



murray river
council




Adverse Event Plan

22 July 2020

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**“You don’t just wait
for a disaster you build
community in advance”**



This plan will build community leadership capability and the capacity to adapt and cope with the chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events.

The Murray River Council Adverse Event Plan has been prepared with funding from the Drought Communities Program as a requirement for acquittal. This plan will provide a strategy and guidance framework for increasing resilience to the likely and potential adverse events that threaten Murray River Council Local Government Area (LGA).

This plan has been developed with the valuable input of the local community, including local farmers, local business owners, representatives from progress associations, crisis support and health services. Four online focus groups were run in addition to an online community preparedness survey to inform this plan.

This plan aims to improve preparation for and recovery from adverse events. It will build community leadership capability, community resilience and the capacity to adapt and cope with chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events. It articulates Council's role as vital in providing accurate and timely information to its community and to advocate to state and federal governments on their behalf. Murray River Council LGA has been in

sustained drought for several years and has suffered numerous adverse events including flooding and heat waves that have had deep impacts on its small population. With several border towns and many of the closest community, health and recovery services located in Victoria, collaboration and communication with Campaspe Shire, Gannawarra Shire and Swan Hill Rural City is critical in planning for and recovering from adverse events.

This plan is a public document that Council can implement immediately in its preparation for future adverse events and to assist recovery from the current drought and pandemic. It can be used by the community, farmers, local business and service providers to understand Council's role in building preparedness and how Council can support them in recovery.



We see communities across the Murray River Council united in their commitment to prepare for and recover from the impact of future adverse events – be it drought, fire, flood, or pandemic.

Farmers, local businesses, social service providers and residents all understand their role in building resilience, not waiting for disaster to happen.

Council plays a strong coordination, advocacy and communication role, connecting and empowering leaders to rise up in the community.

While we hope that adverse events are few and far between, we know that when they come, we will be prepared.



Murray River Council Adverse Event Plan

Purpose

This plan will build community leadership capability and the capacity to be prepared and able to adapt and cope with the chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events.

Vision

We see communities across the Murray River Council united in their commitment to prepare for and recover from the impact of future adverse events – be it drought, fire, flood, or pandemic. Farmers, local businesses, social service providers and residents all understand their role in building resilience, not waiting for disaster to happen.

Council plays a strong coordination, advocacy and communication role, connecting and empowering leaders to rise up in the community. While we hope that adverse events are few and far between, we know that when they come, we will be prepared.

Resilience Principles

Community led recovery

Plan in the good times to be prepared for the bad times

Continuous learning and improvement

Strategies

To build resilience with adaptive methods



To diversify the economy and capture value at home



To build the capacity of the community



To provide accurate, clear and timely communication



Initiatives

A suite of initiatives that are aligned with these strategies have been prepared to deliver this plan.

Relationship to other plans

This Adverse Event Plan is the first of three interconnected plans. It has been prepared prior to the finalisation of the Murray River LGA Emergency Management Plan and the Murray River LGA Disaster Recovery Plan. The Adverse Event Plan will focus on building resilience within the community, the economy and the environment. It demonstrates initiatives for preparedness and recovery from the identified hazards that currently and could affect the LGA.

The Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN)

will focus on Council's role in an emergency and outlines steps for preparedness by the Local Emergency Management Committee in compliance with the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989.

The Disaster Recovery Plan

will outline a detailed recovery action plan for adverse events for short and long term recovery of the LGA in accordance with the NSW Recovery Plan. It will be informed by the hazard analysis and recommendations of the Adverse Event Plan.

Disaster recovery is "the coordinated process of supporting disaster affected communities in the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and the restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing" (Australian Emergency Manual, Disaster Recovery EMA 2004).

In NSW, the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 requires the appointment of a State Emergency Recovery Controller (SERCON) and a Deputy State Emergency Recovery Controller (DSERCON) and details their consequent responsibilities and functions.

The NSW State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN)

details emergency preparedness, response and recovery arrangements for NSW. It ensures a co-ordinated



response to emergencies by all agencies having responsibilities and functions in emergencies.

The NSW Recovery Plan

is a supporting plan of the NSW State Emergency Management Plan. It outlines the strategic intent, responsibilities, authorities and the mechanisms for disaster recovery in NSW. It is supported by a suite of guidelines that outline the operational objectives and the range of activities that may be associated with recovery operations. The NSW Recovery Plan, together with the guidelines, allow for the development and implementation of a planned recovery following a natural disaster or other emergency. The Murray River LGA Disaster Recovery Plan will be prepared in accordance with the NSW Recovery Plan.

The draft Business Continuity Plan

is a document currently being prepared by Council's Risk Manager. It will support local businesses impacted by adverse events.

Murray River Council Disability Implementation Action Plan

is a document that guides the implementation of access for people of all abilities. Its implementation should be monitored as part of preparedness.

Approach and definitions

The approach to preparing the plan has been community led and has sought to listen to a diversity of voices from the community. This engagement took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and was restricted to digital formats only. Four online focus groups were run to focus on key aspects of the plan:

- Farmers
- Local Business and Tourism
- Community
- Vulnerable People and Crisis Support Services

Engagement and communication with the cross border Victorian Councils of Campaspe Shire, Gannawarra Shire and Swan Hill Rural City was also undertaken to understand their adverse event and preparedness plans and policies and to initiate collaboration. An online community survey was also undertaken to get feedback from the community on how they have been impacted by drought and the pandemic. Engagement has been carried out under Murray River Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Community Engagement Policy.

The following **definitions** have been used to guide the preparation of the plan.

What is an Adverse Event?

An Adverse Event can be a drought, flood, bushfire earthquake, storm, biosecurity, spill, terrorist attack, major accident or health pandemic event. It can have environmental, social, cultural, health and economic impacts.

What is Rural Resilience?

Rural Resilience is how easily a rural area can simultaneously balance environmental, economic and social functions in the face of its threats. A resilient rural area will have the ability to absorb, recover and prepare for future shocks or adverse

events. Resilient rural areas promote sustainable development, the wellbeing of its community and inclusive growth.

What is preparedness?

Preparedness is knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organisations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters.

What is a hazard and a disaster?

A hazard refers to the phenomenon (natural or human) that presents a risk of harm or damage to humans, while disaster refers to the event which has caused loss of human life, damage to property or loss of livelihood.


It is therefore possible to have a hazard which does not result in disaster, and this is the purpose of disaster risk reduction and resilience building. Good disaster risk reduction work will reduce disaster risk and increase the resilience of a population.

What is disaster risk reduction?

Disaster risk reduction refers to the actions we take before a hazard or disaster occurs to reduce the impact of such an event. Examples include, reducing bushfire risk, measures to divert flood water, using drought resilient crops or increasing water storage capacity in order to maintain water supply in times of drought.

What is community capacity building?

Community capacity building is about strengthening the skills, knowledge, access to information, materials, funds and equipment for local communities to develop, implement and sustain their own solutions to problems in a way that helps them shape and exercise control over their physical, social, economic and cultural environments.



“The pandemic has highlighted how important agriculture is. Farmers are up there with the health workers, they need to be recognised.”

A Unique Place

A vastly dispersed but caring community. Border towns and small rural settlements are the life of Murray River Council.

The Murray River Council Local Government Area (LGA) is surrounded on all sides by the Murray River and its tributaries. Its small population of 12,118 residents (2018) are spread across a large area of 11,865km² with the main population centres being Moama, Barham, Mathoura, Moulamein, Koraleigh, Wakool, Tooleybuc and Murray Downs. There are an additional 25 settlements that each have small populations ranging from 11 in Waugorah to over 100 in Cummerangunja.

In Murray River Council LGA 83.9% of people were born in Australia. The most common countries of birth were England 2.0%, New Zealand 0.8%, Scotland 0.5%, Philippines 0.5% and Netherlands 0.3%. 3.2% of the population is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2016).

The Local Economy

In 2016, the size of the Murray River Council Local Government Area (LGA) economy was \$1.3 billion, with the four largest sectors – agriculture, manufacturing, construction and accommodation/food services (including tourism) collectively accounting for 70% of economic output and 47% of employment.

Agriculture is both the largest contributor to economic output (\$344 million or 25%) and the main industry of employment (20%).

According to the Murray River Council Local Profile (Zenith Planning, 2018) 85% of the LGA is zoned for primary production with the main forms of agriculture based on irrigation being rice, livestock, some citrus, cereal crops, dairy, pistachios, almonds, olives and vineyards.

Manufacturing produced \$208 million in economic output, and employed 6% of the workforce. Construction produced \$144 million in economic output and employed 9% of the workforce.

Tourism (accommodation/food services) contributed \$138 million and was the second largest sector of employment with 12% of the workforce.

These four sectors are great assets to the Murray River Council LGA and are key contributors to the community's resilience, however, given their vulnerability to adverse events, they are of key importance to ensure that these sectors are prepared for adverse events.



Drought and the Basin Plan

Sustainable management of water resources is critical to the ongoing prosperity of the region. Since the introduction of the Murray Darling Basin Plan in 2012 the region has experienced a net reduction in water availability and a corresponding decrease in agricultural employment.

The Murray Darling Basin Plan was developed by the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to determine the amount of water that can be extracted annually from the Murray Darling Basin for consumptive uses. Implementation of this plan to manage water resources locally has been a challenge for the community, particularly in recent years as low rainfall and a severe drought have exacerbated the impacts of limited water availability.

Since March 2018, general security water allocations for the Murray River under this plan have been 0%. While the river remains in a Stage 2 drought, this water allocation was recently increased to 3% in May 2020 for the first time in over 2 years.

Drought has had a significant impact on the communities of the Murray River region throughout much of this century. In mid 2017, the region was plunged into a long term severe drought with impacts continuing to be felt in 2020. Rainfall in the period January 2017 – December 2019 was the lowest on record in NSW, whilst the 2017, 2018, and 2019 calendar years were also the warmest on record.

Early rainfall in 2020 has eased the severity of the drought for communities along the Murray River, however the recovery is expected to be slow even with above average rainfall predicted for the remainder of the year.

Drought is likely to continue to occur in the ongoing future and poses a significant threat to the sustainability of the agriculture sector, the LGA's main industry and largest employer.

The Challenge

The Murray River Council LGA is particularly vulnerable to negative impacts of adverse events. It has a small population spread across a large area resulting in physical isolation for many residents. This is exacerbated by poor internet and phone reception in many areas further isolating some members of the community.

The dispersed population means there are also vulnerable people who are physically and socially isolated.

There are limited opportunities for training and employment for young people when they finish school, with many leaving the LGA to pursue work and education. There are also young people growing up in disadvantage with 45% of one parent families in the Murray River and Campaspe LGAs being jobless and a total of 12% of children coming from jobless homes.

The population in some parts of the LGA is declining due to water shortages affecting agricultural productivity resulting in reduced jobs. The economy has a high reliance on two sectors – agriculture and tourism – which are prone to be impacted severely by natural disasters.

For some locations there are access difficulties at river crossings in cross border towns. Many of the towns in the LGA rely on services and daily needs on the Victoria side of the border which has caused issues and confusion during the current COVID-19 pandemic with different rules applying in each state.

The Opportunity

The Murray River Council area is blessed by natural resources and beauty which, when combined with the innovation and drive evident in the business community, provides the platform for a strong and resilient local economy.

Many 'tree changers' are moving to the area from surrounding towns and Melbourne for a change of lifestyle as they can work from home or retirement boosting the economy and growing the population.

The community support structures are strong and committed to caring for vulnerable and isolated people in the area. The cross border context can be a real strength as it provides the Murray River LGA community with access to larger populations on the Victorian side – giving access to markets, and a wide range of community services and business organisations than would normally be available to the small populations in the cross border towns.

With increased collaboration between community groups and Council, the Adverse Event Plan provides the opportunity to be prepared for any shocks and events that may occur.

What are the Hazards?

An assessment of the key hazards for the Murray River LGA has been detailed in the Hazard Risk Matrix which is contained in Appendix 1 and depicted below. Each hazard has been rated according to the likelihood of the hazard occurring and the potential consequence of each hazard on the Murray River LGA community, environment and economy.

It is important to recognise that the likelihood of some hazards may be seasonal and fluctuate up or down at different times of the year or between years. For the purposes of this plan, the likelihood is considered with a five year time horizon. Similarly, the consequences of these hazards can vary based on the severity and/or duration of the occurrence.

Using the likelihood and consequence of the hazard, a risk rating is derived which is based on the scoring matrix contained in Appendix 1.

For the Murray River LGA, there are a number of hazards identified as 'Extreme' risk. These include weather and climate related hazards (drought, heatwave, storm); epidemic or pandemic (human, animal or plant disease, agricultural pests); bush or grass fire; industrial fire and trade or labour market shocks. An 'Extreme' risk rating is the highest level of risk, therefore requiring that these hazards receive priority treatment to mitigate risks.

The next highest level of risk classification is the 'High' risk category. This includes natural hazards such as severe floods and blue green algae outbreaks. It also includes man made hazards such as hazardous substance release, transport emergency, and utilities failure.

High	Drought	Ag/ pest/ disease epidemic	Human disease epidemic/ pandemic	Bush or grass fire	Heat wave	Storm	Industrial fire	Trade and labour market shocks
Medium	Severe Flood	Hazardous Substance release	Transport Emergency	Utilities Failure	Blue Green Algae Outbreak	Urban or residential fire		
Low	Earthquake	Incident of mass violence						

A photograph of a flooded street. In the foreground, a red rectangular sign with white text reads "REDUCE SPEED". To the right, a yellow diamond-shaped sign with a black arrow pointing right and a curve below it is visible. Below it is a smaller yellow rectangular sign with the number "55". The street is completely submerged in brown water, and the background is filled with dense green trees.

**REDUCE
SPEED**

**“Create a brains trust
to inform Council of
emerging issues”**

What Did You Say?

To inform the development of the Murray River Council Adverse Event Plan, four focus group meetings were held online via Zoom with a total of 35 community members participating. The four focus group targeted:

- Farmers
- Local Business and Tourism
- Community
- Vulnerable People and Crisis Support

An online community survey was also published on Council's 'Your Say' webpage on their website from 29th May - 4th June 2020 and emailed to Council's community database. 28 responses were received.

Across the Focus Groups and the survey results some key themes emerged in relation to Council's role in preparing for and recovering from adverse events.

Council being the source of clear, accurate and timely **information** for its residents was mentioned consistently in each focus group and in the survey responses. Supporting farmers and local businesses in understanding what **services** and state and federal **support** was available to them was also repeated. Supporting the community to **advocate** to other levels of government on many issues that impacted them was also a key theme.


Council's role in bringing together **informal leaders** and helping to establish **networks** in the 'good times' to be ready for the 'bad times' was also a message that came up in every focus group and the survey. People who came to the focus groups represented many different community and business groups. It was discussed that Council had a role in helping establish more **collaboration** across relevant groups to harness resources and mobilise **social capital**.

A strong theme was that Council should be **supporting local business and farmers** and advocating for a higher water allocation and more drought relief to allow farmers to maintain viable and transition to adaptive agricultural methods.

Many people raised the **poor internet and phone connectivity** as hindering farmers using the latest agricultural machinery, local business progressing and increasing the risk of people becoming isolated and being cut off in a crisis.

Planning for vulnerable people was also an area that needed **clarity on roles and responsibilities** as there was confusion within the service sector in NSW and across the border in Victoria where many residents access services.

The main theme that kept being repeated was that Council should establish a **citizens committee** or working group where solid connections, networks and roles can be clarified before the next adverse event, not to wait until another event.

A photograph of two firefighters in full protective gear, including helmets and jackets, working in a fire scene. The scene is filled with bright orange and yellow flames and a dense shower of sparks falling from above. The firefighters are positioned on either side of the frame, facing each other. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

“Create a pre-established network that is representative of different community service sectors. Document roles and responsibilities.”

Resilience Principles

The following resilience principles have been applied to the creation of the strategies and initiatives outlined in this plan.

This plan aims to anticipate the likely and potential adverse events that could impact the Murray River Council. These adverse events vary greatly on their impacts to the environment, economy and social fabric of the community. Therefore this plan needs to be flexible to ensure that the strategies and specified initiatives can be applied in various ways to any future adverse event.

Each principle addresses the intent of the purpose and vision of the plan to ensure its success in implementation.

Community led recovery

It is now well recognised by Emergency Management authorities that recovery from an adverse event disaster best led by the affected community where it takes responsibility for and drives recovery efforts, with all three tiers of Government supporting the approach. Recovery needs to vary according to the scope of the adverse event and will change and evolve over time. Initiatives to build community capacity for leading preparedness and recovery are recommended in this plan.

Plan in the good times to be prepared for the bad times

A strong theme from the community engagement was to 'plan in the good times so you are ready for the bad times'. Doing the work of establishing the appropriate networks, communication channels, community leaders and service coordination is easier when there isn't a crisis or emergency.

This plan outlines key actions to ensure a strong and clear network of communication is established now, particularly learning from the lessons of the current pandemic and drought adverse events.

Continuous learning and improvement

Continuous learning and improvement is a key part of any plan that remains active and used by its community. This plan has recommended a framework for its review and continuous improvement initiatives to ensure that it is current and useful in a crisis. This will form a significant part of preparedness planning and will ensure Murray River Council can be in the best position possible to face any adverse events.



How do we prepare for next time?

Four targeted strategies have been created to deliver on the purpose and the vision of this plan. These strategies build on the resilience principles and have been designed to address the priorities that the Council should focus on in building community capacity and enhancing preparedness for future adverse events.

These initiatives are part of preparedness but also influence the recovery of the LGA from the existing drought and COVID-19 pandemic.

They have been prepared in response to the hazard assessment which shows multiple threats to the small communities. With the constraints of poor internet, phone and physical connectivity the impact of these threats are increased without a clear plan to prepared the community.

Each initiative that is recommended as part of this plan corresponds to at least one strategy as shown on the following page.

Strategies

To build resilience with adaptive methods



To diversify the economy and capture value at home



To build the capacity of the community



To provide accurate, clear and timely communication



Strategies

To build resilience with adaptive methods



To diversify the economy and capture value at home



To build the capacity of the community



To provide accurate, clear and timely communication



Coordination Initiatives

Create independent water stores (bushfires)			☆	
Create independent power supplies (water pumps and communications)			☆	☆
Review road and bridge network for escape options			☆	
Award \$3k grants for community building activities	☆		☆	
Construction of the Moulamein Heritage Village		☆	☆	
Moama Recreation Reserve upgrade		☆	☆	
Noorong Community Centre Playground		☆	☆	
Build Moama Australia Open Darts Festival		☆	☆	
Renovate the Bunaloo Hall and Ball		☆	☆	
Barham Micro Abattoir	☆	☆		
Tooleybuc shared path	☆	☆	☆	
Add more drought tolerant species to the farm tree rebate	☆		☆	
Procure locally produced goods	☆	☆	☆	

Strategies

To build resilience with adaptive methods



To diversify the economy and capture value at home



To build the capacity of the community



To provide accurate, clear and timely communication



Communication Initiatives

Council Marketing Campaign		☆		☆
Install a Drought Officer	☆	☆	☆	☆
Create a Community Committee	☆	☆	☆	☆
Create a "Phone a Friend" Program			☆	☆
Create a Vulnerable Persons Network	☆		☆	☆
Diversify access to Council communications	☆			☆
Provide Digital Engagement Training for Council	☆		☆	☆

Advocacy

Support the agri-knowledge centre	☆	☆	☆	
Advocate for flood warning review	☆		☆	☆
Amplify local tourism	☆	☆	☆	☆
Review the Vulnerable Persons Register			☆	☆
Advocate for the improvement of internet and phone reception			☆	☆

Strategies

To build resilience with adaptive methods



To diversify the economy and capture value at home



To build the capacity of the community



To provide accurate, clear and timely communication



Training Initiatives

Host an annual one day adverse event 'simulation'	☆		☆	☆
Host bushfire preparedness training session (with the RFS)			☆	☆
Host storm and flood preparedness training session (with the SES)			☆	☆
Offer free first aid and mental health first aid courses and refreshers			☆	
Provide local business training for event readiness and recovery		☆		
Provide agriculture innovation and adaption training for farmers	☆	☆	☆	☆

Coordination Initiatives

Further detail on each initiative is described below. Council should allocate key roles and responsibilities to each initiative. These initiatives involve Council taking the lead in a coordination role.

Create independent water stores

Independent water stores should be established at each town and settlement to defend lives and property in case of bush or grass fire. The pumps should be connected to the independent power supply as described below.

Create independent power supplies

Independent power supplies should be established to power water pumps and keep satellite phones working in case of bushfire, grass fire, flood, storm or other natural disaster where people are cut off. The independent power and water supply should also have water boiling equipment for purification and the ability to sterilise baby bottles, medical equipment, clothes and other critical items if people are cut off from water and food for a period of time. A food store of essentials should also be stored here including baby formula, nappies, soap and first aid supplies.

Review road and bridge network for escape options

The road and bridge network should be reviewed to identify any points that, if cut off, would isolate communities in times of flood, bushfire or storm events. If alternate options for escape can be made available they should be considered. Council should engage with residents who are at risk of being isolated to ensure they have adequate bushfire and evacuation plans and supplies if cut off from power, water and food. Map elderly, isolated and vulnerable people and ensure they have escape and bushfire plans.

Award grants for community building activities

Council can develop low cost grants to support the ideas and activities of the community that build social capital, connect and network people. Ideas include a community garden, dog park, BBQ or community picnic, networking or social event for vulnerable or isolated people, art and cultural activities.

Construction of the Moulamein Heritage Village

Construction of a new tourist attraction in Moulamein. Outcomes – providing immediate employment for local contractors. The Visitor Centre, Museum and Bush Tucker Garden will increase visitation and length of stay.

Moama Recreation Reserve upgrade

The upgrade will bring the facilities up to a regional standard and provide an opportunity to attract larger events to the region which bring the community together throughout the year.

Construction of a playground at Noorong Community Centre

Providing an important meeting place for drought affected families to gather. The play activities provide opportunity for the grown and development of physical and social skills.

Support the Moama Australia Open Darts Festival

Bringing big events to town draws the community together in addition to lots of new visitors boosting the profile of Murray River. Council should continue to support initiatives like this.

Coordination Initiatives

Renovate the Bunaloo Hall and Ball

Installation of air conditioning at Bunaloo Hall will ensure the long term usage of the facilities and the opportunity to attract new community groups. Subsidised ticket cost to attend the Bunaloo Community Ball provides an opportunity for mental health and wellbeing by encouraging drought affected farms and rural businesses to engage in a social activity.

Fund the first stage of the Barham Micro Abattoir

The micro abattoir will improve producer and regional business viability for local primary producers.

Tooleybuc Shared path

Construction of shared pedestrian/cycle pathway in Tooleybuc to provide safe passage for extended user groups to travel to the town centre whilst promoting an active lifestyle.

Drought tolerant species on Farm Tree Rebate

The Council Farm Tree Rebate Scheme should be reviewed to include a large variety of drought tolerant trees that do not require irrigation or much rainfall. This will assist in the adaption of the area to drier and hotter conditions without the certainty of irrigation.

Procure goods locally

Council should be mindful, in terms of its regular review of the procurement policy, to consider opportunities to source local goods and services from within the LGA and surrounding regional areas, subject to achieving the “best value” outcome for the community in determining tenders and contracts for services and goods. The support of local producers and businesses through the procurement process can help to raise their profile and reduce our carbon footprint.



Communication Initiatives

Further detail on each initiative is described below. Council should allocate key roles and responsibilities to each initiative. These initiatives involve Council taking the lead in communicating clear and accurate information.

Council Marketing Campaign

Murray River Council Promotional and Marketing Campaign to encourage visitation to destinations across the LGA.

Install a Drought Officer

Install a temporary position of a Drought Officer at Council to manage and communicate the assistance that is available to drought affected farmers and businesses. This person will provide a helping hand and friendly face to those overwhelmed with what and how to apply for assistance. They will also provide up to date information, share updates on agricultural innovation and technology and create opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking. Their role will also ensure that information is accessible to people with various access requirements.

Create a Community Committee

Set up a Community Committee of diverse informal leaders and volunteers from across the LGA, of mixed genders and backgrounds within the community who can come into action if there is an adverse event. Spending the time bringing together the right people and building their capacity ahead of time can increase community resilience and preparedness dramatically. The committee set up could be supported by the Red Cross who are piloting a model in other communities in NSW currently.

Create a 'Phone a Friend' Program

A buddy system could be created for community members who are physically or socially isolated to ensure that the community can pull together quickly to check on each other, make sure all are accounted for, and to offer help. Following on from an adverse event, buddies can

check in on each other at agreed intervals to provide ongoing social connection and support.

Vulnerable Persons Network

Council can lead the set up of a Vulnerable Persons Network that can connect the multiple social, community, aged care, disability, health, youth and other services that serve vulnerable people. Setting up this network can assist to coordinate efforts and to clarify roles and responsibilities of each service provider to ensure that vulnerable people are prepared for an adverse event, able to be safe during one, and also supported following one.

Diversify access to Council Communications

Council should review its communication formats to ensure that vulnerable people without access to the internet can access Council newsletters and updates via print, radio and television. Communications should also be available in the first language of community members where possible. Communications for those with vision and hearing disabilities should also be addressed in addition to those with low literacy including pictorial communication.

Provide Digital Engagement Training to Council Staff

In order to communicate in a variety of methods to reach isolated members of the community digital engagement training should be given to key Council staff to increase their capability to reach the community. A variety of digital platforms, teleconferences, chats, webinars, teleconferences and chat systems have been used by other agencies during adverse events to keep people connected and updated with accurate and up to date information. Additional training can help Council spread their updates and host more meetings and engagement sessions online to include more people.

Advocacy Initiatives

Further detail on each initiative is described below. Council should allocate key roles and responsibilities to each initiative. These initiatives involve Council taking leading advocacy to support local business, agriculture, tourism and the community.

Support the Agri-knowledge Centre

Council is supporting the development of an agri-knowledge centre at Barham with the Western Murray Land Improvement Group. Continuing support for this project through communications, advocacy and setting up leadership networks will add to its success and value in the community.

Advocate for flood warning review

Feedback from the community indicated that flood warnings are inaccurate and create confusion when activated. Council should advocate for a review of the warning system so that it is accurate and reliable source of information for the community.

Amplify Local Tourism

Council can look for ways to amplify the marketing and media campaigns of its local tourism businesses. In addition, it can advocate to state and federal governments to support the interests of the tourism industry and to request support after adverse events to ensure their survival.

Review the Vulnerable Persons Register

As described in the Vulnerable Persons Network, the system that vulnerable people are registered on is unclear and inaccessible to those who need it. Council should advocate to state government departments to review the system and install an appropriate portal that enables accurate information to be easily added, updated and quickly accessed in an emergency.

Advocate for the improvement of internet and phone reception

Many parts of the LGA are part of internet and phone blackspots with limited or unreliable connectivity. Council should reach out to service providers to ensure that connections are improved to connect isolated residents.

Training Initiatives

Further detail on each initiative is described below. Council should allocate key roles and responsibilities to each initiative. These initiatives involve Council taking the lead in providing targeted training opportunities.

Host an annual one day adverse event 'simulation'

Council can lead preparedness by hosting a one day adverse event simulation where community leaders, the community committee and other stakeholders come together to test preparedness. Lessons learned from the day will be used to update the plan as part of its continuous improvement.

Host bushfire preparedness training session

Council can host a free bushfire preparedness training session annually with the RFS, with up to date resources and links published on Council's website in addition to contributing to the improvement and update of this plan.

Host storm and flood preparedness training session

Council can host a free flood and storm preparedness training session annually with the SES, with up to date resources

and links published on Council's website in addition to contributing to the improvement and update of this plan.

Offer free First Aid and Mental Health First Aid

Council can host free First Aid and Mental Health First Aid courses quarterly for the community. All members of the Community Committee should undertake both courses.

Provide Local Business Training for event readiness and recovery

Provide business workshops and consulting advice to local businesses to prepare for adverse events and to recover from the existing COVID-19 pandemic and drought.

Provide agriculture innovation and adaption training for farmers

Provide training for local farmers on what innovations in agricultural and drought adaptation is occurring within the LGA and around the country. Support guest speakers who can share research and facilitate discussions among groups of farmers to give them the tools to make informed decisions.



Priorities

The following initiatives have been prioritised to be delivered within the next 12 months.

Coordination	Communication	Advocacy	Training
Create independent water stores (bushfires)	Council Marketing Campaign	Review the Vulnerable Persons Register	Host bushfire preparedness training session (with the RFS)
Create independent power supplies (water pumps and communications)	Create a Community Committee	Advocate for the improvement of internet and phone reception	Host storm and flood preparedness training session (with the SES)
Review road and bridge network for escape options	Create a "Phone a Friend" Program		Offer free first aid and mental health first aid courses and refreshers
Award \$3k grants for community building activities	Create a Vulnerable Persons Network		
Add more drought tolerant species to the farm tree rebate			

What is Council's role?

The Adverse Event Plan has been prepared by Murray River Council but is not solely for Council to implement. The Adverse Event Plan will only be successful with the input of many people and organisations across the community and economy of the Murray River Council. The unique contribution that Council will lead is described below.

Coordination

To use its convening power to bring together the various community committees and working groups discussed earlier in the plan to progress the preparedness and capacity building agenda of this Plan.

Communication

To use its resources and access to various media to communicate with the whole community about adverse event preparedness, response and recovery

Advocacy

To use its influence and to create a platform to gain support and funding from state and federal governments for socio-economic and cultural support for the resilience of the LGA.

Training

Several training sessions have been recommended in this plan. Providing training to build the capacity of the community to be prepared to cope is a great way that Council can lead preparedness.

Review

Council will also be responsible for regularly reviewing and testing the Adverse Event Plan and keeping it in the consciousness of the community. This plan should be reviewed after an adverse event occurs to include any lessons learned and to update appropriate initiatives for recovery.



Next Steps

It is suggested that Council confirm the key priorities that are suggested within this plan and define who is responsible from within Council for the implementation of each initiative.

The Draft Adverse Event Plan can be circulated to those who participated in the focus groups and put on exhibition to gain helpful feedback and insight from the community.

This plan will be a living plan that can be updated and added to by Council as lessons are learned and recovery progresses.



APPENDIX 1

Hazard Matrix

Our vision

Murray River Council has vibrant, diverse and cohesive communities. We are supported by strong local business and primary industries. We value our beautiful waterways and natural surrounds.

Our values

Murray River Council has four core values that drive us in our dealings with the people we serve, our stakeholders and the community. We live these values every day:

We achieve our goals through **collaboration**.

We take **responsibility** of our contribution to servicing our community.

We act with **integrity**.

We demonstrate **excellence** by delivering our best.



murray river
council