

'Unfair' grants claims denied

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Fire recovery anger

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THE national agency leading the Black Summer bushfire recovery has hit back at criticism of a new grants program, amid growing frustration about the pace of the rebuilding effort.

The Herald Sun revealed last week that East Gippsland leaders, including former federal minister Darren Chester, were demanding Scott Morris

son intervene to fix the grants scheme because it offered \$4.5m for each affected municipality. That would mean just \$4.5m for projects in East Gippsland – where 1.1 million hectares were burnt – compared with \$27m for northeast Victoria.

But National Recovery and Resilience Agency co-ordinator general Shane Stone, writing in today's Herald Sun, said

the funding for each municipality was “not fixed” and projects would be backed on merit.

“Incorrect assumptions about the final allocation of funding potentially discourage applicants from putting forward important projects for their communities,” he said.

It came as Indi MP Helen Haines, whose electorate is in the state's northeast, warned that she was concerned about the program's guidelines because money could be “sent to places which didn't see a wisp of smoke or any flow-on business effects during the fires”.

Ms Haines said community groups, small businesses and organisations were “working their hearts out” to receive “sorely needed” funding and needed to know they were “applying to a fair system”.

Gippsland East MP Tim Bull turned up the heat on the state government last week, blasting its “go-slow approach” to fixing local infrastructure damaged during the bushfire disaster including boardwalks, walking tracks, campgrounds and bridges. He said Parks Victoria had promised him a list of project time frames a month ago and still had not delivered.

“These communities and businesses, which rely on these locations being open for their economy, are frustrated at the progress and angry they have no time frames,” Mr Bull told state parliament.

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