

Bushfire grants fair to all

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THE recently advertised Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants will be determined on merit. Nothing has changed.

The 32 Local Economic Recovery projects (nearly \$25.6m in Commonwealth-Victorian government funding) for East Gippsland were merit based.

Almost two years on, communities affected by the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires continue to receive federal government assistance. To date, \$2.4bn of the \$2.8bn in Commonwealth support available for recovery has been rolled out.

The National Recovery and Resilience Agency works with communities on “locally led, understood and implemented” solutions to support recovery and prepare for future natural disasters.

There is much to be done. Recovery takes time and turns on many variables including availability of materials and trades.

The NRRRA assumed responsibility for the Commonwealth’s response to the

bushfires in May 2021.

We hit the ground running, as we did in other disasters over the past three years: floods in Queensland, cyclones in WA, a national drought and Covid lockdowns.

I am currently locked down in Brisbane and locked out of NSW and Victoria. I look forward to directly engaging with people about their recovery and how we can work together to minimise the effect of future bushfires and other natural disasters.

Under the \$280m Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants program, grants range from \$20,000 to \$10m for community organisations, councils and businesses.

Projects in 110 municipalities that were disaster-declared because of the Black Summer bushfires are eligible for funding.

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

Amounts identified for each eligible municipality in the grant guidelines are notional – that is speculative, hypothetical. They are not fixed. Grants will be determined on merit. Grant funding might exceed or fall below these notional amounts depending on the project applications that come in.

MPs from all parties, state and federal, and local government are lobbying the minister and NRRRA for as great a share as possible of the grant funding. However, the final allocation will be based on project eligibility and merit. For details visit recovery.gov.au/black-summer-grants

SHANE STONE IS CO-ORDINATOR-GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE AGENCY