

Highlands  
Community  
Conversation:  
**Recovery  
Planning**

April 2026





## Introduction

On Saturday 11 April 2026, a community conversation was held at the Highlands Hall to discuss community representation in recovery planning and to seek feedback about the current recovery priorities for Highlands.

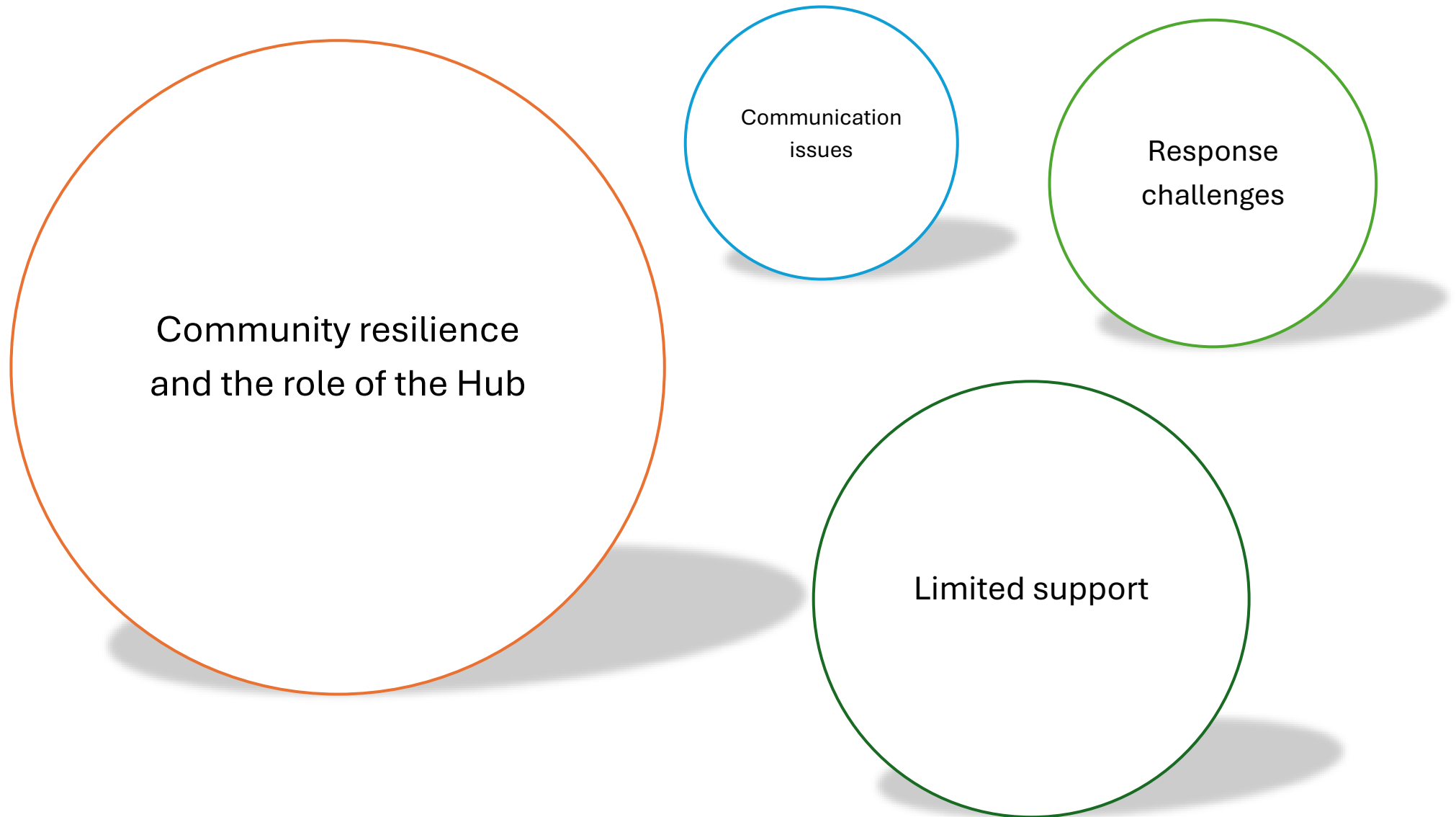
A new, incorporated association – The Highlands Relief Hub Inc – has recently been formed, and the conversation identified a range of skills and experience that will be needed to help to shape bushfire recovery now and into the future.

Potential nominations were also sought from the community for people who may be willing to take a role on the newly formed association.

The information generated during the community conversation has been collated into key themes on the following pages, together with individual and group responses from attendees.

The aim of this information is to help progress and support the formation of the Highlands Relief Hub Inc and to provide guidance to its members to support representation and recovery planning for medium to longer-term recovery.

# Highlands Community Conversation: What has stood out the most since 9 January?



## What has stood out the most?

Theme	Individual responses
Community resilience and the role of the Hub	<p>The emergence of members of the community            Commitment to community            Holding the community together            Ability to get community together            Willingness to help            Comradery between neighbours            Community support from locals            The support from the Hub and community has been overwhelming            The Hub - Andrea, Kate and community spirit            The role of the Hub in supporting the community and our needs            Andrea and Kate and Team's kindness            Mitchell Shire Council help, assistance and dinners</p>
Limited support	<p>Lack of support for restoring essential services in the first 6 weeks            Community was pretty much on their own            Initially, denial, head in the sand. Then - what needs to be done for the community            Lack of grants available for me due to no ABN or not living on the farm            Murrindindi Council's lack of physical assistance, e.g. trees, roads, etc            Side roads taking too long to be cleared as this is a strong reminder of the disaster            Lack of Government clean up resources on the ground            The lack of local and state assistance</p>
Response challenges	<p>No large generator to power communication "Safe Space"            Lack of reliable water at time of impact            Not being able to move around due to trees down over the roads            Why didn't the Army step in to help fight the fire like Gippsland            Prior to the fires, was the amount of dead and fallen trees on sides of all roads that fuelled the fires - all roads were a corridor for the fires to travel along            Fires kept coming for 30 plus days after the main fires</p>
Communication issues	<p>Centralised communication in and out            Failure of telephone system            No communication when we could come back after the fires            Lack of updated information of exact site of fire and direction            Confusion</p>

## Recovery Priorities: Key themes



## Immediate Recovery Priorities

Theme	Individual responses
Roadsides / tree clearing	<p>Assistance for unmaintained government roads with clearing trees</p> <p>Shire to clear roads and roadsides</p> <p>Hazardous trees not cleared at end of Lades Road so no-one will help until they are removed</p> <p>Roadside and road rubbish collection</p> <p>I am at the end of Lades Road - we cannot allow Blaze Aid to work until dangerous trees are removed</p> <p>Restoring roadside vegetation to protect and accommodate native flora and fauna</p> <p>Clean up the roads</p> <p>Removal of dangerous trees on side roads</p> <p>Continue to clear all dead and fallen trees before next summer, El Nino and dry summer</p> <p>Removal of all marked dangerous trees</p> <p>Clean up of dead and damaged vegetation and replanting to preserve our landscape</p> <p>Clean up roads including trees, posts beside roads and fixing roads. We have already had fog and need these fixed ASAP</p>
Rebuilding	<p>Cooperation by Shire in facilitating rebuilding and repair</p> <p>Financial assistance with replacement of water tanks</p> <p>Housing - dealing with insurance</p> <p>List of recommended tradesmen / women, companies that can assist</p> <p>The Council to assist in rebuilding new homes</p> <p>Water deliveries for small amounts - less than 10,000 litres and limited access</p> <p>Centralised repository for people's information to streamline grant applications and eligibility</p> <p>\$\$\$\$\$\$</p> <p>Reliable power supply</p> <p>Firewood depot? Is this going to happen?</p>
Clean up and fencing	<p>Clean up and fencing</p> <p>Fencing to contain stock and fodder for animals</p> <p>Burnt property government clean up - speed up timeline</p> <p>Having a council / community mulcher to assist in clean up</p>

Clean up and fencing (continued)	<p>Site clearance of houses and sheds destroyed</p> <p>Speed up R/O rubbish removal</p> <p>Cleaning up of damaged objects to be able to move forward (out of sight, out of mind)</p> <p>Cleaning up and getting everything together</p>
Support and wellbeing	<p>Basic needs all restored</p> <p>Ease of access to Local, State, Federal Government assistance</p> <p>Easy to access psychological services</p> <p>Supporting the community's mental health, accommodation and daily needs</p> <p>Community security (thefts and such)</p> <p>Gather community insight to help direct relief</p>
Community strengthening	<p>Reduce division</p> <p>Rectify the disparity of distribution of assistance</p> <p>Learnings are captured and implemented</p> <p>Ensuring the community-led approach is sustainable</p> <p>CFA assistance with funds</p> <p>Support the community every way possible to get back to normal way of life</p>

## Skills and experience needed to shape recovery now and into the future:

Theme	Responses from group discussion
Personal / /professional attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good negotiating skills</li> <li>• Grant writing skills</li> <li>• Good communication, including with government agencies</li> <li>• Strong leadership</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Experienced facilitator for community consultation</li> <li>• IT skills</li> <li>• Psychological experience</li> <li>• Administration skills +++</li> <li>• Environmental knowledge</li> <li>• Accountant / business management (donations / sponsorship)</li> </ul>
Technical knowledge / experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CFA - communication expert - structure for emergencies</li> <li>• Logistics / infrastructure management skills</li> <li>• Labourers</li> <li>• Machine operators</li> <li>• Fencing techniques</li> <li>• Chainsaw safety course</li> <li>• Tree rehabilitation – Landcare - and seed collection (local)</li> <li>• Rebuilding advice / planning advice, e.g. expertise in BAL</li> <li>• More professional arborists, including skilled arborists for private properties</li> <li>• Legal advice</li> <li>• Case managers, e.g. Windamere</li> <li>• Professional fencers (subsidised)</li> <li>• Operators of earth moving equipment to move felled trees away from fence lines</li> </ul>

<p>Technical knowledge / experience (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permit writers</li> <li>• Builders</li> <li>• Plumbers / electricians</li> <li>• Landscaping / drainers</li> <li>• Dealing with hazards and materials</li> </ul>
<p>Ways of working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to have a disaster plan in the immediate timeframe of the fires and the Council staff to be aware of the plan to be implemented (cut the red tape)</li> <li>• Emotional support at the 'coal face' - that those experiencing depression are reluctant to ask for help</li> <li>• Listening ear of government</li> <li>• List of reliable contacts for trades</li> <li>• Buying power for bulk purchases, delivery, etc.</li> <li>• Conduit between three councils and the above</li> <li>• Communication to continue - individuals with jobs that can be advertised (a list somewhere) and volunteering offered (Odd jobs)</li> <li>• Police to control traffic with speed limits and access</li> <li>• Different forms of fun, relaxation, therapy</li> </ul>
<p>Issues requiring advocacy / coordination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community clean up, e.g. excavators and truck</li> <li>• Large (Council) mulchers to use on private land</li> <li>• Having wood available and delivered to the affected residences who have their stockpile of wood burnt during the fires</li> <li>• More tradespeople to be available in the days and weeks after the fires</li> <li>• Council planning permits to be fast tracked as currently taking three (3) months to replace a shed that was already there in the first place (Hire extra people to manage the process)</li> <li>• Sort out power outages as this affects so many things i.e. septic tanks</li> <li>• Sensible clearing of roads - money being wasted?</li> <li>• First aid group - be available in real time situation - additional training for everybody</li> <li>• Asset pool register - lend, loan, borrow - internal and external resources</li> </ul>

# The Highlands Relief Hub Inc – nominations

Considering recovery priorities and the skills, experience, ways of working and technical knowledge identified during the community conversation, participants were invited to nominate people who could potentially contribute to recovery as members of the Highlands Relief Hub Inc committee of management.

IMPORTANT: The purpose of the nomination process was to identify people who could be approached as potential committee members. Not all nominees were present at the community conversation event. The inclusion in this report of the names of nominees does not infer their acceptance of the nomination, nor does it represent any obligation to do so.

Community members nominated as potential committee members (in alphabetical order)

- Andrea Bauer
- Vicki Bell
- Claire Daly
- Joe Daoud
- Lillian De Maria
- Sarah Fitzgerald
- Ivan Hazeldene
- Alistair Lade
- Kate McAlpin
- Scott McKay
- Sally Merchie
- Sam Parsons
- John Rogers
- Andre Shaw
- Sam Strong
- Dylan Welsh

Next steps: A further call for nominations will be made to incorporate the views of those community members who were not present at the community conversation. Highlands Relief Hub Inc volunteers will then undertake to contact each nominee to establish their availability and interest in serving on the committee. If the number of people who accept nomination exceeds the number of committee positions, a ballot will be undertaken to elect members to the committee.

For any information about the nomination process and/or the Highlands Relief Hub Inc, please contact [thehighlandshub2026@gmail.com](mailto:thehighlandshub2026@gmail.com).