

# Memorandum of Understanding

January 2026 Bushfire Relief, Recovery and Advocacy Partnership

## 1. Parties

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is made between:

- **Mansfield Shire Council**
- **Mitchell Shire Council**
- **Murrindindi Shire Council**
- **Strathbogie Shire Council**

(together referred to as *the Councils*).

This MoU is endorsed by the respective Chief Executive Officers and formally communicated to each Council for organisational awareness and alignment to.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this MoU is to establish a coordinated, collaborative framework for relief, early recovery, long-term recovery and advocacy arising from the January 2026 bushfire event.

The MoU enables the Councils to work together to:

- promote consistent and coordinated and community-centred approaches to relief and recovery
- support a coherent and equitable experience for communities, regardless of municipal boundaries
- share intelligence, data and insights to inform planning and decision-making
- collaborate on resourcing and capability and workforce support where appropriate
- strengthen collective advocacy to State and Commonwealth Governments on shared priorities

## 3. Context and Significance

The Councils acknowledge that the January 2026 bushfires resulted in significant loss and damage across the participating municipalities, with profound and enduring impacts on people, livelihoods, landscapes, infrastructure and local economies. The consequences of this event will extend over many years, particularly for rural and regional communities where recovery is complex and layered.

Rural local governments entered this bushfire event under existing financial and workforce pressures, with finite resourcing capacity and increasing service demands. This context reinforces the need for strong collaboration, coordinated effort and shared approaches to support effective and sustainable recovery outcomes.

The Councils also recognise that the scale, duration and complexity of recovery from the January 2026 bushfires will have long-term implications for the financial sustainability of affected rural councils. Increased service demand, infrastructure repair and replacement, workforce pressures, reduced revenue capacity and the administrative burden of recovery

will continue well beyond the immediate relief and early recovery phases. These impacts must be considered alongside community recovery to ensure councils remain viable and able to fulfil their statutory and community responsibilities over the long term.

## 4. Relief and Recovery Principles

The Councils agree to work together in accordance with the following shared relief and recovery principles:

- A human-centred approach to services and communications
- We are here for the long haul
- The wellbeing of our people is paramount
- The safety of our staff, volunteers, contractors, partners and community
- Council information is up to date and reliable, providing a single point of truth for community
- Decisions and actions reflect transparency, proportionality and shared accountability
- Efforts prioritise those most affected and most vulnerable

These principles guide decision-making, service delivery, communications and partnership behaviours under this MoU.

## 5. Areas of Collaboration

Under this MoU, the Councils agree to collaborate in relation to the January 2026 bushfire event across the following areas:

### 5.1 Relief and Recovery Coordination

- Coordinating relief, early recovery and long-term recovery activities
- Sharing lessons, emerging issues and recovery insights
- Supporting alignment with state recovery structures and partners
- Identifying opportunities to avoid duplication and maximise collective impact.

### 5.2 Community Experience and Communications

- Promoting consistency in community information and engagement approaches
- Supporting clear, reliable and timely information for affected communities
- Reducing confusion and duplication across municipal boundaries
- Ensuring communications are culturally appropriate, accessible and inclusive.

### 5.3 Intelligence and Information Sharing

- Sharing relevant data, intelligence and analysis on impacts, needs and recovery progress
- Using shared intelligence to inform service delivery, planning and advocacy
- Developing common data definitions where practical to support comparability and accuracy.

#### 5.4 Resourcing and Capability

- Exploring opportunities for inter-council collaboration and resource sharing where appropriate and lawful
- Supporting surge capacity, specialist skills and capability uplift as recovery demands evolve
- Considering shared recruitment, workforce pools and joint procurement where beneficial.

#### 5.5 Joint Advocacy

- Coordinating advocacy to State and Commonwealth Governments
- Presenting aligned, evidence-based messages on recovery priorities
- Advocating for sustained investment in agriculture, small business, tourism, infrastructure, housing, wellbeing and community resilience
- Advocating for appropriate State and Commonwealth support to address the medium- and long-term financial sustainability impacts on affected councils, including recovery-related cost pressures, workforce capacity, infrastructure liabilities and revenue constraints
- Ensuring advocacy reflects agreed regional priorities and community-informed needs.

### 6. Governance and Operation

- The Chief Executive Officers of the participating Councils provide executive oversight of this MoU
- The Councils may establish an officer-level coordination group to support collaboration, information sharing and delivery
- The Partnership will meet as required to address recovery priorities, emerging impacts and shared challenges arising from the January 2026 bushfires
- Roles, meeting frequency and communication protocols may be clarified in an associated working arrangement if required.

### 7. Duration and Review

This MoU takes effect upon endorsement by the participating Chief Executive Officers and remains in place for the duration of recovery from the January 2026 bushfire event, unless otherwise agreed.

The MoU may be reviewed periodically and updated by agreement to ensure it remains fit for purpose and responsive to evolving recovery needs.

### 8. Status

This MoU is a statement of shared intent and collaboration. It does not create legal or financial obligations beyond existing legislative, policy and governance frameworks. Each Council retains its statutory responsibilities, decision-making authority and autonomy.

Nothing in this MoU limits or prevents any Council from acting independently where required in the interests of its community.

Where a Council undertakes works on behalf of another Council, the delivering Council may invoice for reasonable costs unless covered by a separate agreement.

Any Council may withdraw from this MoU by providing written notice.

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