

# Western Downs Regional Council SBF Program Showcase

Western Downs Regional Council: A range of Disaster Recovery support provided after Tara Bushfires



Photo: Tara Bushfire, October 2023.



Photo: Filming the Sunset Way video, April 2024.

## Showcase snapshot

- The Western Downs Bushfires of 2023 constituted one of the largest bushfire events in Queensland history. This was compounded by the consecutive flooding events the region has experienced since 2021.
- In the wake of the Tara Bushfires, Council activated evacuation centres to ensure residents had a safe place to go.
- Council partnered with government agencies and charities to deliver comprehensive support, including promotion of financial grants, to ensure individuals, primary producers and businesses were able to access information and apply for assistance.
- Staff actively attended affected areas to assess the direct and indirect impact of the bushfires to businesses in the region.
- Council ensures safe travelling of visitors in region and maintain the good tourism profile of the region.

Key search words: Western Downs Regional Council, Disaster Resilience, Disaster Recovery, Bushfires, Tara, Business Support, Tourism

## Introduction

- The Western Downs has experienced seven natural disasters between 2021 and 2023, comprising five major floods and two bushfire events.



- The 2023 bushfire events had a total burn scar area was 13,102 hectares with 112 structures destroyed or severely damaged and 562 damage assessments completed.
- After the most recent bushfire in November 2023, 11 local businesses in Tara were indirectly impacted due to necessary closures, staff shortages, power outages, active involvement in firefighting efforts or reduced sales.
- 3 home-based businesses were directly impacted by the fires.
- The communities in and around the Tara district were severely impacted and Council needed to provide immediate support and also assist with recovery in the medium-term and improve long-term resilience.
- Not only did Council activate Evacuation Centres, we were also able to partner with government agencies and charities to offer comprehensive support for impacted residents.
- Economic Development staff canvassed businesses to ascertain extent impact and worked with Chambers to distribute a disaster impact survey and promote \$75,000 Southern Queensland Bushfire Recovery Grant for primary producers.
- Local Recovery Plan developed.
- Council embarked on a tourism recovery campaign to create positive destination profiling of Tara. The campaign ran for over 9 months with the Sunset Way campaign bringing it to a close in August 2024. Overall an investment of \$20,000 was directed at marketing with the final Sunset Way campaign of \$13,420.

## Outcomes

- Council coordinated additional feed and water for impacted small scale farms.
- As at 7 August, 3 primary produces had received a total of \$10,946.30 under the Southern Queensland Bushfire Recovery Grant.
- Council delivered a Health and Wellbeing 4 Biz roadshow.
- Liaised with Department of Employment, Small Business and Employment (DESBT), ATO and Bunyarra Wellbeing Co, who provided information and support services, financial counselling, wellbeing coaches, mentoring for recovery.
- Liaised with DESBT to visit and support small businesses and primary producers.
- On June 3, 2024, the Sunset Way social media campaign was launched promoting a return to tourism in the affected areas and drive visitor economy. \$1000 of paid advertising over 23 days resulted in 720,000 views of the video and 2,324 shares.

## Insights

- Our region is prone to natural disasters and will continue to experience extreme weather.
- The support Council were able to offer was of critical value to the residents and small businesses of the Tara and surrounding communities, those affected both directly and indirectly.



- It's not enough to have plans, resources and funding to recover - forward planning and disaster mitigation strategies need to be in place before disaster strikes.
- A three year Building Western Downs Disaster Resilience Program funded by Shell QGC and delivered from 2023-26 will include building resilience forums and business continuity checks (as well as a range of other components).

## Further information

To learn more about this showcase, please contact:

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