

Our Voices, Our Future Bushfire Recovery Community Forum Summary

Date: 28 May 2025

Hosted by: Halls Gap Recovery Kitchen Cabinet (informal Community Recovery Committee)

Facilitated by: Happy Changemakers.

Why This Forum Was Held

In April 2025, more than 60 community leaders, volunteers, and residents came together at a community forum in Halls Gap. The event aimed to reflect on the recovery journey following recent bushfires in December 2024 and to shape a shared vision for a stronger, more resilient community.

This summary captures key messages, shared hopes, and practical ideas that emerged during the forum. The input was gathered through small group conversations, whole-of-room discussions, and written feedback. The Forum was supported by The Building Community Resilience Project, funded by Northern Grampians Shire Council and Victorian Government.

Reflections on Community-Led Recovery

Participants widely acknowledged the positive shift from a tourism-focused response to a broader community-led recovery. The formation of the Halls Gap Recovery Kitchen Cabinet (Kitchen Cabinet) as an informal community recovery committee has helped bushfire recovery be a more inclusive and welcoming process.

What People Shared:

- The recovery process has created new connections and brought residents, part-time locals, and newcomers closer together.
- Local leadership and communication were appreciated, though there is still room to improve how information is shared across the community and beyond ie. media.
- Some felt there is a need to better connect residents and business owners, as well as to strengthen ties with nearby Pomonal.
- Participants valued being involved and acknowledged that even attending events made a difference.
- Strong support for the Kitchen Cabinet to develop a statement of purpose and apply to be an ongoing auspiced subcommittee of the Halls Gap Community Association Inc, Plus develop an expressions of interest process for the community to get involved broadly.

Visions for the Future

Many participants expressed a strong desire to build a future that supports residents as much as visitors. There was widespread support for enhancing liveability, strengthening social ties, infrastructure, and improving emergency and disaster preparedness.

Shared Priorities:

- Increase housing and long-term rental options to attract and retain residents.
- Establish a shared community hub and make better use of existing spaces.
- Create stronger ties between Halls Gap and Pomonal to ensure a united approach.
- Strengthen local emergency planning and support networks.
- Encourage proactive planning for businesses and build in more year-round community resilience.
- Improve communication channels, including digital accessibility and community media.

Ways People Want to Contribute

Community members expressed strong interest in being part of future projects and solutions, with many offering time, skills, and energy.

Key Suggestions:

- Provide clear invitations and accessible information about how to get involved.
- Use a variety of communication tools to ensure everyone is reached, including new residents and absentee landholders.
- Support grassroots involvement through volunteering, working groups, and participation in key decisions.
- Recognise and match individual skills to local needs.

Ideas for Funding and Support

Participants were realistic about financial limitations and keen to explore practical solutions. There was strong interest in being proactive and reducing reliance on external grants alone.

Notable Ideas:

- Improve coordination and use of existing resources.
- Seek targeted support from Northern Grampians Shire Council and funders.
- Consider mechanisms such as a local tourist levy to fund key initiatives.
- Continue building partnerships across sectors to support both business and community wellbeing, social and economic development and protect and enhance the natural environment.

Next Steps

The insights from this forum will be used to inform upcoming community recovery and resilience efforts. The Kitchen Cabinet would love your feedback and invites you to get involved or share your ideas by contacting us via email: **HGKitchenCabinet@gmail.com**