management on neighbouring public land requires greater focus and adjustment so that we are safer together.
9. **Livestock and animals.** Our livestock and animals are fundamental to our lives and livelihoods, and it's important that we keep them safe and well.
10. **Food, water, goods, medications and fuel.** Geographic isolation and road closures can exacerbate the risk of losing access to (and distribution of) food, water, goods, medications and fuel.



Our hazards

Hazards refer to events in our environment with the potential for disasters. These events are occurring more frequently, often consecutively and sometimes concurrently and their impact is cumulative.

We have identified the **following hazards** that impact us.

1. **Bushfire.** Our region has a long history of fires of substantial scale, and the threat of major bushfires on an annual basis throughout the region is significant and real. Land and fuel management can help mitigate our bushfire risk.
2. **Flood.** Floods continue to be a major disaster risk in the Omeo Region. There has been a long history of substantial and isolated flooding in the region, such as the June 2007 floods that impacted Tambo Rivers and multiple flood events on Livingstone Creek in 2021-22.
3. **Drought.** Our region has experienced significant drought periods, which heighten bushfire risk in our region and adversely impact the agricultural sector in terms of livestock feed and conditions.
4. **Pandemic.** The health impacts of the pandemic, border closures and social restrictions have impacted our region's communities.
5. **Storm.** There is potential for storms to cause significant damage and lead to road closures.
6. **Biosecurity.** Disease and plague can impact our animals and livelihoods. A locust plague severely impacted the Swifts Creek area from late 2005 to early 2006, from Omeo in the north, to Tambo Crossing in the south.

Our community priorities

Our community priorities are the residual risks that are left after assessing our capacity, our vulnerabilities and hazards. They include:

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Consistent road access
to support our community,
our jobs and the economy. | 2. Reliable communications.
We are connected and can
access up to date information. | 3. Sustainable power supply to
connect to essential services that are
critical to our lives and livelihoods. | 4. Social connection and
support is crucial to our
mental health, wellbeing
and resilience. | 5. Collaborative approach to
fuel management to reduce
bushfire risk. |
|--|--|---|--|---|

Regional Overview

The Omeo Region is a large and geographically dispersed area in Victoria's East Gippsland Region.

Our residents are diverse in background and experiences, and include farmers, foresters, tradespeople, business owners, healthcare and emergency workers (volunteer and paid), new residents looking for a tree change, and people who value living remotely.

We are a connected and resilient community. We have strong local expertise. Our biggest strength is that we have great networks and relationships across the community. We look out for each other.

We are made up of small townships, each with their own strengths, local capabilities and vulnerabilities.

The townships of the Omeo Region include Anglers Rest, Benambra, Bindi, Bingo Munjie, Brookville, Bundara, Cassilis, Cobungra, Doctors Flat, Ensay, Ensay North, Glen Valley, Hinnomunjie, Omeo, Omeo Valley, Reedy Flat, Shannonvale, Swifts Creek, Tambo Crossing, Tongio and Uplands.

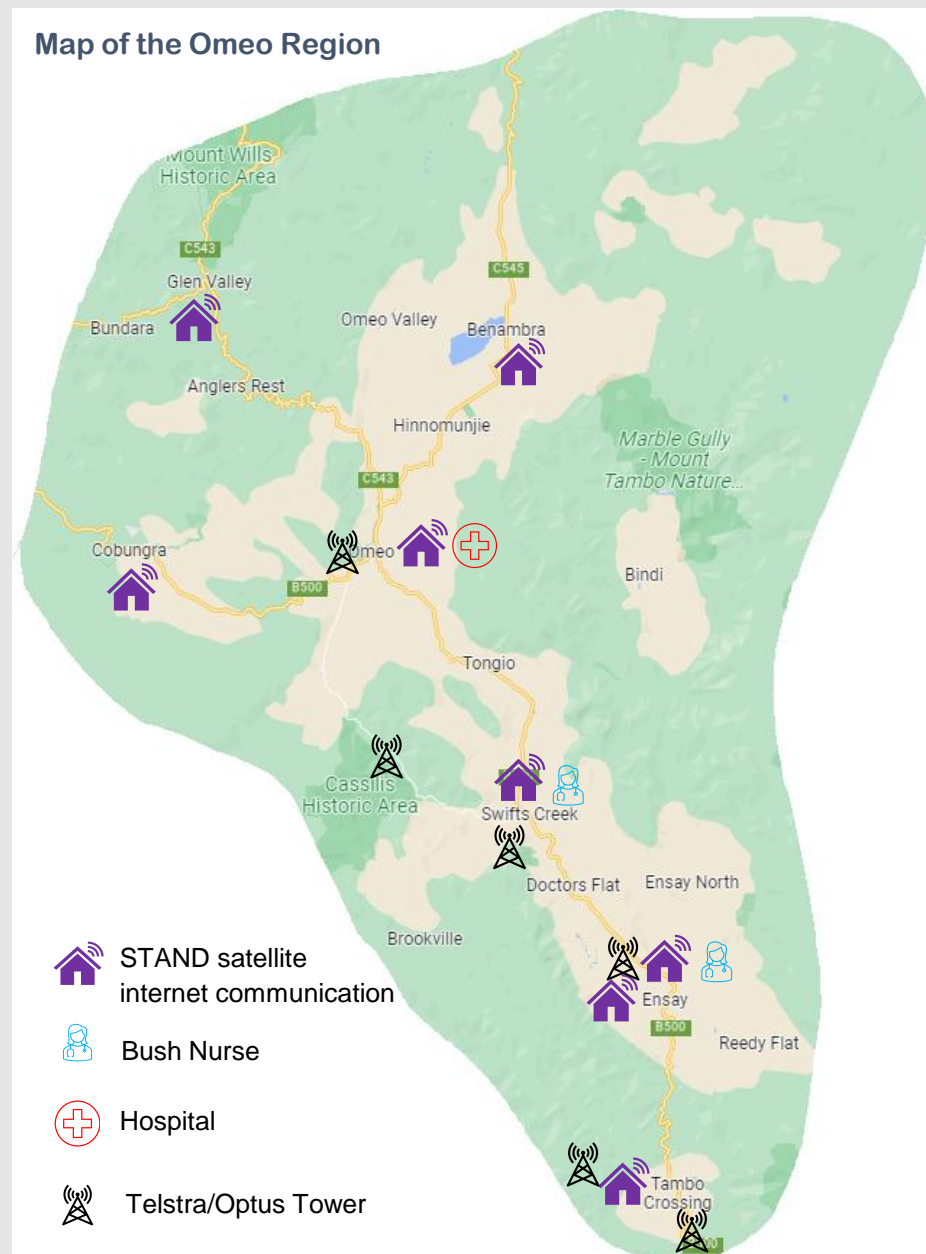
The townships can generally be divided into the North and South areas. North of the gap, or the Great Divide, includes the areas of Anglers Rest, Benambra, Cobungra, Omeo and Glen Valley, where the rivers flow into the Murray. In the South, which includes townships such as Swifts Creek, Ensay and Tambo Crossing, rivers run down to Gippsland Lakes.

As a community, we have experienced many disasters, where living memory of the 2003 fires is front of mind for many, and most recently the 2019-20 bushfires. These fire events did not occur in isolation. They were preceded by multiple years of drought and, most recently, closely followed by a pandemic and flooding events.

We are continuously exposed to and manage disaster risks. Disaster risks for each township differs depending on the unique geographic location and local vulnerabilities. These disaster risks will likely increase and occur more frequently and concurrently as a result of the impacts of climate change.

Connecting the differences across our townships are common experiences and requirements across the whole region, which are reflected in this single Disaster Resilience Plan for the communities of the Omeo Region.

Map of the Omeo Region



Regional Overview

Anglers Rest and Glen Valley area

We also call ourselves the Bundar, but everyone knows us as Anglers Rest, with Glen Valley to the north. We are among the most remote localities in the Omeo Region. Due to our remoteness, our community is self-reliant and lives off-grid. We are a connected community and support each other during disasters.

Things to know about Anglers Rest and Glen Valley

- We are lucky to have the Bundara River run through Anglers Rest and Glen Valley. We get our water from the Bundara and the Mitta Mitta Rivers.
- Our homes are self-sustaining and we live off-grid.
- We know how to prepare for the commencement of the fire season. Our community members know to test the fire fighting equipment, truck and pumps before every fire season.
- We experienced the bushfires of 2019-20 and 2003 and understand the disaster risks of living in a remote area like Anglers Rest.
- Our newest community members are keen to join the local Country Fire Authority (CFA) brigade and strengthen their resilience.
- We are actively involved with the CFA and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to better prepare for the next fires.
- We know that evacuations are personal choices our community members need to make, based on their bushfire plans and capacity to defend.
- During emergencies, we use Radio UHF 40 and local repeater channel 2 Duplex to communicate with each other and the Telstra small cell tower and booster/personal satellite internet located at the CFA Shed.

Challenges

- Due to our remoteness, agencies find it challenging to come to Anglers Rest and Glen Valley, or communicate with us, during emergencies.
- In our experience, we have found official emergency management information inaccurate or not up-to-date during emergencies.
- Like other townships in our region, road issues can impact our lives and livelihoods.
- Because we are off-grid, we don't always know when the power goes out for the telecommunications towers.

Quotes from community

"Enforced road closure made it impossible to protect my property."

"Locals keeping locals up to date."

"We live very remotely with unreliable communications."

"During the 2019-20 fires, there were government agency people around but they didn't really communicate with us. Some paid no attention to local knowledge."

"We need fuel reduction desperately."

"The local community of Anglers Rest talk to each other during disasters."

"Everyone comes together and supports one another. There is a lot of local knowledge and experience dealing with fires, drought, floods etc."

Regional Overview

Benambra area

Benambra is located in the most northern part of the Omeo Region. Benambra includes the Benambra township and surrounding localities of Uplands, Hinnomunjie and Beloka.

Things to know about Benambra

- We look after each other and value all-ability facilities for everyone to access.
- The community consists of multi-generational farmers, with a lot of mechanical know-how, qualified electricians, mechanics and veterinarian, as well as the 'bush mechanics'.
- Key buildings and infrastructure include the Benambra Neighbourhood House, General Store, Community Hall, Benambra Hotel, Benambra Recreation Reserve and CFA shed.
- We have our own airport (limited tarmac width) and a quarry with certified heavy machinery (trucks, loaders, graders) nearby.
- The Benambra Neighbourhood House is the community centre away from the operational activity of the emergency precinct, with capability to have video calls with the Incident Control Centre.

Hazards

- In an emergency, the prevailing weather (and fire) comes from the North, so we seek communication from the North.
- We need to be connected with the Corryong and Tallangatta Incident Control Centres (Hume Region). Information from Swifts Creek Incident Control Centre (Gippsland Region) is welcomed, but doesn't provide us with sufficient information about fires in Hume District moving into East Gippsland (Tambo District).
- During a fire event, the locals know the tracks to go down and the ones to avoid.

Quotes from community

"It was good to see most of the locals pitch in and lend a hand. Offers of help, sharing info, making sure everyone was ok."

"District seemed more concerned with fire to Benambra's South when we needed information about the fires to the North, North West and East"

"No power meant no telecommunications, no phone, no NBN."

"Road closures meant goods were not available. Food, mail, fire fighting equipment, medical. Not willing to travel Benambra-Omeo due to road closures."

"When roads were blocked, this information was not updated on VicTraffic or VicEmergency in a timely way, having the potential to endanger people's lives who were trying to evacuate."

"Limited to no info about the fire. Conflicting advice re convoys out of town. No information about support services, such as when the Centrelink bus was coming to town."

"Government agencies don't listen to local knowledge."

Regional Overview

Cobungra area

We are a self-reliant community in a remote part of the Omeo region. We have a great wealth of local knowledge, we look out for each other and have a strong volunteering spirit.

Things to know about Cobungra

- Our expanded CFA shed and carpark has been upgraded with Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) equipment, satellite internet, wi-fi, wired to accept a back-up generator, and houses a light tanker. The CFA shed serves as a community meeting point.
- We rely on radio during emergencies, as mobile reception is unreliable during emergencies and peak periods.
- Our community members are prepared for emergencies. We know to keep our pantries well stocked, and what to do ahead of each fire season.
- Managing livestock is part of our bushfire risk reduction plan and livestock graze paddocks that surround key assets (e.g., houses, CFA shed) prior to the fire season.
- We have a community freezer and a microwave, which is used to heat and distribute meals during disasters.
- We experienced the 2019-20 and 2003 bushfires and understand the disaster risks of living remotely.
- We have a mix of permanent and occasional residents (who visit during peak seasons such as Christmas, Easter and the snow season).
- We have good connections to the neighbouring Alpine Shire, and often work with Dinner Plain for supplies.

Challenges

- Lack of communication is a vulnerability for Cobungra, especially during disasters. While we have mobile reception, it becomes unreliable during peak seasons (such as Christmas, Easter, snow season) and during an emergency.
- Access to firefighting resources can be a challenge during disasters. In our experience, we have been unable to influence where firefighting resources are focused for greatest strategic benefit. There is a need for clarity about how agencies make decisions during emergencies.

Quotes from community

"Listen to locals."

"Volunteer groups do a great job."

"The size of the community allows for all individuals to be known and supported personally as needed."

"[We were] unable to contact family who had stayed to defend and there was no mobile coverage."

"[We need] back up power supply, importantly to phone towers."

"Small community. Stretched to capacity."

Regional Overview

Ensay area

Ensay includes the localities of Ensay, Ensay North and Reedy Flat. We are a larger and more dispersed town than the other townships in the Omeo Region.

Things to know about Ensay

- Key buildings and infrastructure in Ensay include the pub, recreation reserve, a Post Office, Hall and a winery.
- The Hall and Rec Reserve have STAND capability: a satellite, wi-fi, and a TV that can be hooked up to do zoom calls with the nearby Incident Control Centre in Swifts Creek. Both the Hall and the Recreation Reserve have switchboard capability to accept generators for emergency power and to enable locals to charge their devices.
- The Recreation Reserve has bore tanks awaiting implementation of pumps for fire fighting purposes.
- Many students identify strongly with Swifts Creek (to our north), through the schools, football or netball clubs, while the older generation identifies more strongly with Ensay.
- The Ensay Bush Nursing Centre provides care to persons 'at greater risk' in the area and the area is supported by Tambo Valley Ambulance Victoria (AV).

Challenges

- Like many other townships in the region, being prepared for power outages, communications down and road closures are our key community priorities.
- Evacuations need to be planned as a priority. We like to be self-sufficient, empowered to look after ourselves and make informed decisions.

Quotes from community

"When phones are down, there is no communication to anyone. There is decent word of mouth locally"

"A local came with his tractor and plough, to put in fire breaks around our property."

"Difficulty accessing info about the fires and their progress."

"Unable to access fuel for pumps due to power outages."

"The town hall meetings were good"

"Lack of telephone service, friends/family who live away were very concerned."

"Difficult accessing up-to-date information. Advised to use the VicEmergency app which was not real time but 12 hours out of date consistently."

Regional Overview

Omeo area

Omeo is located in the northern part of the Omeo region and is the commercial hub and gateway into East Gippsland from the north east. Its community represents a central hub where people come into work in the local businesses, school, hospital, the shire office, supplying goods and services for nearby townships, supporting visitor economy and its local residents.

Things to know about Omeo

- We have a strong culture of volunteerism. We have lots of events and clubs eg. Hall Committee, Show Society, Community Radio, Angling Club, Omeo Region Business and Tourism Association (ORBTA), and a Football Netball Club.
- Omeo has the greatest accommodation capacity in the Omeo Region and fuel is available 24/7.
- The East Gippsland Shire Council Business Centre and Omeo District Health (hospital) are a part of the business sector, which includes the Historical Precinct, Ambulance Victoria (AV) and CFA facilities, Post Office, supermarket, pubs and motels.
- We have a central 'community' hub next to the Council Service Centre. We also have a well-equipped Rec Reserve for community to use as a Relief Facility, with STAND capability (satellite communications), air conditioning and heating, ember proofing, back-up power (generator to be installed), emergency shelter (accommodation including for pets), catering capability and first aid kits.
- Succession planning will be important for our community in the coming years, as our volunteers are ageing and we have many elderly residents.
- Property owners in the surrounding area often have their own generators and fire-fighting equipment and are prepared should help not be immediately at hand.
- Word of mouth is a trusted source of communication.
- Some of our residents are new to the area, and there's an opportunity to build greater connection and information sharing with our newest community members.

"Our distance from agencies who make decisions about what is going to be best puts people at risk, when they don't know our environment and fire behaviour."

Hazards

- In addition to fires, Omeo has experienced isolated flooding (eg. at the local caravan park through which Livingstone Creek flows) when the weather in Bairnsdale was dry. During an emergency event (fire or flood), the surrounding localities are also impacted as Omeo is a central hub for goods, services and road access.

Challenges

- When there are road closures, locals living on the Omeo outskirts often can't get back to their houses after getting supplies in town due to emergency traffic control protocols.
- Map accuracy is an issue, as Triple Zero Victoria can't accurately pinpoint where an accident is, so an ambulance doesn't know where on the road the accident is. The "nearest intersection" doesn't work here.
- Information accuracy. Residents have stated the VicEmergency app falls out of date quickly and can be inaccurate, causing undue alarm for family members of locals who are relying on the app for information. Timely and accurate information is critical, so locals trust word of mouth.
- We know our locality, however sometimes experience jurisdictional protocols that prevent timely assistance, which is challenging given our isolated geography requires travelling large distances.
- Locals have observed 'out of town' crews experience inertia in poor conditions through lack of knowledge of the local terrain in heavy smoke.

Quotes from community

"Having lived through 2003 and 2020 fires I feel the community are aware of dangers and cope well organising fire plans."

"They are really tough! The capacity of the community members is outstanding."

"The Omeo Relief Facility at Rec Reserve was a good set up with beds and hot showers where you could camp, have toilets, drinks etc. when it was necessary to leave home during ember attacks."

"No water, power, phone, internet or roads in or out"

Regional Overview

Swifts Creek area

Swifts Creek is a hub for surrounding areas in the southern part of the Omeo region and a social place for meeting with an IGA, Bakery, Cafe and pub. The Swifts Creek locality includes Bindi, Brookville, Cassilis, Tongio, Tongio West and Doctors Flat. The local Rec Reserve hosts the Swifts Creek football, netball and the bowls club.

Things to know about Swifts Creek

- We host the region's secondary school, which is a Prep to Year 12 school.
- We have a petrol station, post office, bakery, pub, cafe, mechanic, electrician and grocer, the Great Alpine Gallery and community centre.
- The local timber mill, under new ownership, is a big employer of a skilled and well-organised labour force. The mill provides a good source of equipment and space to park heavy machinery.
- In an emergency, the Swifts Creek Rec Reserve serves a basecamp for the emergency surge workforce and an Incident Control Centre (level 3) can be activated at the DEECA offices, located in the town.
- The Hall is the community assembly area with satellite telecommunications (STAND) capability and ability to receive a generator for emergency power and for locals to charge their devices.
- The Bush Nurse Centre has a ducted purified air conditioning system, and during the 2019-20 fires, people in need were able to access the building and benefit from the clean air.

Hazards

- Flash flooding followed the 2003 bushfires, wet weather caused landslides in 2009, and the bushfires of 2019-20 approached Swifts Creek from the North and from the South.
- During fires, there's a risk of trees falling onto the road, particularly the road leading in and out of Cassilis.
- Floods in 1998 and 2022 isolated surrounding communities and caused damage to roads, houses and farms.
- A locust plague severely impacted Swifts Creek area from late 2005 to early 2006.
- In Cassilis, it is difficult to access water during emergencies as there is little water in the creek.

Quotes from community

"Plans put in place and widely disseminated so people know what to do and when."

"Let community have more say. Local knowledge was not respected."

"A fire does not observe 'office hours'"

"VicEmergency needs to be updated more frequently so that information is not out of date. ABC radio warnings were also misleading about the state of the emergency and asked people to evacuate when it was clearly too late."

"No internet means it was difficult to find out what was happening. With no phone communication, I was left on the farm while all my family were out firefighting with no communication."

"Ensure we never lose the ability to communicate by phone."

"Regular meetings at the reserve in Omeo kept us up to date with fire locations."

"Fire breaks were run around my house and my workshop were very much appreciated as I didn't have the equipment to do so myself."

"The general sense from all agencies and some people has been that if you didn't have direct impact from flames, you were not affected."

Regional Overview

Tambo Crossing area

Tambo Crossing is located in the most southern part of the Omeo region. We are surrounded by beautiful state forest. It's a small farming community that is geographically remote, with the Tambo River running through the township.

Things to know about Tambo Crossing

- The Tambo River is one of East Gippsland's main rivers.
- We have an environmental self-sustaining community facility for use all year round, and for gathering in emergencies. The community facility has satellite communications, wi-fi, solar power, a back-up generator, community kitchen, and video-call capability with a large TV screen.
- Locals often go to Bairnsdale for shopping, due to its proximity.
- Tambo Crossing is part of the Ensay CFA Brigade.

Hazards

- As we are surrounded by state forest, bushfire is the major hazard for Tambo Crossing. Fire can approach from any direction and we have had fires in 2002-03 and major fires in 2006-07. In the bushfires of 2019-20, fire approached us from all directions at once.
- Tambo Crossing has experienced flooding from the Tambo River. In 2007, flooding occurred in the Tambo River and other rivers in the area, resulting in significant impact on the Gippsland Lakes. When the river floods, the area risks being cut off from other localities due to road closures.
In these circumstances, some properties need to be self-sufficient (food, fodder) for weeks until the water subsides or the fire threat passes.

Quotes from community

"Our neighbours were very supportive."

"Sharing information and looking out for each other."

"We as a community worked together."

"Maps not specific about location of fire front"

"We've done it a few times before and we will do it again."

"Local knowledge could have been used more effectively."

"Tambo crossing no way in or out once it hits what resources you have is what you have You must as a group be self-reliant."

"Loss of telephones, power, and the ability to travel due to inflexible road closures, isolated the community at a time of great stress. This had a profound effect on the folk of Tambo Crossing for months."

"Not having a clear expectation of what guides government services in providing fire fighting support."

Community Capacity

Community capacity refers to the high-level skills and experience, networks and infrastructure that we have in the community that can help us be prepared for emergencies, as well as before, during and after an emergency. Our people and their networks, and our community infrastructure are our biggest strengths.

Community skills and strengths

The skills, experience and expertise of our residents are key strengths of our community. We are proud to have a community with such diverse skills and experiences.



Farmers with deep practical knowledge and experience in farming, agriculture, and operating heavy machinery, also known as 'bush' mechanics.



Qualified tradespeople, such as mechanics, electricians and other certified skills, including operating heavy machinery. Organised casual workforce(s) on hand at the timber mill in Swifts Creek and quarry near Benambra.



Many residents with local knowledge and experience of past disasters. This includes residents who have experienced the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, the 2003 Alpine fires, and the June 2007 floods.



Omeo has a small rural hospital that provides integrated primary and community health services, while bush nurses work with the local Bush Nursing Centres in Swifts Creek and Ensay.



Informal community networks to check on everyone during an emergency. We are respectful of each other's privacy, but know how to band together and check in on each other when it's need during an emergency.



Many residents volunteer throughout the community, as well as for the emergency services, and we have a strong volunteer culture.

Community Capacity

Community infrastructure

Each township has a [Local Incident Management Plan \(LIMP\)](#) which provides information about our assembly points, use of key local community buildings during a local incident, CFA stations, SES units and key contact information.



Assembly Areas are places to go to during a local incident (e.g. fire, flood). They vary in each town, and can be a community hall or recreation reserve.



Community Halls will generally have access to satellite communications, wi-fi, switchboard to accept a generator, and a TV that can be hooked up to do zoom calls with the Incident Control Centre. In Omeo, the **Rec Reserve** has this capability. Following the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, the Federal Government has invested in **Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND)** to improve resilience particularly in regional and rural communities.



Many townships have a **Recreation Reserve**, which may also be the town's Assembly Area during a local incident, however, may also serve as basecamps for out of town emergency personnel (refer to each town's LIMP).



CFA Stations are in four towns: Benambra, Ensay, Omeo and Swifts Creek, with Omeo having satellite stations and appliances at Cobungra and Anglers Rest. CFA's fire stations are specifically designed to support and facilitate the emergency needs of firefighters and to house specialist vehicles and equipment.



Some towns have an **SES unit** and an **ambulance service**.

In addition to the community infrastructure above, we also have the following:



Omeo District Health Service provides urgent care, acute care, residential aged care and a range of community and home based services. **Swifts Creek** and **Ensay** offer **Bush Nursing healthcare services** to community members.



The **DEECA office** hosts the **Incident Control Centre** and is located in Swifts Creek.



The **Benambra Neighbourhood House** is a community centre away from the operational activity of the Emergency Precinct.



When the **Timber Mill** in Swifts Creek closes during an emergency, an organised contractor workforce becomes available.



There are **generators** at many places in the region, including, e.g., at recreation reserves, community halls, the general store in Benambra and Swifts Creek, and telecommunications towers.



There are a number of **culturally and historically significant assets** around the Omeo Region that need to be protected.



All towns have **static water tanks**. Across the region there are 12 tanks holding 46,000 litres each for fire fighting purposes (including private use). Omeo Rec Reserve has an 80,000 litre static water tank fed by bore (requires power). Bores are also located in Benambra, Ensay and Swifts Creek.

Regional Vulnerabilities

In this Community Disaster Resilience Plan, regional vulnerabilities **represent the gap between community capability and agency expectations**. In other words, it's the gap between what our towns or localities can do for ourselves and what we need agencies, such as, CFA, DEECA and the Council, to do.

Our local communities know the region best, and we understand the unique vulnerabilities and hazards of the region. We have identified the following key vulnerabilities in our region. These vulnerabilities are outlined in more detail on the following pages.



Regional Vulnerabilities



1. Health and wellbeing

Our communities have an ageing population. A greater ageing population potentially requires greater care, more in-home care, and support to access internet and technology.

Many people also live on their own. The percentage of one-person households in our region is higher than the Victorian average.

At the same time, many community members have experienced previous disasters, and the cumulative mental health impacts of consecutive disasters is a key vulnerability. The mental health impact continues and we can see solvable problems that remain unsolved.

We also have newer members of our communities, some of whom may not be as familiar with the local landscape.



2. Resource support

As a small, remote and dispersed community, our capacity is stretched during disasters.

During disasters, volunteers across our communities wear multiple hats—they volunteer at the relief centre, with CFA, SES and AV. They look after their properties and livestock, and support community members in their evacuations.

There is currently no succession plan or surge capacity plan in place for community coordination roles during an emergency, so burnout is a key vulnerability.

Due to the isolated nature of the area, it is difficult to access health services. During an emergency event, timely access to health services is even more challenging.



3. Road closures

Road closures due to incident control protocols often strands locals. When there is not an imminent threat on the road, and telecommunications and power is down, road access to talk to your neighbours is critical for ensuring people are safe and for getting medical assistance.

High priority roads, such as the Great Alpine Road, Benambra-Corryong Road and other key access routes, are essential for us (locals) to function and sustain our own resilience.

Enforcing a road closure when there is no imminent threat creates anxiety for locals leaving home for essential reasons. Sometimes it may require those locals to take a longer route using roads that have not been closed. Non-local police also need to be briefed as to the local conditions where they are attending.

A road closure due to a blockage (landslide or fallen tree) needs to be well-signed 'at the corner', which may be 40km before the blockage.



4. Communications

Communications includes both communicating with each other and agencies as well as telecommunications infrastructure.

Communicating with each other and agencies

Reliable information makes you feel safe. It stops you from catastrophising.

Not having up to date information is a key vulnerability. Whether it is communications from the authorities about the weather conditions or from your family on the fireline or in town and their movements. Without communications we are isolated, especially during an emergency.

Telecommunications infrastructure

Telecommunications infrastructure is critical because it is how people communicate with each other and dial 000 for help. Infrastructure may be down due to the need to refuel a generator.

Telecommunications towers usually go down within a few hours depending on when the backup generator was last refuelled.



5. Power

Lack of power is another key vulnerability for our region.

Power outages, especially during an emergency, can cause significant disruption and can impact other essential services such as telecommunications and pumps for water supply and treatment. The ability for local people to refuel the Ausnet, Telstra and Optus towers reduces this vulnerability.

While many people have their own generators, some don't. As a community, we generally know who has a generator, and who might need power during a power outage.

Regional Vulnerabilities



6. Agency capacity

In our experience, non-local agencies (e.g. state government, police) have a limited understanding of our local ways of doing things, our needs and preferences.

This local knowledge gap has often led to frustrations, for example during road closures.

There is an opportunity for agencies to better equip themselves with local knowledge, to ensure agency staff understand our local context.

Agencies also need to work better with locals, not just to build local knowledge, but also peer-to-peer connections. We believe these connections and relationships will go a long way in strengthening our resilience.



7. Geographic isolation

We recognise that we live in an isolated part of Victoria. Our local community members understand both the benefits and risks of this isolation and have planned accordingly.

Isolation can no doubt be a vulnerability, particularly when there is also an absence of communication during an emergency.

A key vulnerability of our geographic isolation is road access, power supply and telecommunications. Communicating by 'word of mouth' depends on these. Not everyone has a generator, but many do. We might be geographically isolated, but our communities are connected and have strong local networks and relationships.



8. Landscape

Our environment is beautiful. We are surrounded by state forests, and visitors from all over Victoria and Australia come to visit the region for its landscape.

Our properties border crown parkland, but fuel management on public land is out of our control. While many manage our private land, land and fire agencies are responsible for fuel management on public land to reduce bushfire risk.

We need to ensure agencies have the local knowledge and understand our landscape to be able to most effectively undertake fuel management activities. This will ensure our communities are more resilient and are safer together.



9. Livestock and animals

We are proud to have farming as a key industry in our community.

Our livestock and animals are fundamental to our lives and livelihoods, and it's important that we keep them safe and fed. The wellbeing of our livestock and access to fodder can impact our disaster preparation and evacuation plans.

Fodder deliveries, road access, storage of fodder, and access to vet services are key vulnerabilities for our farming communities.



10. Food, water, goods, medications and fuel

Access and distribution of food, water, goods, medications and fuel is crucial to the effective functioning of our communities.

Geographic isolation and road closures can exacerbate the risk of losing access to these essential supplies.

Access to clean water is vital when water run-off is contaminated following fire.

Medical supplies, firefighting equipment, donated items are all necessary goods during a disaster, but community risks being cut off from these essential goods when roads are unable to be accessed due to fires, floods, or local incidents.

Our Communities' Hazards

The following hazards have been identified by the residents and communities in our region. This information has been informed through many in-depth consultations with residents, as well as community organisations. It also considers the history of emergency events in the Omeo Region and in East Gippsland.

Disaster risk	Description and context
Biosecurity	Disease and plague can impact our animals and livelihoods. A locust plague severely impacted the Swifts Creek area from late 2005 to early 2006 and impacted north to Omeo and south to Ensay and Tambo Crossing. Historically, Ovine Johne's Disease had a detrimental impact on the sheep population in the Omeo and Benambra area in the late 1990's.
Bushfire	The threat of major bushfires on an annual basis throughout the region is significant and real. Our region has a long history of fires of substantial scale. This includes the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires and the 2003 Alpine Fires. The Omeo Region is exposed to both fire risks from the northeast and northwest (impacting Anglers Rest, Benambra, Cobungra and Omeo) and fire risks from the south (impacting Tambo Crossing, Ensay and Swifts Creek).
Drought	Our region has experienced significant drought periods, which heighten bushfire risk in our region and adversely impact the agricultural sector in terms of feed and livestock conditions. Preceding both the 2019-20 Black Summer fires and the 2003 Alpine Fires, East Gippsland experienced five to six years of exceptional dryness.
Floods	Floods continue to be a major disaster risk in the Omeo Region. There has been a long history of substantial and isolated flooding in the region, such as the June 2007 floods that impacted Tambo Rivers and resulted in significant impact on the Gippsland Lakes. Livingstone Creek experienced extensive flooding from multiple flood events between September 2021 and January 2022. Large rains can cause landslides especially after a fire.
Pandemic	The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Australia and the world since the beginning of 2020. Australian borders were closed to all non-residents on 20 March 2020 with restrictions in place to varying degrees, within Victoria, within Australia and more broadly to overseas residents and visitors. In addition to border closures, social distancing rules were imposed, 'non-essential' services were halted and face masks were mandated. These social restrictions impacted our community's ability to 'recover' from the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.
Storm	There is potential for storms to cause significant damage and lead to road closures from flash floods and landslips. The townships of the Omeo Region are subject to weather patterns that can cause severe rain, wind and hailstorms.
Alpine road conditions	Following a sub-zero temperature night, driving through black ice creates a dangerous road experience, especially when coupled with extreme weather conditions and poor visibility. In addition, road closures may occur due to tree falls, landslides or impassable snow, even when using chains.

Community Priorities

The 'residual risk' is left after assessing our vulnerabilities in light of the hazards and our capacity to prepare and manage in times of disaster. We have identified the following residual risks for the communities of the Omeo Region, and identified priority actions — our Community Priorities — to mitigate against these risks. Priorities specific to each township are outlined in further detailed in each township community emergency plan.

Residual risk		Our Community Priorities
1	Lack of road access cripples our community, our jobs and the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure those tasked with enforcing road incident control protocols are supported by local knowledge, to minimise disruption to local residents in the event of a road closure. • Improve timely and accurate information about access routes, convoys and clear signage. • Ensure multiple channels of communications before, during and after a disaster. • Build agency capacity to operate locally so disruptions are minimised to the greatest extent possible. • Prepare the road so that it can stay open for locals to function, move their livestock or get essential goods.
2	Without communications we are isolated and lack reliable information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure community members know where to access internet and satellite capability. • Telecommunications companies should have a dedicated high country resource available to refuel and sufficient battery backup capacity to last at least 3 days. • Certify local 'responsible person' to refuel generators of telecommunications towers in times of emergency. • Look out for neighbours and locals, establish and follow community telephone trees to check on everyone. • Support Council's work in improving telecommunications resilience in our region (establishing the STAND framework – Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters). • Familiarise ourselves with our Community Assembly Areas, which are our connection points for community, provide respite during bushfires and communication points for agencies to provide emergency information. • Ensure the Incident Control Centre can communicate with the Community Assembly Areas and are in constant contact with official local contacts • Strengthen how we receive reliable, accurate and regular communications during an emergency. • Establish community radio as an emergency services broadcaster for pre-recorded community information, noting that it is not a staffed radio station.
3	Power outages impair essential services that are critical to our lives and livelihoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure agencies are able to provide fuel during an emergency. • Ensure communications towers are able to re-fuelled regularly, and by locals. • Plan and implement emergency backup battery capacity for communications towers and exchanges.
4	Social support is crucial to our health, wellbeing and resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with local service providers and council, ensure better access to health, mental health and social support services, with a focus on community and individual resilience. • Develop an integrated approach to responding to the unmet mental health needs of local farmers, as well as ongoing mental health and wellbeing needs across the region from droughts, bushfires and COVID-19.
5	Bushfire risks increase where high fuel loads exist on neighbouring public land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with land and fire management agencies on an approach to understanding and reducing bushfire risk, and for community input to be reflected in the Joint Fuel Management Plan. • Undertake joint fuel management initiatives between community and agencies for more effective fuel reduction on public land and improved property preparation on private land.

Community Emergency Plans

Community Emergency Plans are available for the following local areas:

- Anglers Rest
- Benambra
- Cobungra
- Ensay
- Omeo
- Swifts Creek
- Tambo Crossing

All plans available for download from the ORCRA website (<https://ourrecovery.com.au/omeo-region>).

Appendix 1: Definitions

Definition	Description
Capacity	<p>In this Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community capacity refers to the high-level skills and experience, education and networks in the community. Agency capacity, as it relates to the hazard and vulnerabilities, is the ability of the agency to support community and reduce the impact of a disaster.
Disaster risk	<p>Omeo Region's Disaster Risks are the residual impact of a disaster for the Omeo Region communities. The residual risk reflects the hazards, as identified by local agencies, in combination with vulnerabilities, as identified by the Omeo Region communities, after community and agency capacities to respond have been considered. Local community capacities and agency capacities work together to reduce the impact of a disaster on community.</p> <p>The residual disaster risks have been identified following extensive community consultation. It uses the following Disaster Risk Equation:</p> $\frac{\text{Hazards (H)} \times \text{Vulnerability (V)}}{\text{Capacity (C)}}$
Hazard	In Emergency Management, a hazard is referred to as the potential for disaster to occur.
Impacts	The impact of an event depends on the elements at risk, such as people, economy, environment, agriculture or infrastructure and their associated vulnerability to damage or change because of the event.
Resilience	Resilience is the ability of an individual, system, community or society exposed to an event to resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover from the effects of an event in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservations and restoration of its essential basic services, structures and functions.
Vulnerability	<p>Vulnerability is a community's susceptibility to injury or damage from hazards. Vulnerability is a reflection of the community's coping resources and may vary within the smaller social and economic groups which form a large community.</p> <p>It is important to note that exposure and vulnerability change over time. It is therefore critical to periodically revisit vulnerabilities in any emergency risk management review.</p>