

# Bushfires Wreak Havoc in Gippsland Region

Written by Boris Bryant, 11V

The East Gippsland Region, which has a population of over 80,000 people, was impacted by fires in early September 2019. The kickoff of the fires was September the 9<sup>th</sup> and nobody understood at the time the impact that these fires would have on our region. Over 320,000 hectares were burnt in the East Gippsland Region over the 91 days which caused horrific scenes before it was finally contained. Without mother nature bringing some much-needed rain to East Gippsland the fires would still more than likely be burning now.

Many families were really impacted by the fires by losing property and stock, and in worst case scenario losing their houses and belongings, which really has had an impact on mental health and people's wellbeing. The long term effects of mental health from the bushfires is probably still to come, with many people still facing challenges such as building houses, having no insurance, losing personal items that could never be replaced, these are some of the things that people are struggling with at the current time.

I know from my personal point of view with us experiencing the loss of our house during the fires, and the impact that it has on our family. We lost our house that was more than a house to us it was a home. The property we lost was originally my grandparents' home and there was a lot of history attached to our family with the house. The impact it has on my family currently is a struggle, with ten people living in a four-bedroom house.

The impact from the fires flows throughout the community with local businesses being impacted significantly, affecting their trading hours and many other parts of their business. The biggest impact in the area would be the tourism industry which was basically shut down with people not having to travel to the region.

One of the positives for myself was my employer Bunnings who were really supportive to me and my family, rallying around my family and insuring we were ok which I found was really positive and gave me great respect for who I work for in my part time job. One of the other organisations to provide some support was the local Aboriginal Cooperative GEGAC who also helped us with housing and appliances and other goods we needed.

Controlled burns and fire management over the winter months are critical in controlling fuel in the forest and trying to manage the risk of what happened in 2019. There are always things to be learnt from catastrophic events and I am sure there will be government policies and procedures implemented in the future.