Omeo Region Community Resilience

SURVEY ANALYSIS & INSIGHTS

Contents

Overview

In August 2021 the Omeo Region Community Recovery Association launched a survey on their new community website to understand the current state of resilience amongst locals. The Community Resilience survey collected feedback based on the personal experiences of Omeo residents during the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian Bushfires and immediate aftermath.

The key findings of the consultation highlighted the challenges with reliable communications and access to power during critical periods. The community described their disappointment that local knowledge and voice was not incorporated during response or relief efforts. Majority of feedback emphasised the reliance on local knowledge and "word of mouth" communication to convey vital information during initial emergency relief.

Introduction to the survey

This survey comprises 44 survey questions that varied in type.

Of these 44 questions, seven questions were free text responses and produced qualitative data. Qualitative data is data that is not numerical based. It is data that is interpreted and descriptive. For each qualitative question, responses were reviewed and assigned to common categories that had emerged. These categories were defined based on examples of the responses that underpinned them and quantified into percentages.

Qualitative data was also generated for some questions that were multi-choice options. This is due to an option to 'please describe' and expand on selections. For the purposes of this report, only question 25 and question 39 'please describe' responses were analysed. The remaining 'please describe' responses were duplicated in other parts of the survey and did not provide new data for analysis.

All questions for this survey were optional. The option to complete the survey online or by a paper-based version was available.

Overall insights

158 survey contributions → **25.32%** Omeo residents → **77.22%** aged 45+
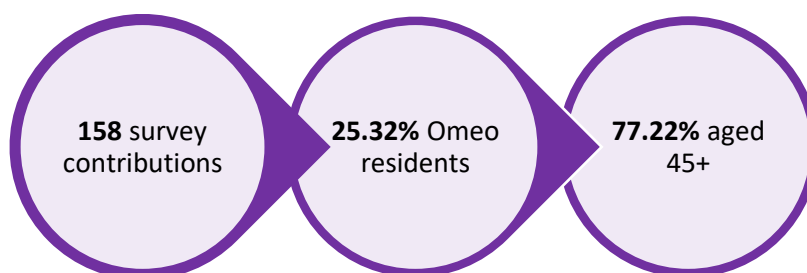
Inaccessible roads due to road closures or blocks was a big stressor to many respondents. Inability to access main roads meant responding to the unfolding emergency, evacuation and accessing essentials during and after the fires was difficult.

- **51.56%** of people said that road closures impacted their ability to accessing facilities or services - Question 18

Community felt considerable frustration and disappointment regarding inadequate power and network infrastructure that led to long lasting outages. This impacted ability to receive timely and accurate information.

- Challenges with **communications (43.75%)** and **power outages (37.50%)** impacted community's ability to accessing facilities or services - Question 18

- **90.07%** of people were relying on accurate information about the fire threat - Question 21

- **72.08%** of people said that direct word-of-mouth was the strongest form of communication. This is likely due to the barriers with digital or phone communication. - Question 24

- **60.81%** of people faced issues with communications during the fires. When opting to describe the reasons for this **69.41%** said this was due to no coverage, **48.26%** said because of no power and **24.71%** said generally they had difficulty in getting information. - Question 25

Local leadership, experience and knowledge in the face of the fires stood out as a point of pride and strength for the community. However, many felt that local voice and community connection was often disregarded and overlooked by responding agencies, which left the community feeling disenfranchised to influence the response and recovery efforts.

- **45.28%** of people felt the community was useful in sharing local information - Question 22

- **41.51%** of people felt the connection to community, local support and comradery was useful - Question 22

- An average of **9.44 out of 10** people agreed that *a stronger voice from the community on recovery plans* was extremely important - Question 38

- Question 42 responses strongly highlight the sense of pride the community has in their inherent connection and local experience.

Lasting emotional impact and trauma two years on from the fires was evident.

- **Emotional impacts (76.82%)** was the largest percentage recorded for impacts following the fires - Question 16
- Impressions from question 32 described the significant negative effect the fires had on community health and wellbeing.

Survey data

Question 1 – How would you describe your involvement in the Omeo region?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Involvement	Percentage
Permanent resident	82.69%
Non-resident property owner	3.85%
Owner/operator of a farming business in the region	18.59%
Hobby farmer	12.82%
Town resident	10.90%
Business owner/operator	12.18%
Government employee working in the region	5.13%
Visitor to the region	2.56%
Other	5.13%
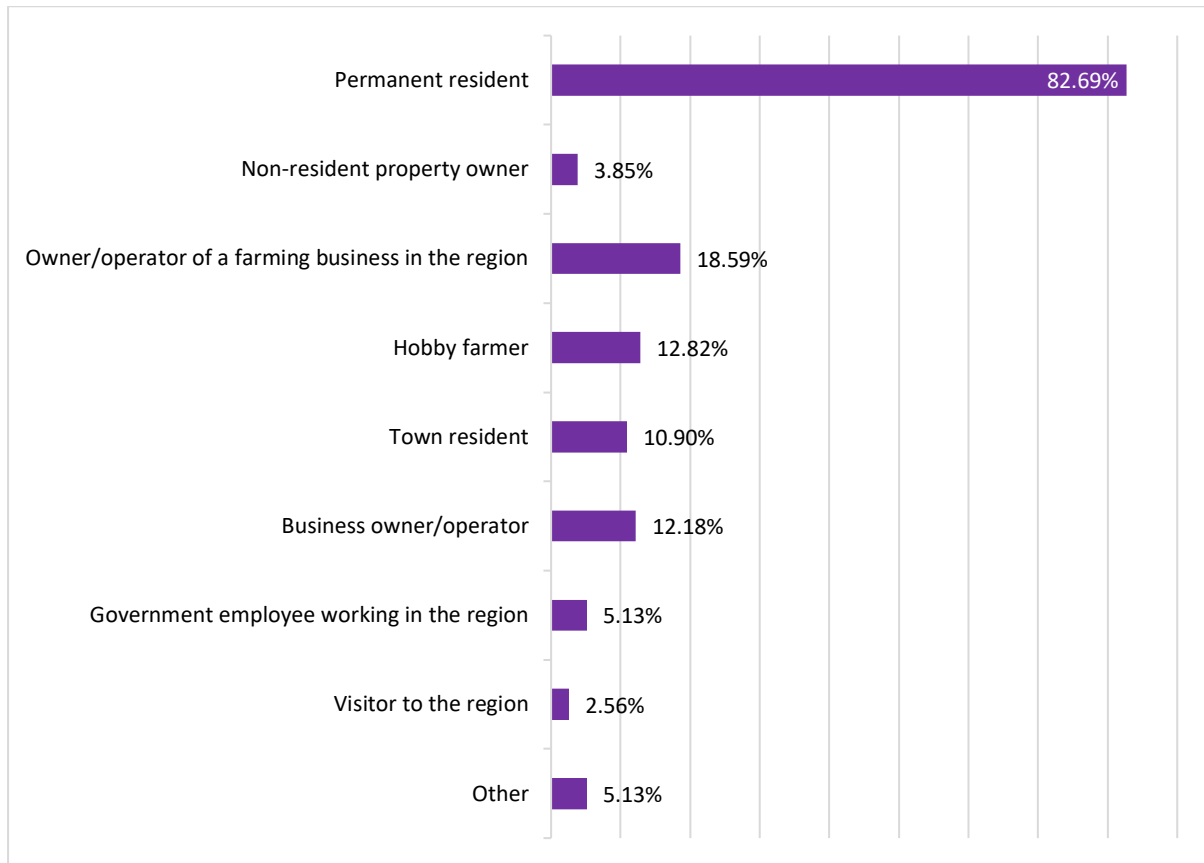
Question 2 – Which locality do you most closely associate with?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 158 (100%)

Locality	Percentage
Omeo	25.32%
Swifts Creek	19.62%
Benambra	18.99%
Ensay	3.80%
Ensay North	0.63%
Tambo Crossing	6.33%
Cassilis	5.06%
Brookville	0.63%
Doctors Flat	0.63%
Hinnomunjie	0.63%
Livingstone Valley	0%
Omeo Valley	0.63%
Reedy Flat	0.63%
Glen Valley	1.27%
Cobungra	3.16%
Shannonvale	0.63%
Bingo Munjie	0.63%
Tongio	2.53%
Anglers Rest	4.43%
Bindi	3.16%
Uplands	0%
Bundara	1.27%
No particular locality	0%
Other	0%
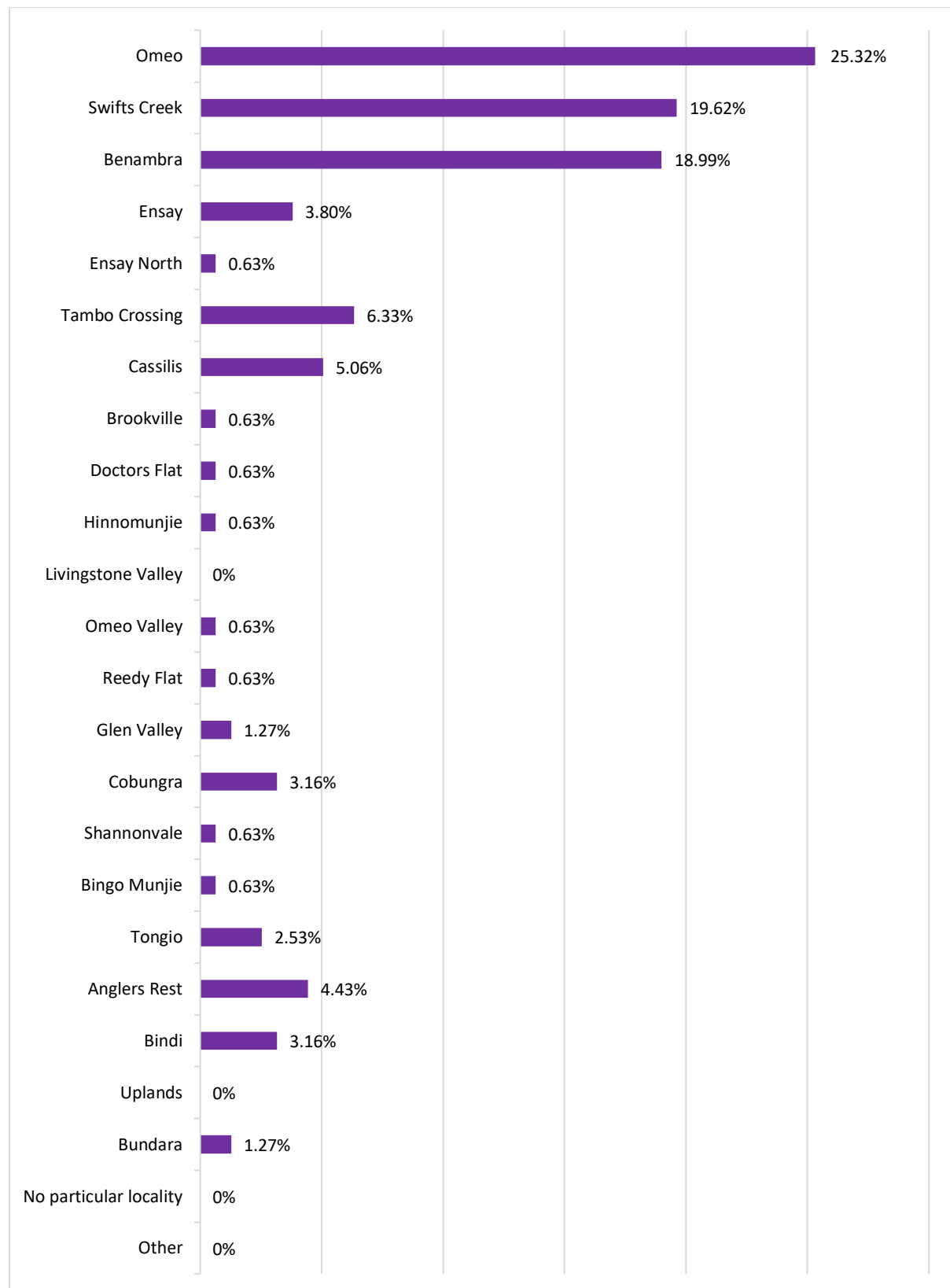
Question 3 – How long have you lived in the Omeo region?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 158 (100%)

Response	Percentage
Less than 1 year	3.16%
1-5 years	17.09%
6-10 years	11.39%
10-20 years	22.15%
More than 20 years	43.67%
N/A - I don't live in the region	2.53%
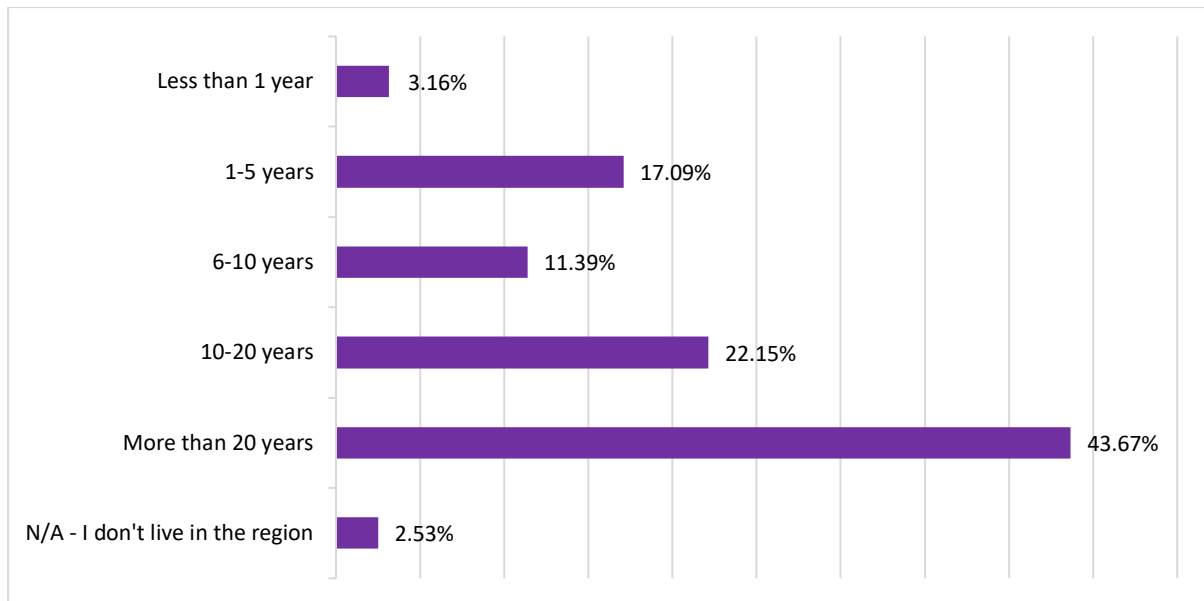
Question 4 – Which age group are you in?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

Age group	Percentage
Under 18	1.27%
18-24	0.63%
25-34	6.33%
35-44	11.39%
45-54	17.72%
55-64	20.89%
65	38.61%
Prefer not to say	3.16%
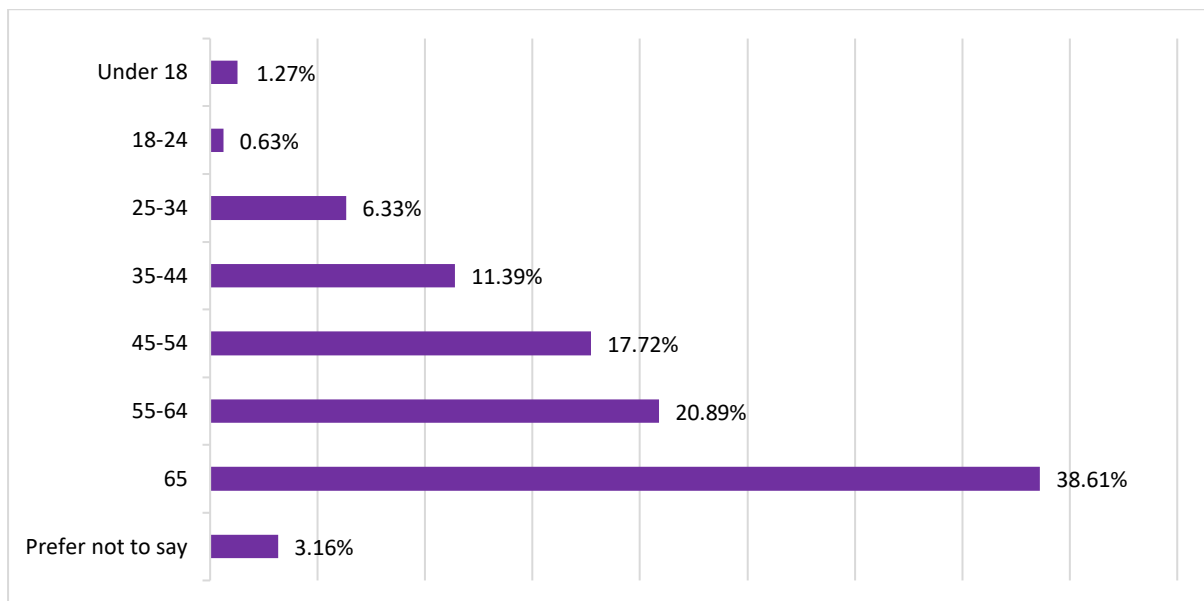
Question 5 – Are you …

Multi Choice | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

- Male
- Female
- Other/Prefer not to say

3.25%
37.01%
59.74%
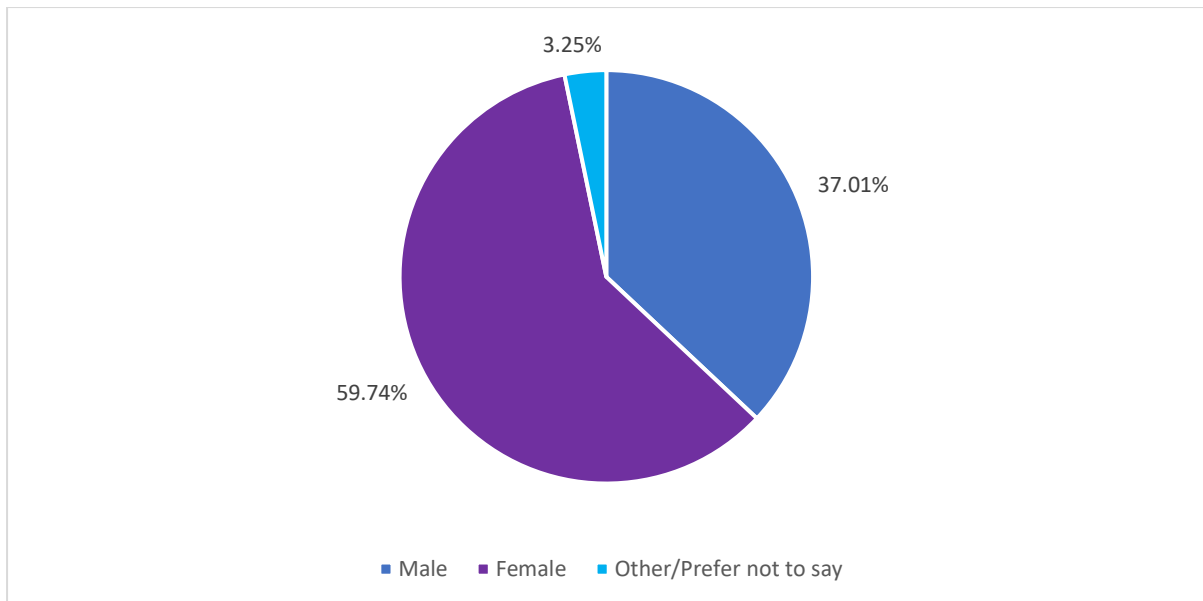
Question 6 – How would you describe your household?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)

Household type	Percentage
Single person	19.11%
Couple, no children	32.48%
Couple with child/ren	33.76%
Single parent with child/ren	5.10%
Extended family	6.37%
Unrelated persons	0.64%
Prefer not to say	2.55%
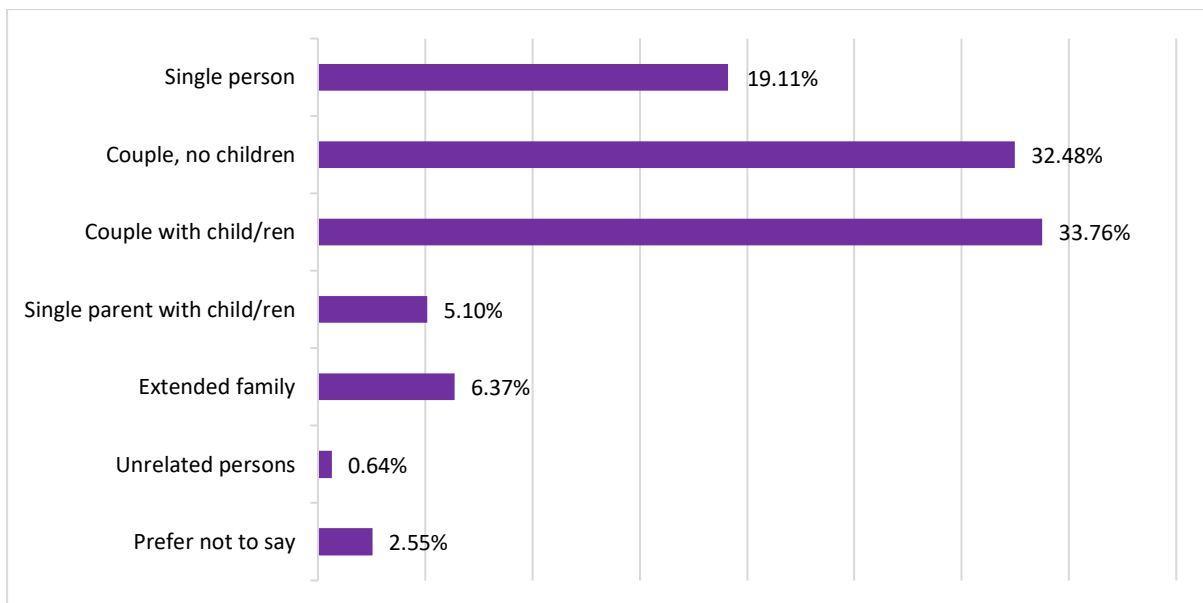
Question 7 – Are you…

Multi Choice | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)

Category	Percentage
Employed full-time	17.83%
Employed part-time/casual	16.56%
Self-employed	24.84%
Unemployed	0.64%
Family duties	5.10%
Retired	32.48%
Student	0.64%
Prefer not to say	1.91%
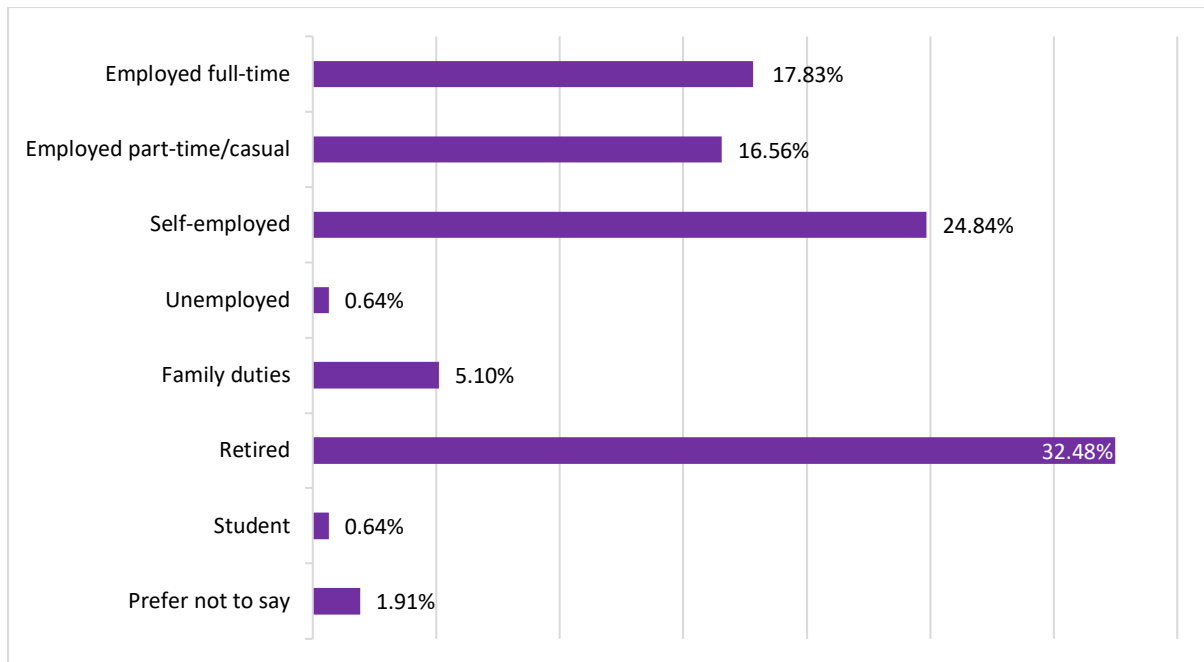
Question 8 - How often do you travel outside the Omeo region (e.g. to Bairnsdale, Alpine Shire or beyond)?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Category	Percentage
Daily or almost daily	3.21%
More than once a week	8.97%
About once a week	41.67%
About once a month	32.69%
Several times per year	7.05%
A few times per year	5.77%
Rarely - once a year or less	0.64%
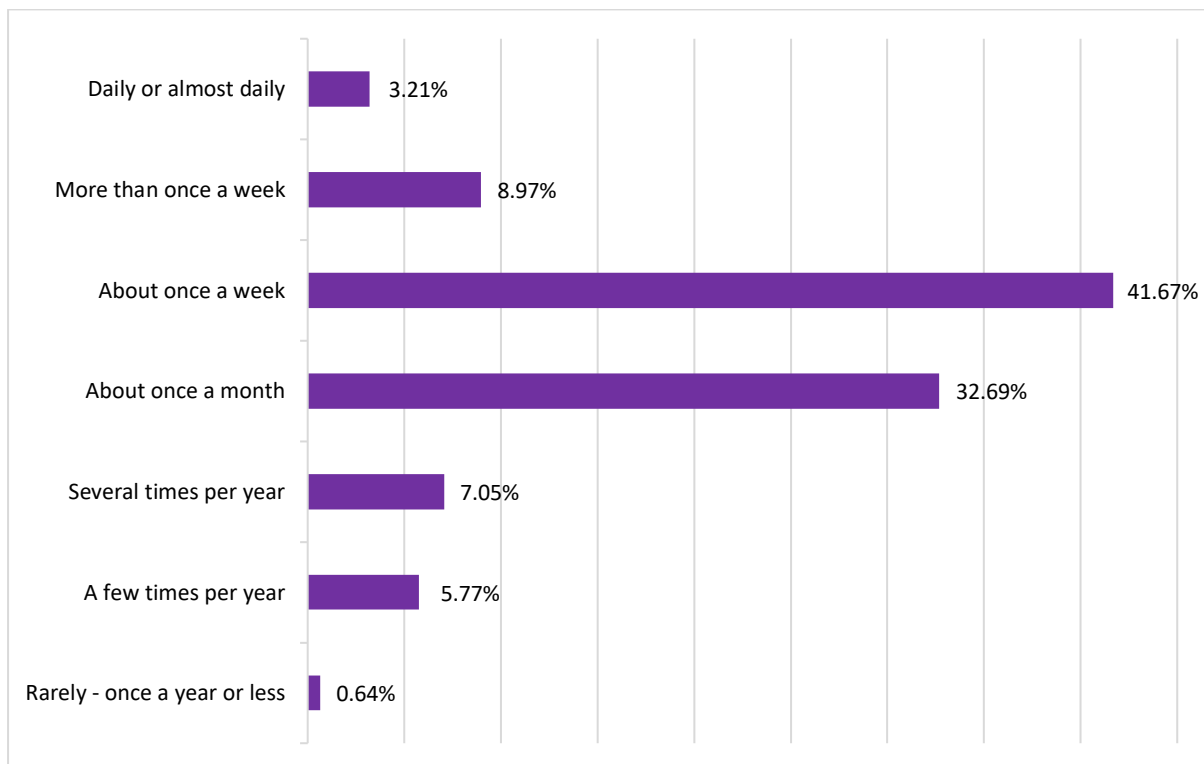
Question 9 - Where do you go for your main household shopping trips?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Pie chart showing:
- Omeo: 18.59%
- Swifts Creek: 8.97%
- Bairnsdale: 60.26%
- Other: 12.18%
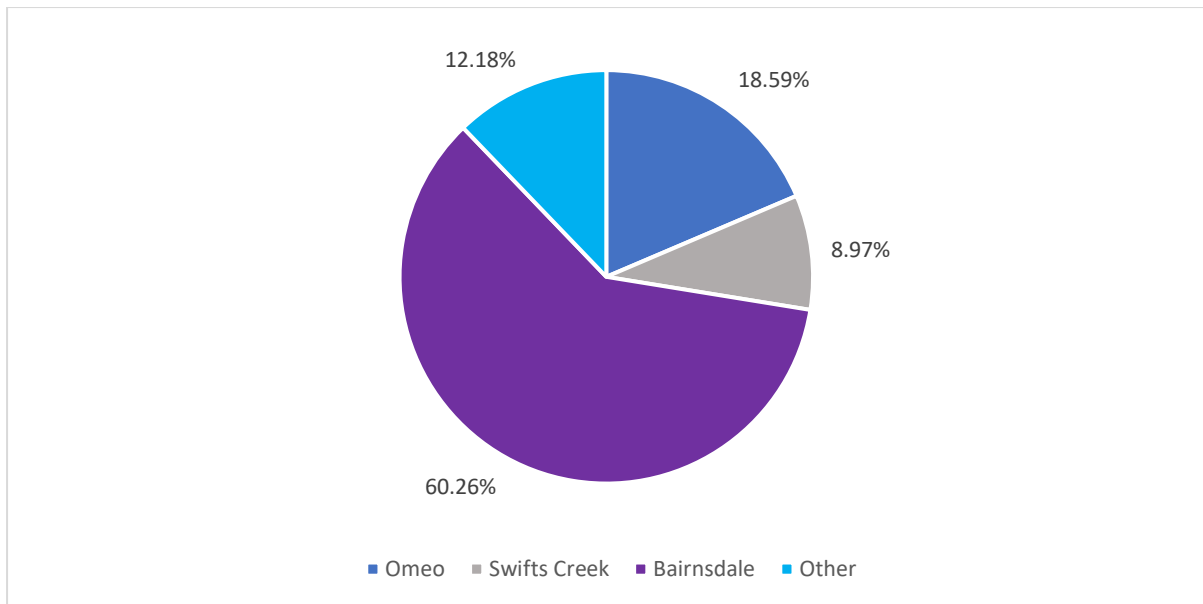
The following questions sought information about experiences of the 2019/20 fires

Question 10 -Thinking about the time just before the 2019/20 fires, how prepared were you for the event?

Matrix | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

Thinking about the time just before the 2019/20 fires, how prepared were you for the event? — 7.83 (scale 0 to 10)
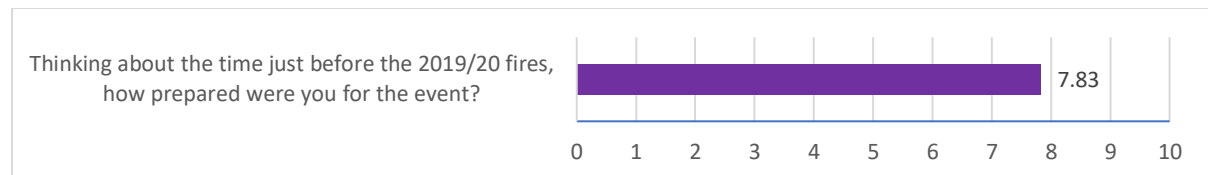
Question 11 - How prepared do you think the general community was for the event?

Matrix | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

How prepared do you think the general community was for the event? — 7.19 (scale 0 to 10)
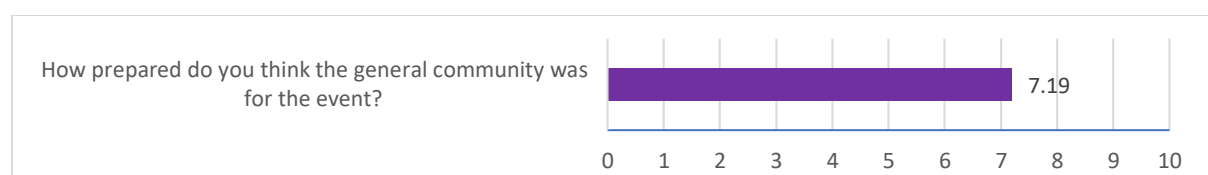
Question 12 - How prepared do you think the government agencies and emergency services were for the event?

Matrix | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

How prepared do you think the government agencies and emergency services were for the event? — 5.86 (scale 0 to 10)
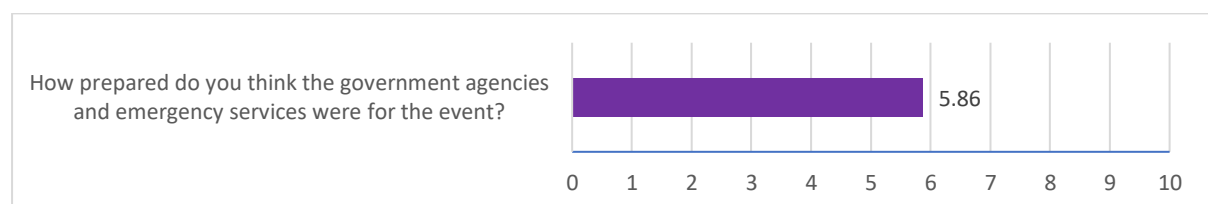
Question 13 - How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on you personally?

Matrix | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)

How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on you personally? — 7.49 (scale 0 to 10)
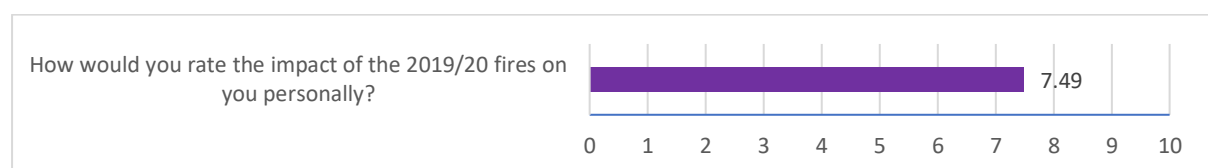
Question 14 - How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on your local community?

Matrix | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)

How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on your local community?	8.54

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
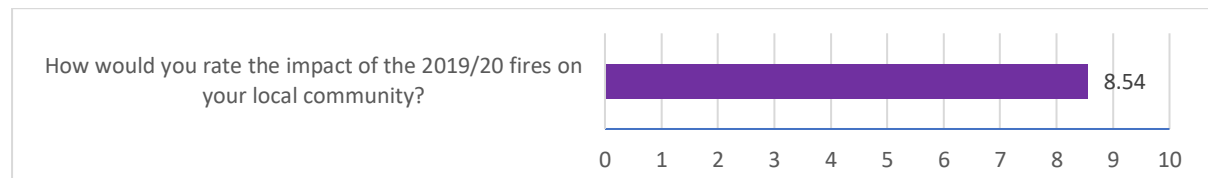
Question 15- How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on the whole Omeo region community?

Matrix | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)

How would you rate the impact of the 2019/20 fires on the whole Omeo region community?	8.8

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
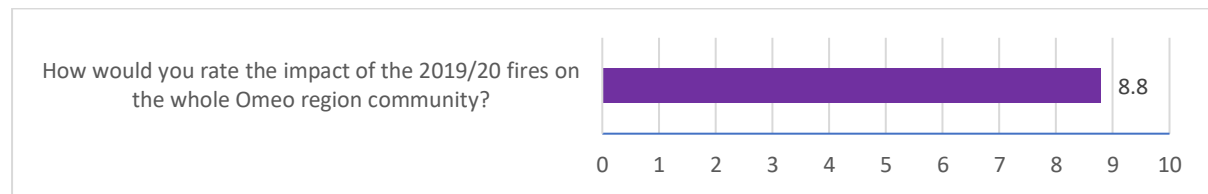
Question 16 - Which of the following impacts did you experience during the 2019/20 fires?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 7 | Answered: 151 (95.6%)

Impact	Percentage
Physical health impacts	44.37%
Emotional impacts	76.82%
Loss or damage to property	23.18%
Loss of stock	3.97%
Loss of work	16.56%
Loss of access to facilities - shops, school, medical, etc.	54.30%
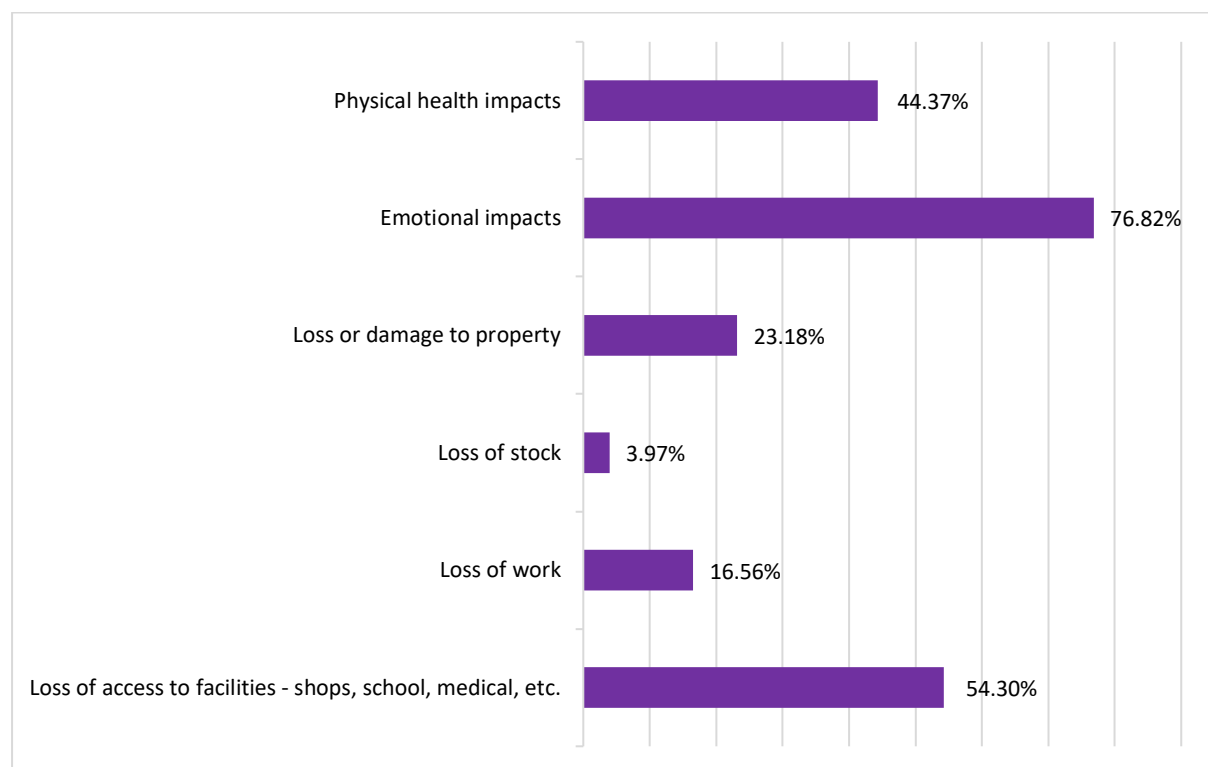
Question 17 - During the fires, were you able to access the things you needed - facilities, services, equipment, advice?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Pie chart:
- 48.08% (Yes)
- 40.38% (No)
- 11.54% (Don't know/ Not applicable)

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know/ Not applicable
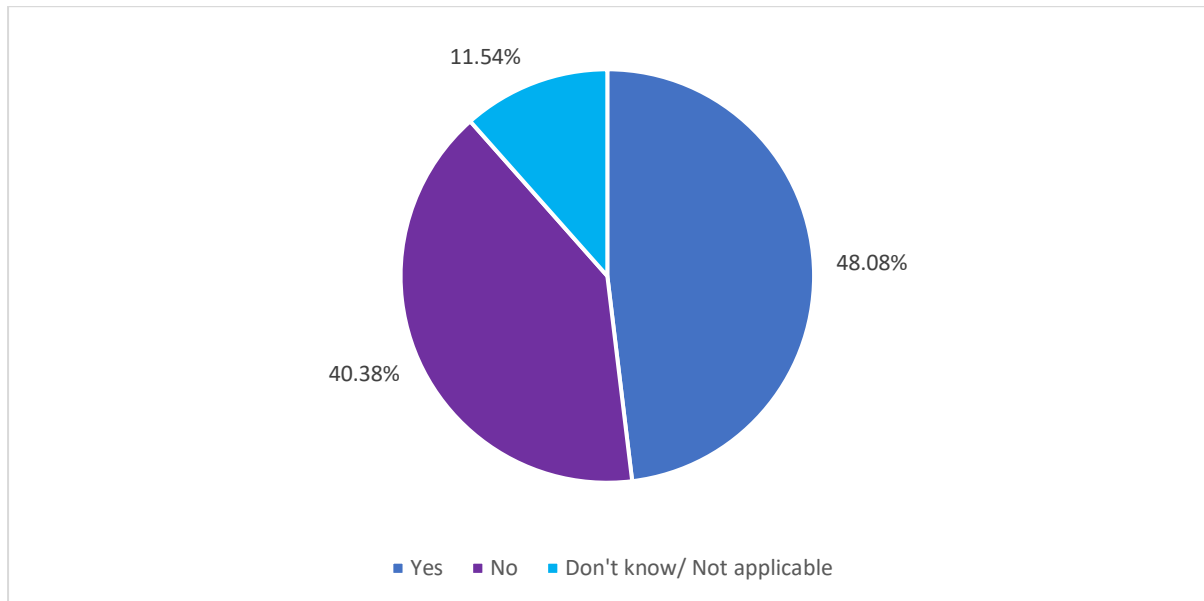
Question 18 - If you answered "no" to Q17, what facilities or services did you have trouble accessing and why/what happened?

Short Text | Skipped: 94 | Answered: 64 (40.51%)

Road closures was a very strong response and spanned many areas of concern such as accessing basic essentials like food, shops, essential services and more. There was a strong sense of being isolated and cut off because of road closures and enduring **power outages** that impacted timely access to **communciations.**

Category	Examples referenced
Road closures	Safe access and egress; Getting to shops and accessing food; Trouble moving around the area meant could not access day to day necessities
Communications	No Internet; Trouble accessing current and up to date information; No phone lines and couldn't charge phones due to power outage; No radio; Evacuation meant disconnected from local community; Current live streaming of community meetings when unable to return home
Power outages	No electricity; No generators; Accessing fuel; Food being spoiled due to power out for many days; Couldn't charge phones and access latest information
Pets/livestock health	Veterinary services; Accessing stock fodder
Fire-fighting support	Water bombing aircraft; Access to water
Health and wellbeing services	Showers; No community hub or refuge area available; Temporary care facilities for the elderly / vulnerable people; Mental health support services; Health and specialist health services

Other	Chose not to answer, description was too vague or was an isolated response that did not fit common categories identified.

Road closures — 51.56%
Communications — 43.75%
Power outages — 37.50%
Pets/livestock health — 4.69%
Fire-fighting support — 14.06%
Health and wellbeing services — 21.88%
Other — 6.25%
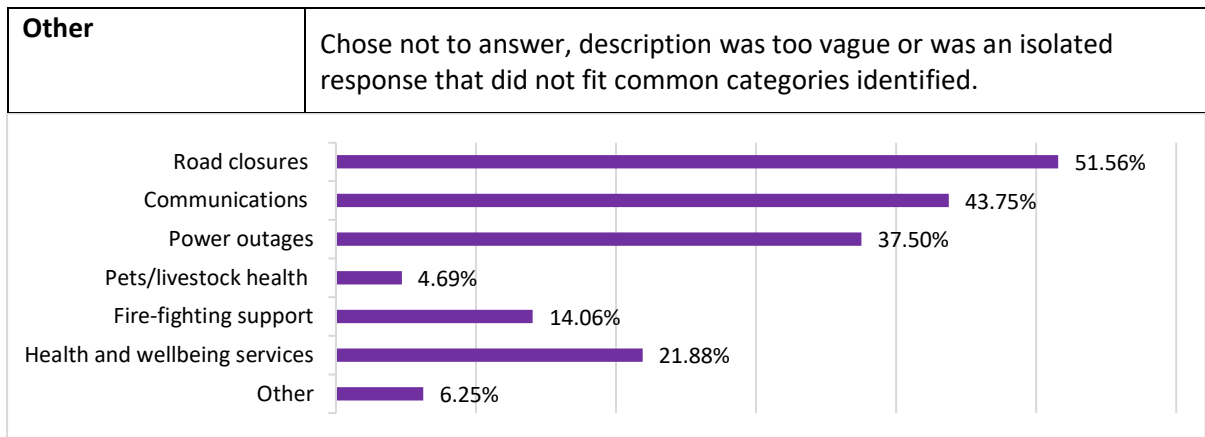
Featured comments

"We were cut off on all roads around us for weeks so no access to shopping of any kind."

(Road closures)

"Most services went down during the fires, power, phones, mobiles and land lines, radio."

(Power outages, Communications)

"Unable to return home for extended period. Loss of access to local community."

(Communications)

"Fire burnt the power poles so we had no power for nearly four weeks. No phone or internet as the power was out. No access to fuel to run generators due to the road being closed both directions. Medical, food, stock fodder were unable to get through."

(Power outages, Communications, Road closures, Health and wellbeing services, Pets/livestock health)

Question 19 - During the fires, did you have to make a choice to stay at home or leave?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

- I chose to stay at home for the duration of the fires
- I chose to leave home for the duration of the fires
- I left home and returned more than once
- No, I wasn't faced with a choice
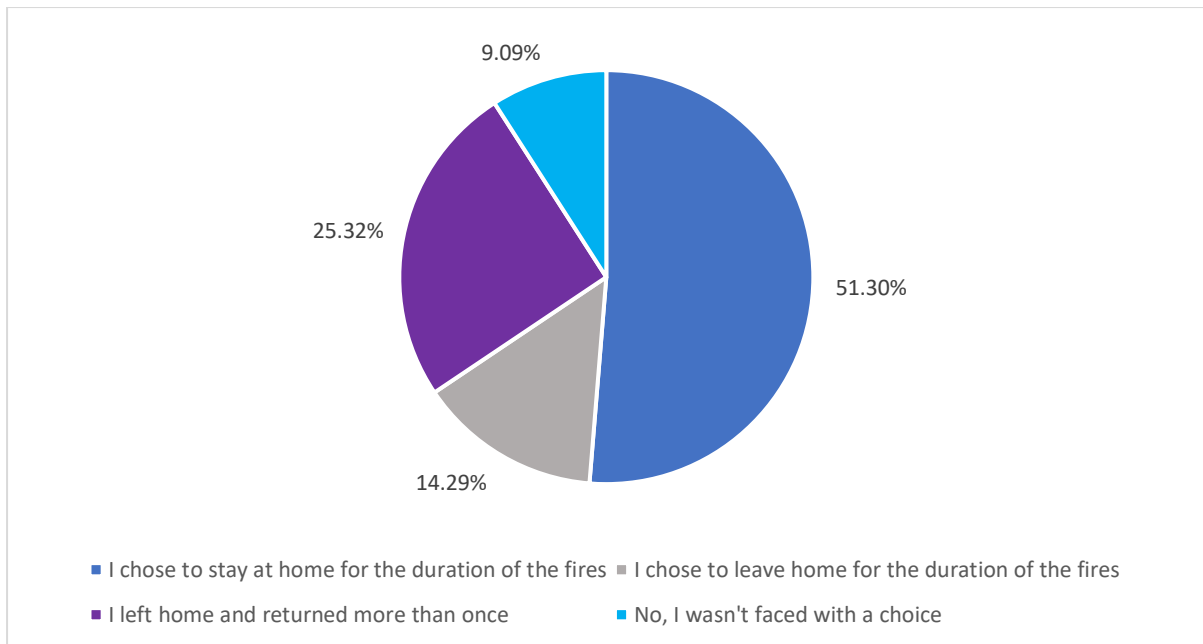
Question 20 - If you left home, where did you go?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 53 | Answered: 105 (66.5%)
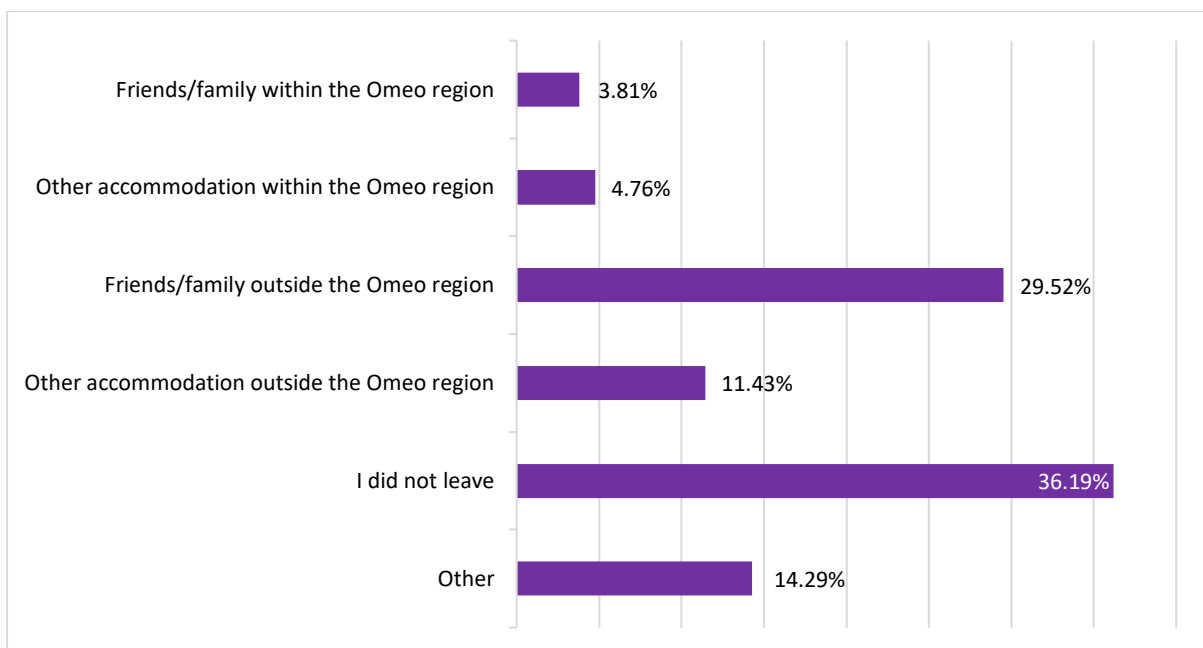
Question 21 - During the fires, what supports or assistance did you rely on in the community

Multi Choice | Skipped: 7 | Answered: 151 (95.6%)

Support/Assistance	Percentage
Information about the fire threat	90.07%
Assistance with evacuation	4.64%
Assistance with protection of my property	27.81%
Loan of equipment or materials	7.95%
Emergency accommodation	2.65%
Food or other supplies	20.53%
Other	7.28%
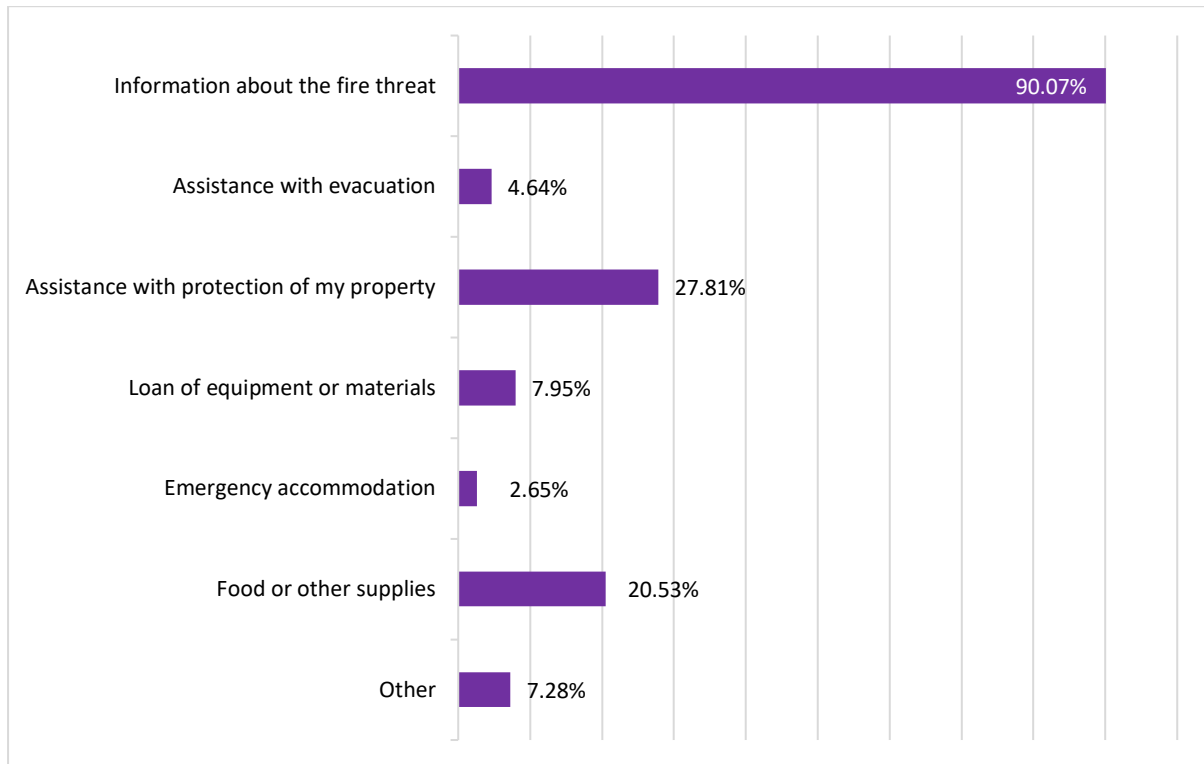
Question 22 - What was done by your community that was useful to you?

Long Text | Skipped: 52 | Answered: 106 (67.09%)

There was a strong sense of the community banding together, supporting each other in response and sharing helpful information. This can be observed in **local information sharing** and **community connection** emerging as the top categories.

Category	Examples referenced
Local information sharing	Common local points for information like Omeo Recreation Reserve, local shop and pub, Swifts Creek IGA, local gallery, Swifts Creek Hall; Community shared information about road closures, fire observations and sense of shared danger; Sharing information on social media; Regular meetings at the reserve; Two-way radios; Town meetings
Community connection	Neighbours and community working together; Caring for each other; Sharing food, laughter, conversations; Neighbours looking out for other people's property
Collaborative response to fire	Local CFA, DELWP, farmers and community members creating fuel breaks around properties and key assets; Land officer visited houses and gave advice on ember attack; Machinery loans to clear vegetation
Local CFA presence	Response and help; Teamwork; Information and briefings; Delivering fuel to base camps; Providing meals
Emergency packs	Fresh bottled water; Food hampers; Toiletries; Supply of hot meals
Establishment of community refuge points	Specifically, the **Omeo Recreation Reserve**, **Swifts Creek Hall** and the services provided by **Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre** • *Swifts Creek Bush Nursing centre* (supported older vulnerable family members; Centrelink on site; Visiting chiropractor) • *Omeo Recreation Reserve* (use of facilities and access to necessities like food, accommodation etc)
Other	Chose not to answer, description was too vague or was an isolated response that did not fit common categories identified.

Local information sharing — 45.28%
Community connection — 41.51%
Collaborative response to fire — 12.26%
Local CFA presence — 14.15%
Emergency packs — 8.49%
Establishment of community refuge points — 11.32%
Other — 11.32%
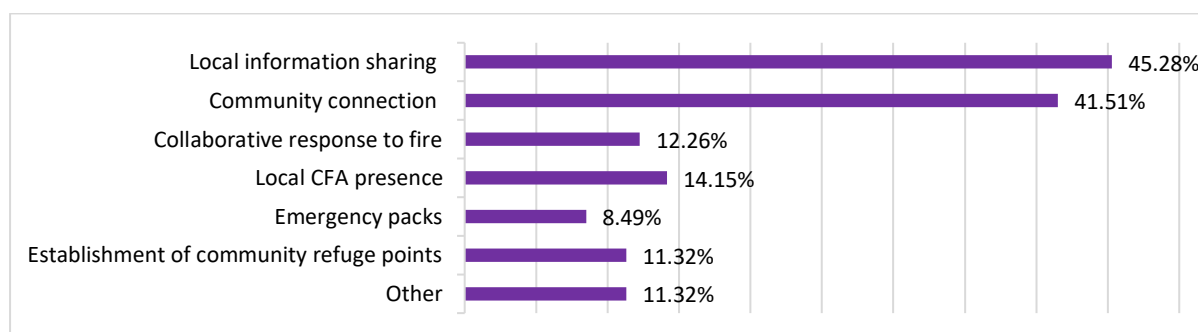
"The local CFA were always ready to help. Local blokes cut fire breaks around our assets. Friends, family and community, working together."

(Local CFA presence, Community connection)

"Sharing of information about road closures, current fire observations, sense of shared danger."

(Local information sharing)

"Fire breaks were pushed around our property which, I believe, was organised by either DELWP or CFA. We received regular visits from CFA ensuring we had water protection and pumps in place. We received additional water for our tanks from the Army. We attended meetings in Swifts Creek with community updates."

(Collaborative response to fire, Local CFA presence, Local information sharing)

"We were all prepared to fight the fire as a community. We relied on each other for everything from water, fuel, food, support. Took it in turns to watch for fire."

(Collaborative response to fire, Community connection)

"Providing facilities at the Omeo Rec Reserve where you could camp, have toilets, drinks etc."

(Establishment of community refuge points)

Question 23 - During the fires, did you receive communications from emergency services?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 8 | Answered: 150 (94.9%)

19.33%

80.67%

■ Yes ■ No
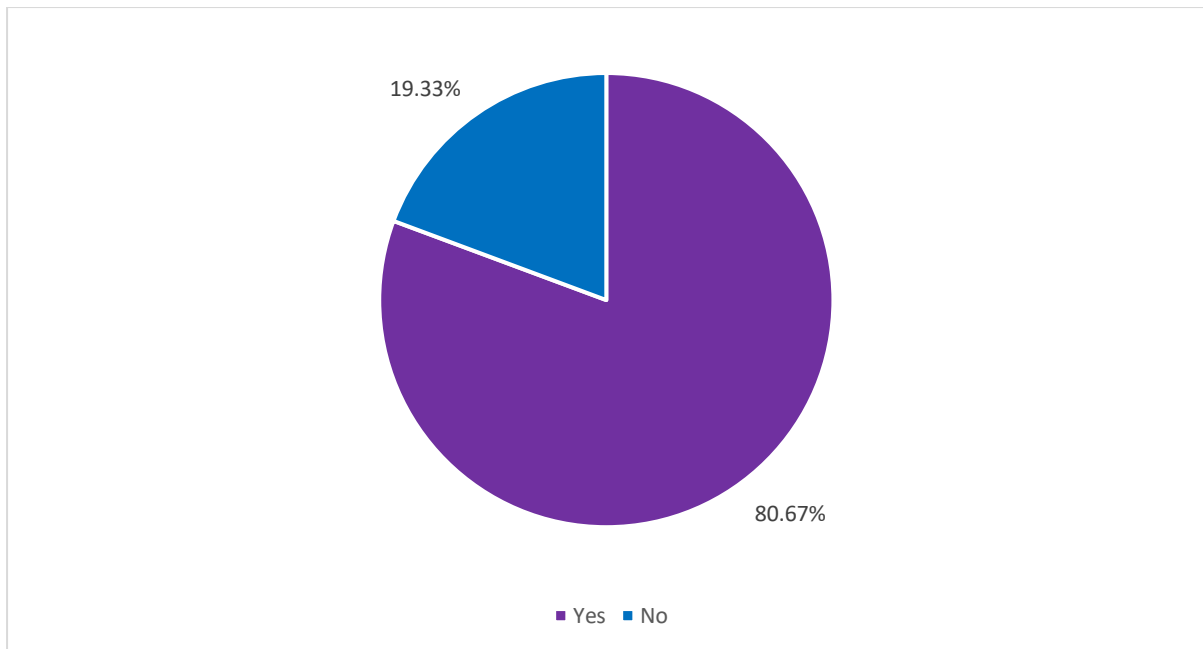
Question 24 - During the fires, what communications channels did you use to gain or share information about the fires?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

Channel	Percentage
TV/radio	54.55%
Vic Emergency App	66.88%
Internet	40.26%
Social media	33.12%
E-mail	7.14%
Telephone	35.06%
Direct word-of-mouth	72.08%
Other	13.64%
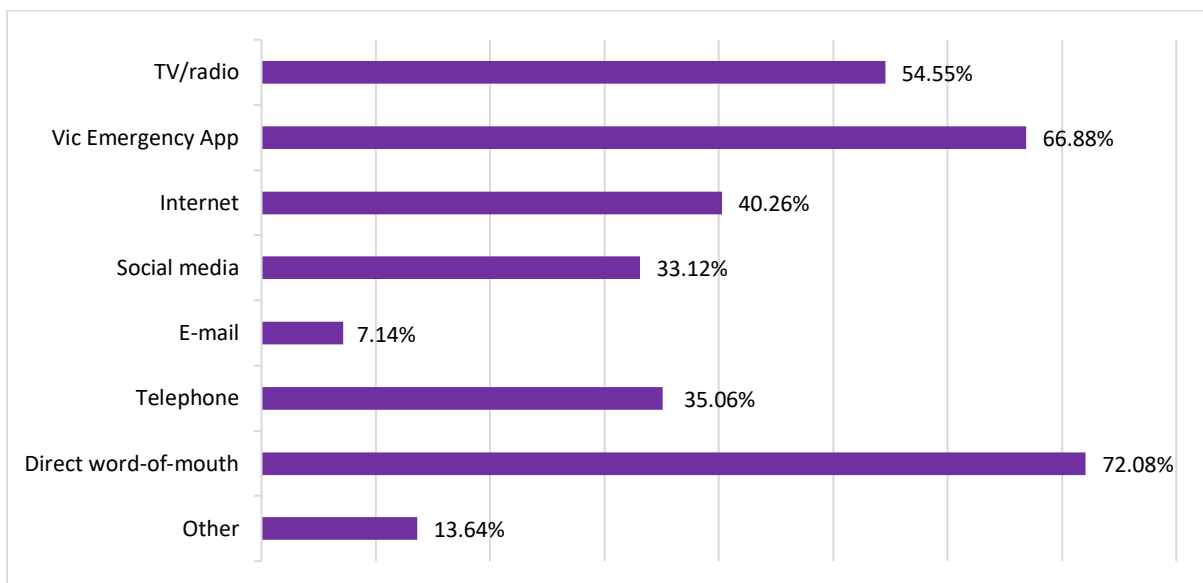
Question 25 - Did you have any problems/issues with communications during the fires?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 10 | Answered: 148 (93.7%)
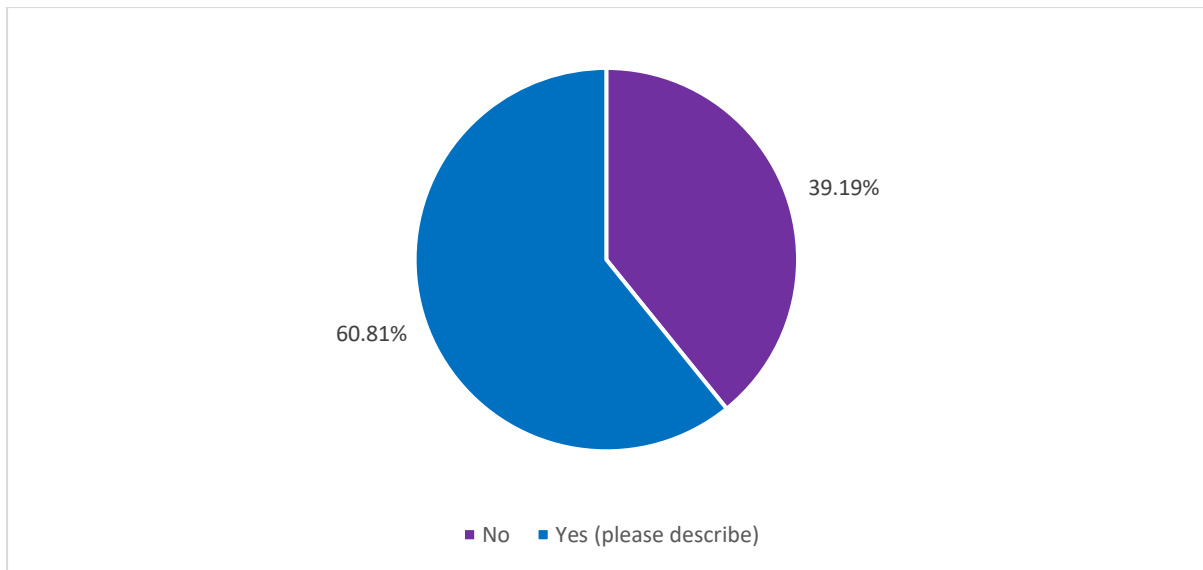
Question 25 *Yes (please describe)* text response categorisation

85 people expanded on their yes response. The following categories emerged for the problems they encountered with communications. Some responses spanned multiple reasons and so multiple categories could be assigned per contribution.

- **No coverage (69.41%)**
  By far the strongest category throughout this question was lack of communication because of no mobile coverage during and after the fires. *Telstra was heavily referenced as failing to provide services for emergency communication.*
- **No power (48.26%)**
  Further reinforcing the challenges of mobile coverage was power infrastructure failing. Without power, residents were unable to use preventative bushfire equipment to protect their property and access other means to communicate readily.
- **Difficulty getting information (24.71%)**
  Many participants mentioned issues with out-dated information provided by government and agency bodies that limited residents' alertness to the fire and subsequently their evacuation options. Reference was also made to the disconnect between government bodies which resulted in different sources of information that was messy and hard to follow. Many residents experienced no communication or inaccurate information from relevant emergency services which made understanding the situation and risk very difficult, relying instead on "word of mouth" updates.

Question 26 - During the fires, did you experience any problems with evacuation of pets or livestock?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 10 | Answered: 148 (93.7%)

12.84%

87.16%

■ No ■ Yes (please describe)
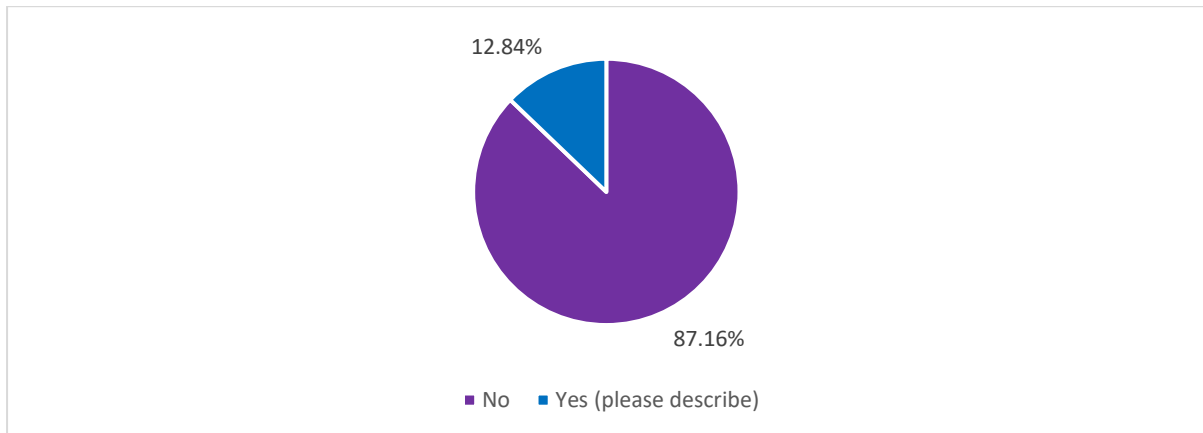
Question 27 - During the fires, did you assist in a volunteer role?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 4 | Answered: 154 (97.5%)

44.81%

55.19%

■ No ■ Yes (please describe)
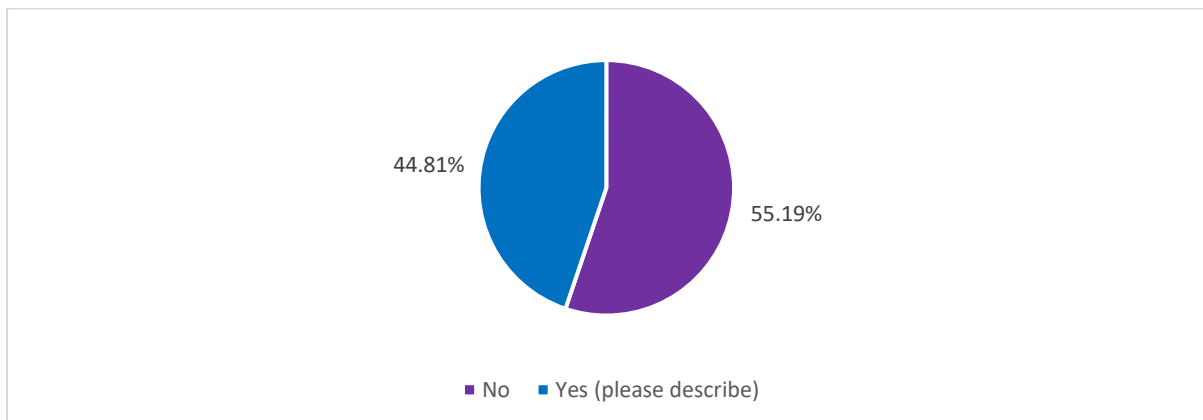
Question 28 - Did you use a recovery/relief centre, or emergency assembly point?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 5 | Answered: 153 (96.8%)

24.18%

75.82%

■ No ■ Yes (please describe)
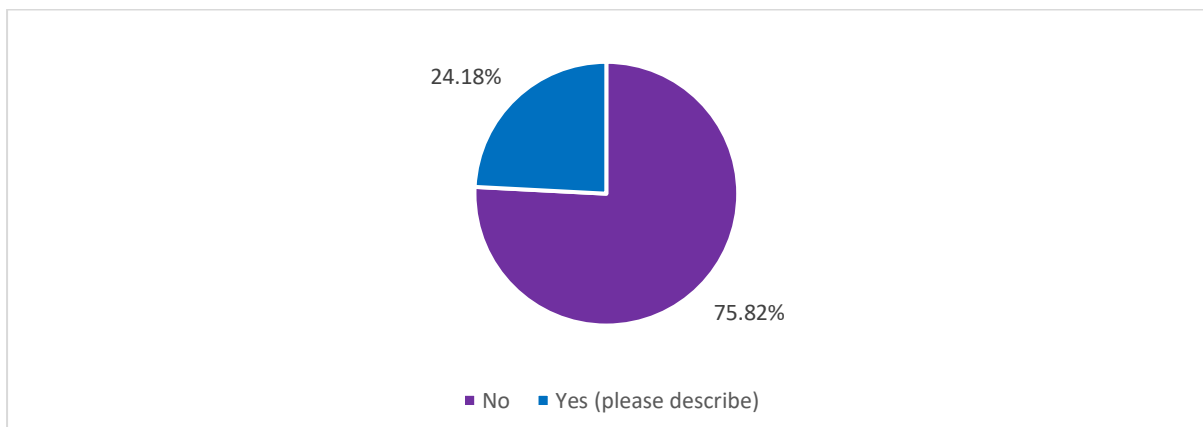
Question 29 - If you answered "yes" to Q28, how would you rate your satisfaction in obtaining the assistance you needed?

Matrix | Skipped: 110 | Answered: 48 (30.4%)
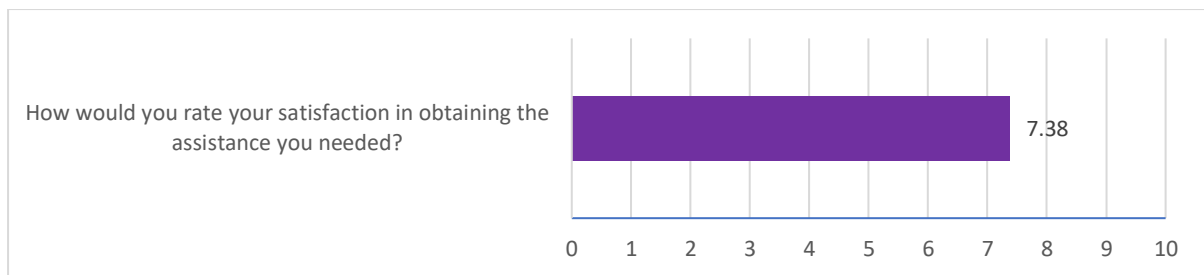
Question 30 - If you answered Q29, what is the reason for your answer?

Short Text | Skipped: 118 | Answered: 40 (25.3%)

The broad nature of this question and the survey logic that follows the previous question made it difficult to quantify responses into common categories. Instead, **impressions** of responses have been outlined.

These impressions **are categorised to follow the structure of the question** to make it easier to interpret.

Those who used a relief/recovery centre said:
- Used the centre when they evacuated, to care for children and pets and store valuables
- Didn't have time to access a relief centre
- To access free resources e.g. food/supplies

Positive comments about relief/recovery centres said:
- Satisfied
- Full assistance and updates. Food and drink provided and dog could be kept with people at all times
- The assembly location was staffed with assistance to fill firefighting water tanks
- It gave peace of mind.

When talking generally about staffing at the relief/ recovery centres, people said:
- Staff were helpful, compassionate, understanding and generally cared.
- DELWP (from Swifts Creek) provided good updates and support. This was because some of the team had experience with the community during the 2003 fires
- Vic Police and Red Cross were stood down leaving council workers to operate and staff the Relief Centre
- Community felt abandoned by Council after they pulled out of running the evacuation centre and the responsibility was largely put on locals and volunteers.

When considering access to communication at the relief/recovery centres, responses were equal part negative and positive:

- Some community described receiving reliable information and that local support and information felt safe.
- Whilst others described difficulty in receiving accurate information.

Overall, there were many comments that shared a sentiment of inadequacy and poor coordination of the relief/recovery centres. With responses stating:
- Difficultly getting supplies to centre like generators due to road closures
- Centre was going to close as staff were defending their own premises

- Omeo relief/emergency centre ill equipped
- There was no relief/emergency centre in Swifts Creek
- Was not a full evacuation centre with meals provided etc. Added to stress for those who were not self-sufficient
- No fire trucks to protect the building
- No back up power
- Whole system needs streamlining, more local input and discussion, more frequently

Question 31 - Did you experience any difficulties with communications to or from government agencies and emergency services during the fires?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 14 | Answered: 144 (91.1%)

41.67%

58.33%

■ No ■ Yes (please describe)
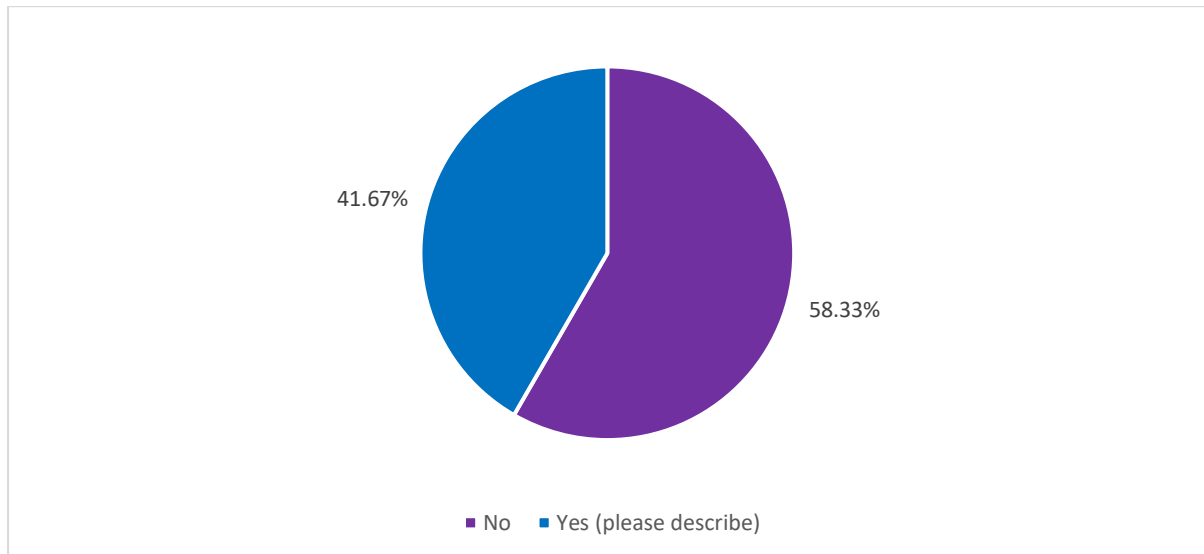
Question 32 - Please feel free to add any other comments about your experience during the fires.

Short Text | Skipped: 93 | Answered: 65 (41.1%)

The broad structure of this question meant sporadic responses that spanned many areas regarding experiences during the fires were recieved. This made it challenging to analyse responses and quantify into common categories or apply a typical data analysis methodology.

Responses were laregly of a **negative sentiment.** However, some responses carried a **positive sentiment.** After review of all responses, the **impressions** of the common themes and their **sentiment** are listed below.

1. A mixture of respondents felt their community was both prepared and not prepared during the fires.

   Negative sentiment

   • The community was *not prepared* because of inadequate fuel reduction, not learning from past experiences and unreliable fire-fighting resources.

   Positive sentiment

   • Feelings of *preparedness* because of support with fuel breaks on private properties, past experiences enhancing preparedness, confidence in community spirit and individual preparation.

2. Negative effect on community health and wellbeing.

   Negative sentiment

   • Young children exposed to trauma

   • The impact of ongoing stress for residents faced directly with the bushfire and for residents away from the area and helpless to the crisis.

- Multiple responses referenced the continued exposure to smoke inhalation and poor air quality, the lack of communication surrounding long term impacts and the under supply of adequate protective masks.

3. Challenges and barriers to receiving timely and accurate communication.

   Negative sentiment

   - Access to information about road closures, miscommunication or poor communication between agencies, barriers to communication due to power outages and network coverage were among the most common responses.

   Positive sentiment

   - Local communication was reliable, and agencies did a good job of keeping the community informed.

4. Inaccessible roads and road closures impacted ability to leave or access essentials.

   Negative sentiment

   - Inaccessible roads impacted accessing information, essential resources and responding to the fire threat.

   Positive sentiment

   - The arranged convoy meant people that would otherwise be trapped by closed roads could get out

5. Agencies were often under-resourced, inefficiently coordinated and had a disregard for local voice.

   Negative sentiment

   - Lack of emotional intelligence from some agencies on the ground.
   - Timeliness of response
   - Many duplication and miscommunication between agencies
   - Offices not staffed beyond standard business hours

   Positive sentiment

   - A strong regard for CFA's response and community presence

6. It was not clear what local evacuation and last resort options were available to community members.

   Negative sentiment

   - Plans needed to be in place for vulnerable and elderly people
   - People stayed who should have evacuated
   - The school was not utilised for a relief centre as previously planned
   - There was no local refuge in Swifts Creek

   Positive sentiment

   - Financial support for emergency accommodation and travel costs was useful

These questions seek your experience and views about the period immediately after the fires.

Question 33 - How aware were you of opportunities for support in recovering from the fires? (Where 0 is "not at all aware" and 10 is "completely aware").

Matrix | Skipped: 7 | Answered: 151 (95.6%)
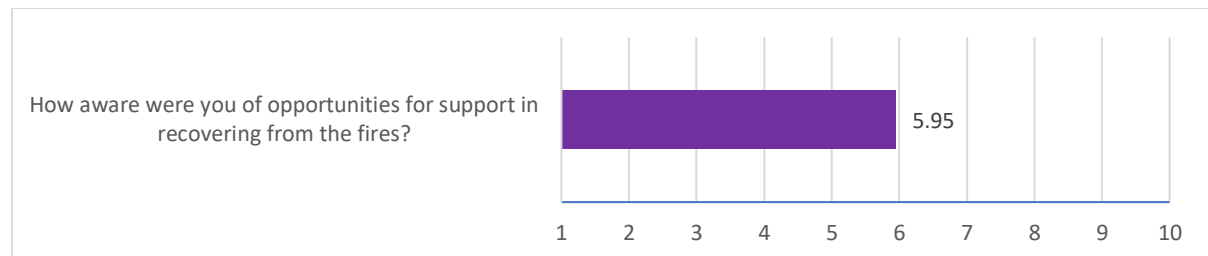
Question 34 - Did you seek any financial assistance or grants?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 157 (99.4%)
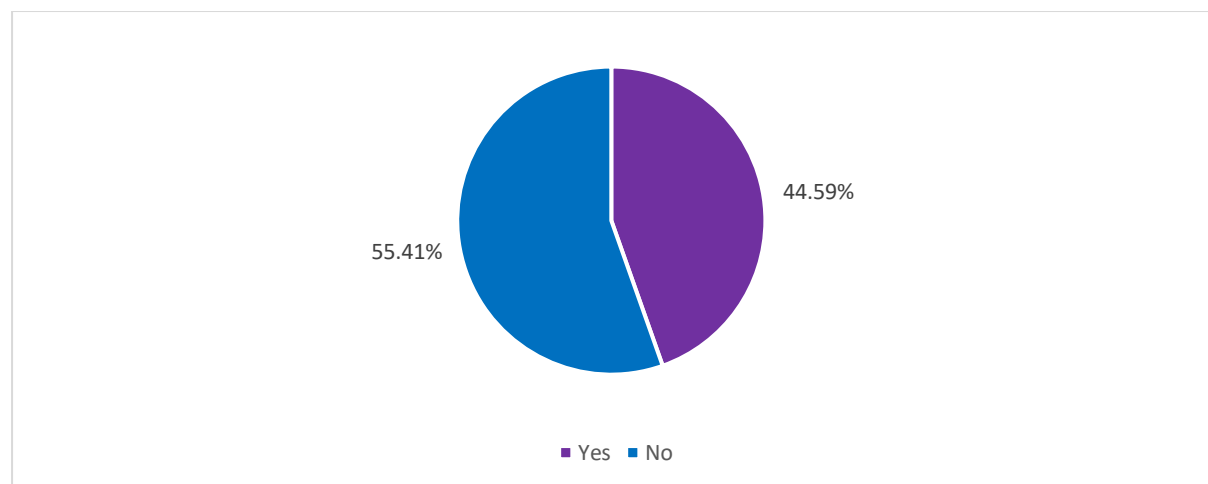
Question 35 - If you answered "yes" to Q34, were you successful in obtaining financial assistance or grants?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 80 | Answered: 78 (49.4%)
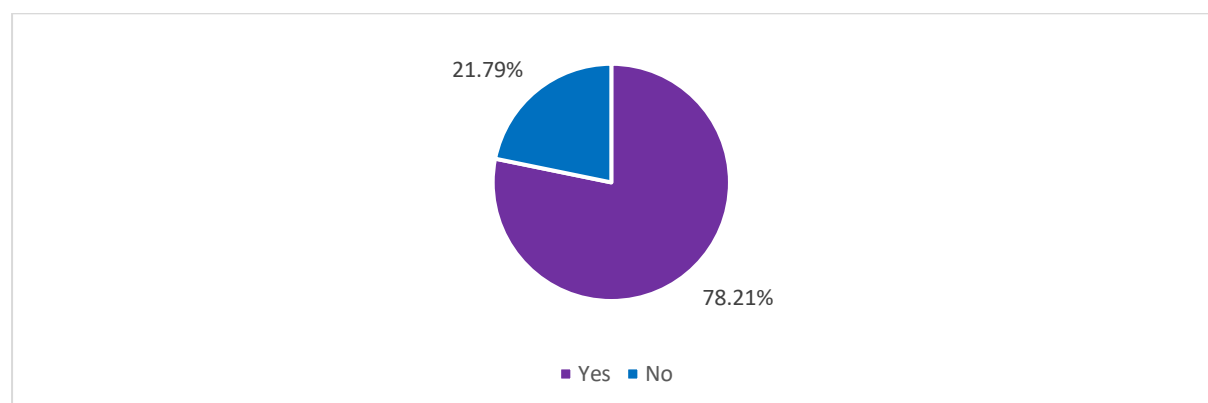
Question 36 - If you sought financial assistance or grants, did you experience any difficulties?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 78 | Answered: 80 (50.6%)

No — 75.00%
Yes (please describe) — 25.00%
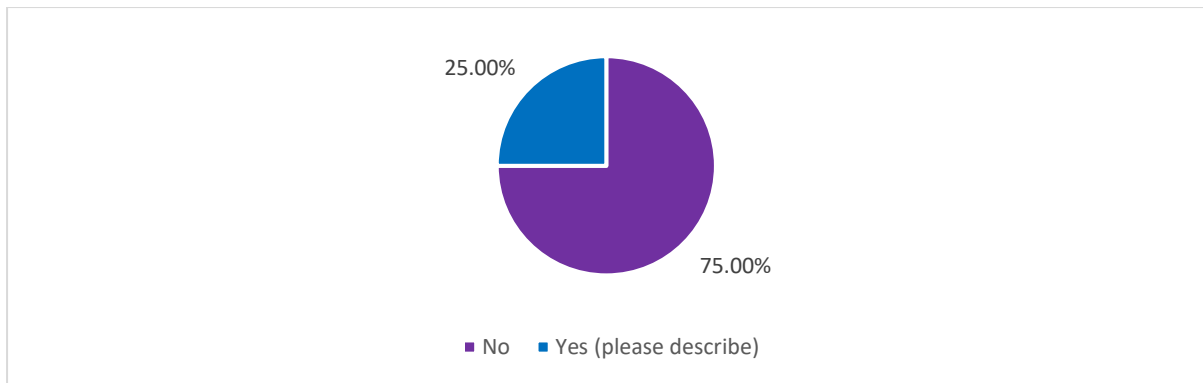
Question 37 - Did you seek any other form of assistance after the fires? (e.g. counselling, peer support, use of community facilities).

Multi Choice | Skipped: 7 | Answered: 151 (95.6%)

No — 81.46%
Yes (please describe) — 18.54%
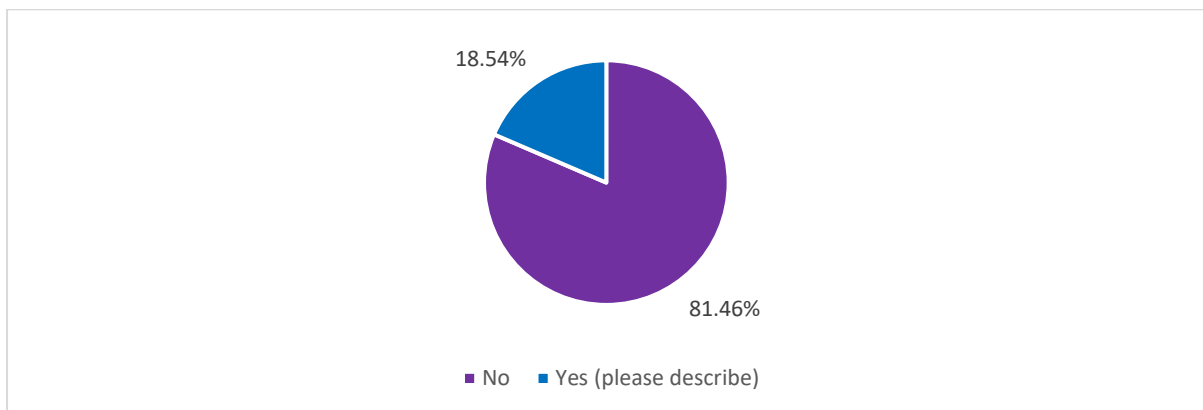
These questions ask for your views about bushfire recovery and the community's needs.

Question 38 - How do you rate the importance of the following in the Omeo region community's recovery from the fires? (where 0 is "not important" and 10 is "extremely important").

Matrix | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Question 39 - Is there anything specifically you can think of that needs to be done in your local community to support bushfire preparation, recovery and/or resilience?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 18 | Answered: 140 (88.6%)
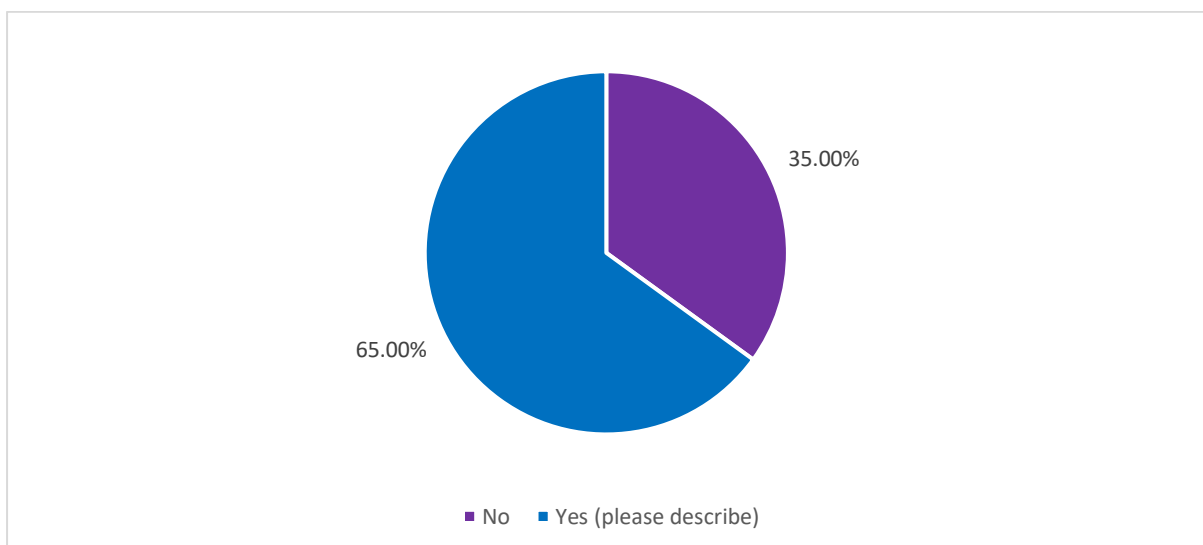
Question 39 *Yes (please describe)* text response categorisation

84 people chose to provide a text response to describe their 'yes' response. Nine core categories emerged. Of these categories, the strongest were responses surround **fuel management & reduction**, **improved infrastructure**, **government planning & response** and **emergency response planning**.

To contextualise these categories, examples of the types of responses attached are included in the table below.

Category	Examples referenced
Fuel management & reduction	More strategic and better fuel reduction on public land; property preparation on private land; enable joint fuel management initiatives between government and community; enable collection of road-side fallen timber
Improved infrastructure	Address power and coverage outages; use generators to fill gaps in power outages; improved community refuge facilities (eg Swifts Creek and Benambra); upgrade power sources through solar and wind
Government planning & response	Better understanding and connection to community needs; preventative planning and resourcing for fire emergencies; timely action and remove red tape; support for vulnerable people in fire emergencies
Emergency response planning	Emergency Plans; improved access to water for firefighting; local fire suppression equipment; local backup power and communications; generators; satellite phones for CFA;
Communications	Optimising access and communications with the latest technology; being kept informed; more communication from DEWLP with properties abutting their land; communication channels put in place early; a place to access info that is up to date
Community-led	Capitalise on local community knowledge in pre-planning, response and recovery; listen to the locals; more recognition of local volunteers; community plans and assembly areas that are led by community; storytelling and knowledge sharing; support local leaders.
Funding access & support	Increase funding on a permanent basis for Swifts Creek Bush Nurse Centre; additional funding for frontline workers such as our Bush Nurse centres; help applying for grants to upgrade facilities as the amount of time, energy and expertise is exhausting; make access to grant funding easier for small groups
Road access & safety	Keep the Great Alpine Road open; roads and safety travelling to Omeo need attention; freight traffic and large vehicles damaging roads; Clean up and clear roads

Community education	Community engagement; access horticultural courses to help rebuild gardens and to be more engaged with the forests as it regenerates

Category	Value
Fuel management & reduction	35.29
Improved infrastructure	22.35
Government planning & response	20.00
Emergency response planning	17.65
Communications	14.12
Community-led	12.94
Funding access & support	10.59
Road access & safety	9.41
Community education	7.06
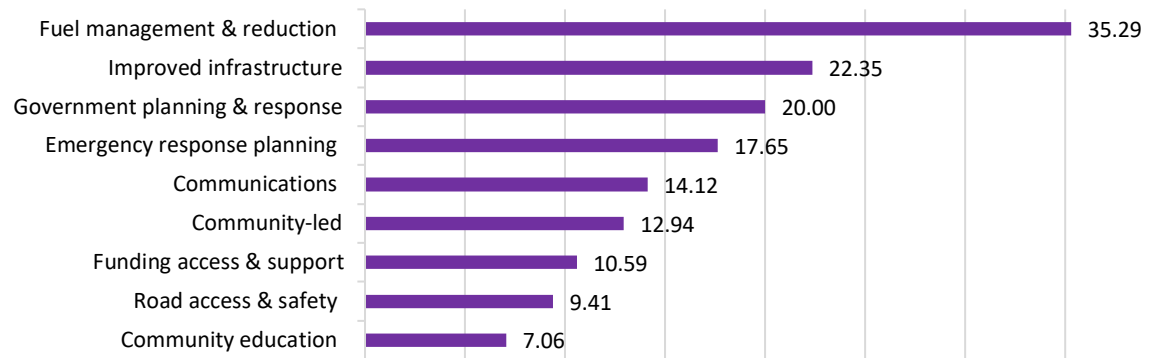
Our aim is to make the community of the Omeo region more resilient, safer and stronger in the face of future disasters. These questions ask for your views about what is needed.

Question 40 - Reflecting on the 2019/20 bushfires (or any other previous disasters), please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements?

Matrix | Skipped: 5 | Answered: 153 (96.8%)

Statement	Value
I have arrangements and supports in place to deal with future disasters	3.79
My household is able to cope with threats and disruption caused by fires and other disasters	3.74
My local community is well-prepared and able to cope with disasters	3.3
Information and communication during bushfires and other disasters is accessible and clear	2.87
Emergency services are able to effectively respond to disasters	3.01
Local facilities serve the community well during disasters	3.49
Government agencies are able to provide effective services during disasters	2.71
There are major improvements needed to provide better emergency response and recovery	4.03

Question 41 - What are the most important things that need to be done to improve community resilience in the face of natural disasters? (Where 0 is "not important" and 10 is "extremely important".)

Matrix | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 156 (98.7%)

Category	Value
The community needs support and funding to run more community events and help community groups	8.82
Communication to the community about bushfire preparedness needs to be improved	9.18
Recovery centres need to be provided locally	9.71
Steps need to be taken to reduce bushfire fuel load	9.99
Better local facilities and equipment are needed to respond to natural disasters	9.73
Government agencies and emergency services need to work more closely with local communities to understand their needs	10.13
Alternative power sources need to be provided for local communities	10.39
The region needs better telecommunications during disasters	10.23

Note: The matrix scale used in this question is valued from 0-10 instead of the traditional 1-10 numerical scale. The additional option of zero as a value on the scale accounts for the percentage exceeding 10.

Question 42 - What do you think are the strengths of the community when it comes to dealing with disasters?

Long Text | Skipped: 29 | Answered: 129 (81.65%)

Responses centred around a strong sense of a **connected community** that works together, looks out for each other and steps in where needed.

This was further complemented by the recognition of the value of **local knowledge and experience** strengthening a community's response to disaster. Many responses that were categorised under local knowledge and experience reference the value of a farming community that is experienced and prepared with machineray and equipment.

Local volunteering and agency staff was recognised as a strong factor that enhanced the strength of the community. Many responses centred around the value of the local CFA and local volunteering.

Category	Examples referenced
Connected community	Communication; Working together; Solidarity; Debriefing together; Shared experience; Listening and talking to each other (emotional support); Helping others
Local knowledge & experience	Local leadership; Previous experience; Sharing skills; Knowledge of the area; Experience enables prior planning & preparation eg Farmers' personal firefighting equipment/ability, Practise drills
Local volunteering & agency staff	Community volunteering; local CFA; Council staff; DELWP; BlazeAid; Neighbourhood house; Bush telegraph
Other	Chose not to answer, description was too vague or was an isolated response that did not fit common categories identified.

Connected community — 65.12%
Local knowledge & experience — 30.23%
Local volunteering & agency staff — 17.05%
Other — 4.65%
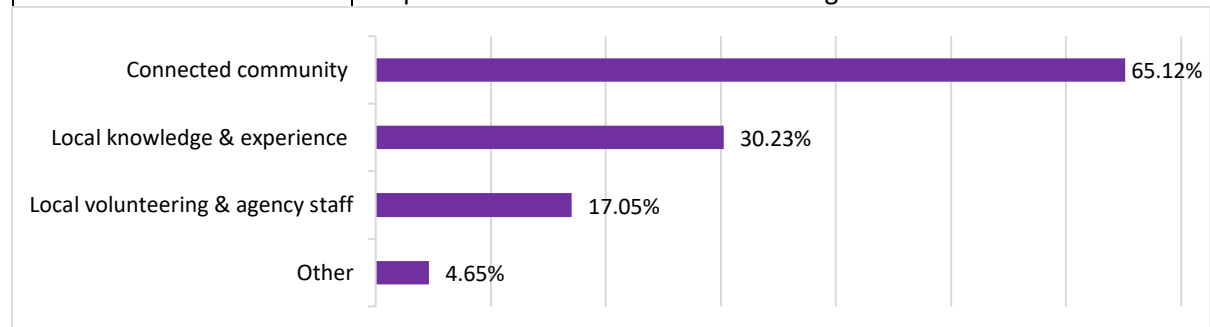
"Our local community of farmers and small land holders are very competent and skilled and have excellent local knowledge, however during a fire they are all stretched to the limit."

(Local knowledge & experience)

"Being a small community, everyone is there for each other in times of a disaster"

(Connected community)

"Solidarity, experience and willingness to help"

(Local knowledge & experience)

"Great number of people who volunteered, committed and effective local people working in agencies such as DEWLP"

(Local volunteering & agency staff)

"Collectively, the community bands together and help one another. The locals are quite adapt at 'getting through' such disasters, there are ideas put forward, some extra hands to help, service communities such as 'Blaze Aid' coming forward and giving local farmers a hand with fencing."

(Connected community; Local volunteering & agency staff)

"Local services do an amazing job and are well regarded, these people/services should be communicated with when external organisations attend rural disasters."

(Local volunteering & agency staff)

"Everyone rallies together and helps each other. You always feel supported and safe."

(Connected community)

Question 43 - What do you think are the weaknesses of the community when it comes to dealing with disasters?
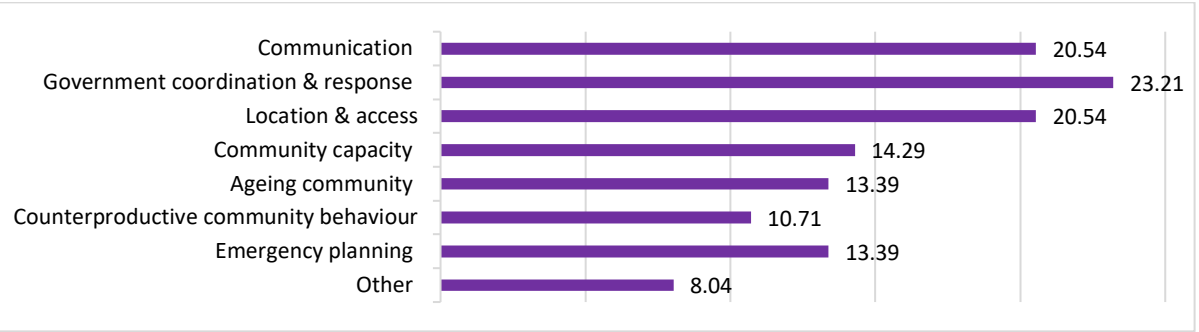
Long Text | Skipped: 46 | Answered: 112 (70.9%)

Seven overarching categories emerged that reinforced community sentiment already represented in other survey questions. Most commonly, responses indicated disappointment in the **response and coordination efforts from government organisations.** This disappointment centred around inadequate resourcing, timeliness in support, disregard for local voice and inefficiency due to structures and processes.

Barriers in effective **communication** and the **location and access** of the region were strongly echoed as significant weaknesses in receiving timely information and responding to the emergency.

Category	Examples referenced
Communication	Vulnerable when information is based on digital and electronic means; Not enough information; Communicating your personal situation in a disaster; Current modes of communication not accessible for all (eg elderly); Vulnerabilities in power and phone connection in a disaster
Government coordination & response	Inequity of aid provided; Need to listen to locals and empower community-led response; Limited personnel resourcing for DELWP and Parks Vic; Disconnected staff responding, not locals; Not enough help during the fires; Facing the disaster alone and unassisted; Bureaucratic red tape; Miscommunication between agencies and response groups ; More collaboration between locals and government; Lack of localised senior management in government agencies; Community distrust in government; Investment in infrastructure like helipads
Location & access	Access and lack of alternative routes to get services in and out; Poor road conditions; Remoteness; Unreliabe UHF due to terrain; Isolation of properties
Community capacity	Small numbers in community – at capacity to respond; Ageing community means loss of knowledge of past fires, less able to evacuate and defend, vulnerabilities for emergency services if they stay and are unable to readily help; New arrivals to the area with no knowledge or experience in fire preparedness; Community members have many conflicting personal weights such as mental health issues, isolation, unemployment and financial hardship that prevents them from preparation; Not enough volunteers who are younger; Individual towns acting separately rather than as a region
Ageing community	Loss of knowledge of past fires; Less able to evacuate and defend; Vulnerabilities for emergency services if they stay and are unable to readily help
Counterproductive community behaviour	Pride, a desire to be self-sufficient and not asking for help when it's needed can be detrimental; Coordination and response falling on the shoulders of a minority of local leaders; Too many who sit back (or are unable) to pitch in and help themselves and the community.; Self-interest and seeking disproportionate support; Greedy people; Monopolies of voice need to give space for new ideas and wider community input
Emergency planning	Division and allocation of responding in a disaster; No defined and supported assembly area; Plans for sharing of information; Properties not prepared, reliance on emergency response to defend; Events are unpredictable and makes it difficult to plan; Properties adjoining Crown land cannot burn and makes it difficult to protect their properties; Huge fuel loads - more fuel reduction is needed; Not enough forward planning

Other	Chose not to answer, description was too vague or was an isolated response that did not fit common categories identified.

Category	Value
Communication	20.54
Government coordination & response	23.21
Location & access	20.54
Community capacity	14.29
Ageing community	13.39
Counterproductive community behaviour	10.71
Emergency planning	13.39
Other	8.04

"Everyone is working around the clock to protect their own property - too stretched. There was a lot of help available after the fire came through, but not before or during."

(Community capacity, Government coordination & response)

"Isolation from support, lack of viable evacuation centres, overly vulnerable when information sharing is based on electronic means."

(Communication, Emergency planning)

"It's remoteness and lack of alternative routes to get services in and out."

(Location & access)

"Not knowing who needs to do what. Not having a defined and well supported assembly area that is fit for purpose. Not having connection through a phone tree or some way of sharing information when there is no power or comes. Not having volunteers or groups who take on the role of relief supplies distribution or reporting who is safe and who isn't. No real hub acknowledged by everyone to go to"

(Emergency planning, Communication, Community capacity)

"The few who are self-interested and seek disproportionate support for themselves."

(Counterproductive community behaviour)

"There are a lot of elderly/vulnerable people in our community who are not capable of dealing with disaster and if they are not evacuated out of the area before the fires, they create an increased workload for the health service."

(Ageing community)

Question 44 - Is there anything else that you think needs to be done to improve the community's preparation, resilience and/or ability to recover from natural disasters?

Long Text | Skipped: 72 | Answered: 86 (54.43%)

The cateogry of **'preventative planning'** was marked as the highest common category. Across most categories, this preference for forward thinking and planning came through strongly.

'**Essential infrastructure**' followed closely as the next high category. Many respondents wanted the vulnerabilities in telecommunications and power stations to be addressed for future disasters with the need for quick access to generators a high priority. Emergency buildings and places for refuge were also a high priority under this category and the need to ensure these buildings are always at a state of readiness for bushfire.

Category	Examples referenced
Preventative planning	community plans; emergency planning; addressing climate change; individual assessment of homes and properties; physical assistance with machinery pre fire; advanced knowledge and planning
Essential infrastructure	retrofitting emergency buildings to withstand ember attacks; recovery centres upgraded and built; emergency buildings being in a state of readiness; plans for power, backup power and telephone towers
Communication	communication of emergency plans; list of names and number for support; telephone trees, improve communication; information points; workshops/townhall meetings; fire education that is accessible for all
Road maintenance	access and egress along the Great Alpine Road and other roads; viable evacuation points; maintenance of roads
Emergency response	maintenance of appliances; more slip ons; clarity between agencies eg CFA and FFM; aerial support and helipads; investment in new tech eg satellite spotting; help for vulnerable people; visiting support services during and immediately after; adequate resourcing to fire response teams
Resource allocation	quick access to portable generators for households without power; stock-pile of essentials like sand bags, sediment traps, power, food, fuel, medicine; consolidated government recovery effort, dilute need to go through multiple agencies
Fuel management	clearing trees along highway; review of timber removal rules; linking with Traditional Owners for cultural burning; burn offs; joint vegetation management between state forest and boundary private properties; don't close down timber towns – lose contractors that prepare for fire
Funding support	support in applying for grants; investment in tourism like walking tracks (Anglers Rest Loop, O'Connell's Over loop trail), music festivals; funding to support bush nursing and Omeo hospital; equitable distribution of essentials and funding
Community-led recovery	local businesses and locals included in recovery; recognising and empowering existing structures; people leading recovery who know the communities
Other	Chose not to answer, description was too vague or was an isolated response that did not fit common categories identified.
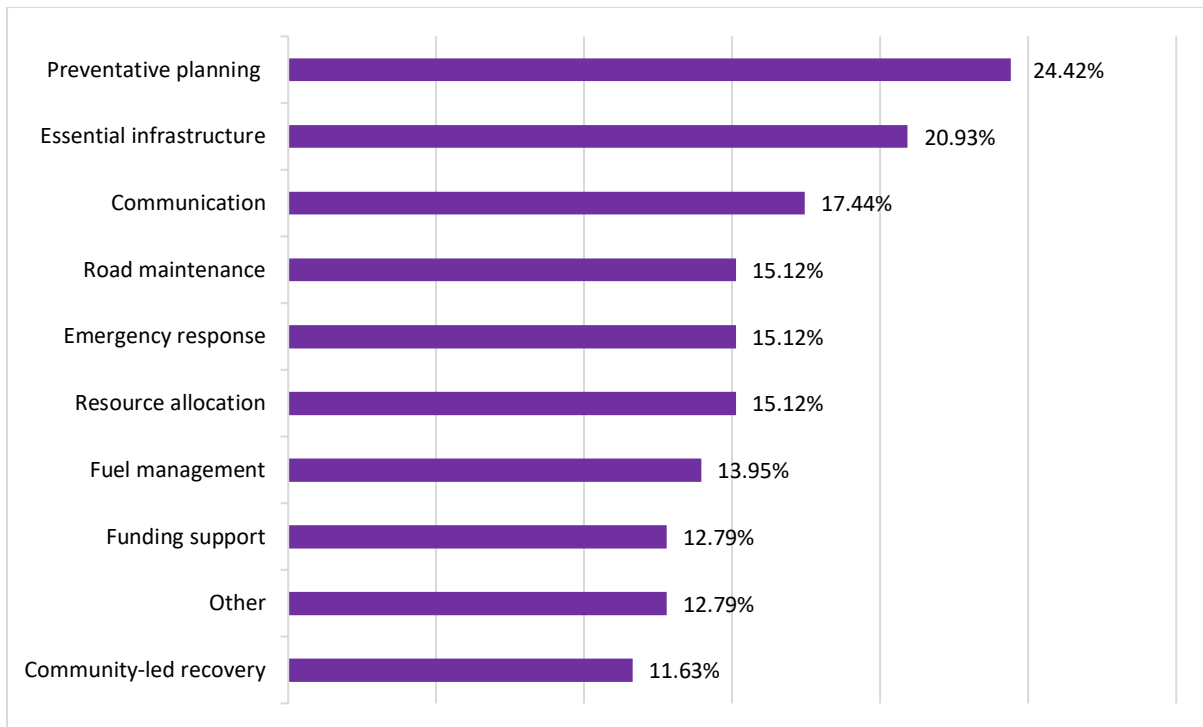
"Alternative power sources, viable evacuation points, robust fire reduction, realistic education for all ages regards fire preparation, property maintenance, review of timber removal rules in non fire periods to allow land holders to clear and maintain properties before fires arrive rather than rushed clearance work as fires approach, including roadside material build ups that have not been dealt with by government authorities."

(essential infrastructure; road maintenance; communication; vegetation management; preventative planning)

"Enhance the ability of pavilions etc to withstand ember attacks etc when being used as safe zones. Emergency building must always be in a state of readiness but must be able to be usefully used in non-emergency times.

Donated goods need to be screened before delivery to stop the recipient area full of non-usable junk."

(essential infrastructure; resource allocation)

"Preparation - plans put in place and widely disseminated so people know what to do and when.

Resilience - reduce the fuel load to limit the impact of fires.

Recover - ensure local business is invited to contribute to the recovery and allow the locals to be involved with the recovery plans."

(preventative planning; vegetation management; community-led recovery)

"The amount of information required to apply for grants when people have huge amounts of stress can be overwhelming."

(funding support)

Generator power. Information during fire. Help to access grants.

(resource allocation; communication; funding support)