



# Richmond Valley Community Preparedness & Resilience Plan

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ADVERSE EVENT PLAN

October 2021

# CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION .....	3
ABOUT THE RICHMOND VALLEY .....	4
THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN .....	5
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS .....	7
WHAT IS AN ADVERSE EVENT? .....	8
WHAT ARE THE HAZARDS? .....	9
THE BUSHFIRE EVENT .....	10
KEY STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS .....	11
PREVENTION .....	12
PREPAREDNESS .....	13
RESPONSE .....	14
RECOVERY .....	15
WHAT IS COUNCIL'S ROLE? .....	19



Richmond Valley Council recognises the people of the Bundjalung nations as custodians and traditional owners of this land and we value and appreciate the continuing cultural connection to lands, their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region in the past, present and future.

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***This plan will build community leadership capability and the capacity to adapt and cope with the chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events.***

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Richmond Valley Community Preparedness and Resilience Plan has been prepared by Richmond Valley Council as a requirement of the Drought Communities Programme. This adverse event plan will provide a strategy and guidance framework for increasing resilience to the likely and potential adverse events that threaten Richmond Valley Council Local Government Area (LGA).

In August 2019 the Richmond Valley LGA was severely impacted by bushfire events which resulted in 48.6% of the local government area and more than 350 homes, outbuildings and facilities being impacted by fire. This large-scale bushfire burnt 142,741 hectares of land within the LGA and severely impacted key industries including primary producers and forestry.

Since then, the Richmond Valley Council LGA has suffered numerous adverse events; the longest drought in living memory, severe storms and flooding, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. This period of overlapping natural disasters and adverse events has shown the strength of the local Council, combat agencies and the overall emergency response management arrangements, as

well as the resilience of our local communities.

This plan has been developed with the valuable input of Council staff and the community, including local farmers, local business owners, representatives from crisis support and health services.

This Adverse Event Plan aims to improve preparation for and recovery from adverse events. The key strategies and actions within this plan are intended to help build community leadership capability, community resilience and the capacity to adapt and cope with chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events. It articulates Council's role as vital in providing accurate and timely information to its community and to advocate to state and federal governments on their behalf.

This plan is a public document that Council can implement in its preparation for future adverse events and to assist recovery from the recent bushfires, flooding and pandemic. It can be used by the community, farmers, local business and service providers to understand Council's role in building preparedness and how Council can support them in recovery.

This plan was endorsed by Council on 19 October 2021.



## ABOUT THE RICHMOND VALLEY

The Richmond Valley Local Government Area (LGA) is located in the Northern Rivers region of NSW and covers 3050 square kilometres of land which extends from the coastline at Evans Head to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range in the west, interspersed with prime agricultural land, regional villages, state forests and national parks.

A vastly dispersed but close-knit and supportive community, Richmond Valley is home to over 23,000 people and the median resident age is 44 years. Casino, the largest population centre (10,900) is supported by centres such as Evans Head (2,850), Coraki (1,278), Woodburn (730) and Broadwater (643) which provide rural lifestyle and coastal living opportunities (North Coast Regional Plan).

Children aged 0 – 14 years old comprise 19.2% of the population in the Richmond Valley LGA and 22.5% of the population is over the age of 65. Over 1,630 residents identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People. The average weekly household income is \$953, lower than the NSW average of \$1,486. At the time of the 2016 Census, 8.7% of the population indicated that they had a need for assistance for a disability (ABS Census 2016).

The Richmond Valley also has a number of important environmental assets, including

wetlands and coastal heath systems located within the Broadwater and Bundjalung National Parks. These assets continue to draw tourists and contribute to attractive lifestyles (North Coast Regional Plan).

Rural communities are the lifeblood of our regional economy. The Richmond Valley contributes \$870 million to Gross Regional Product (NIER 2019) with the economy dominated by the manufacturing and agriculture sectors. The Richmond Valley is a leader in primary industries and food manufacturing with agricultural businesses located across the valley specialising in grain, dairy, beef, fruits, vegetables, timber and tea-tree.

Manufacturing is the region's largest industry in terms of both value-add and employment due to the agricultural processing facilities at NSW Sugar Mill located at Broadwater and Northern Cooperative Meat Company at Casino. The region also supports a healthy retail and tourism sector, growing creative industries and building and construction industry sectors (RDA Northern Rivers).

As key drivers for the Richmond Valley economy, the agricultural and food manufacturing industries are inextricably linked to the environment and the community's resilience, and as such provide dramatic exposure to economic disruption in the aftermath of an adverse event.



# THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN

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## Purpose

The purpose of the Richmond Valley Community Preparedness and Resilience Plan is to provide guidance for Council and the community to prepare for, and manage, adverse events that directly and indirectly affect the Richmond Valley.

## Objectives

The objectives of this plan are to:

- Identify key strategies and actions to be undertaken by Council and other relevant stakeholders, to prepare for and manage adverse events that affect the Richmond Valley
- Standardise the approach of Council to meet the needs of the community in dealing with adverse events
- Build community leadership capability and community resilience and capacity to adapt and cope with chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events
- Learn from adverse events and consequently make improvements as appropriate in preparation for future occurrences

## Scope

The plan describes the key strategies and actions at a local level to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from adverse events. These events may be events for which Richmond Valley Council has full or partial responsibility, or external events which are the responsibility of another agency (e.g. Rural Fire Service, Local Area Health Service) that may involve a commitment from Council.



As key drivers for the Richmond Valley economy, the agricultural and food manufacturing industries are inextricably linked to the environment and the community's resilience

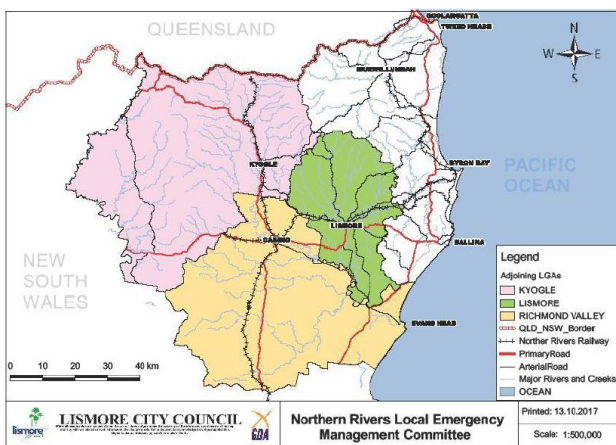




# RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

This Adverse Event Plan is one of three interconnected plans: Northern Rivers Local Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN); Northern Rivers Local Recovery Plan; and the Richmond Valley Council Community Preparedness and Resilience Plan.

The Northern Rivers Local Emergency Management area covers Kyogle, Lismore City and Richmond Valley Local Government Areas (LGA).



The **Northern Rivers Local Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN)** focuses on Council's role in an emergency and outlines steps for preparedness by the Local Emergency Management Committee in compliance with the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989.

The **Northern Rivers Local Recovery Plan** provides a framework for the management and coordination of recovery operations to support the affected community following a disaster, in accordance with the NSW Recovery Plan.

Whilst the **Richmond Valley Community Preparedness and Resilience Plan** will focus on building resilience within the community, the economy and the environment. It demonstrates initiatives for preparedness and recovery from the identified hazards that currently do and could affect the LGA.



This Adverse Event Plan should be considered in conjunction with these documents and other relevant plans and policies, including:

- Richmond Valley Council Risk Management Policy
- Richmond Valley Council Community Strategic Plan
- Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Community Revitalisation Plan from 2019 Bushfires
- North Coast Regional Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN)
- NSW State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN)
- Disaster Assistance Guidelines

Responsibility for the preparation and maintenance of these supporting documents lies with a variety of internal and external stakeholders.

## WHAT IS AN ADVERSE EVENT?

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An adverse event means an event or incident that has a negative impact on the wellbeing of the community. An adverse event can be a drought, flood, bushfire earthquake, storm, biosecurity, spill, terrorist attack, major accident or health pandemic event. It can have environmental, social, cultural, health and economic impacts.

Adverse events may be either events for which Council has full or partial responsibility, or external events which are the responsibility of another agency (e.g. Rural Fire Service, Department of Primary Industries, Area Health Service).

The response of Council will vary in relation to adverse events depending on the:

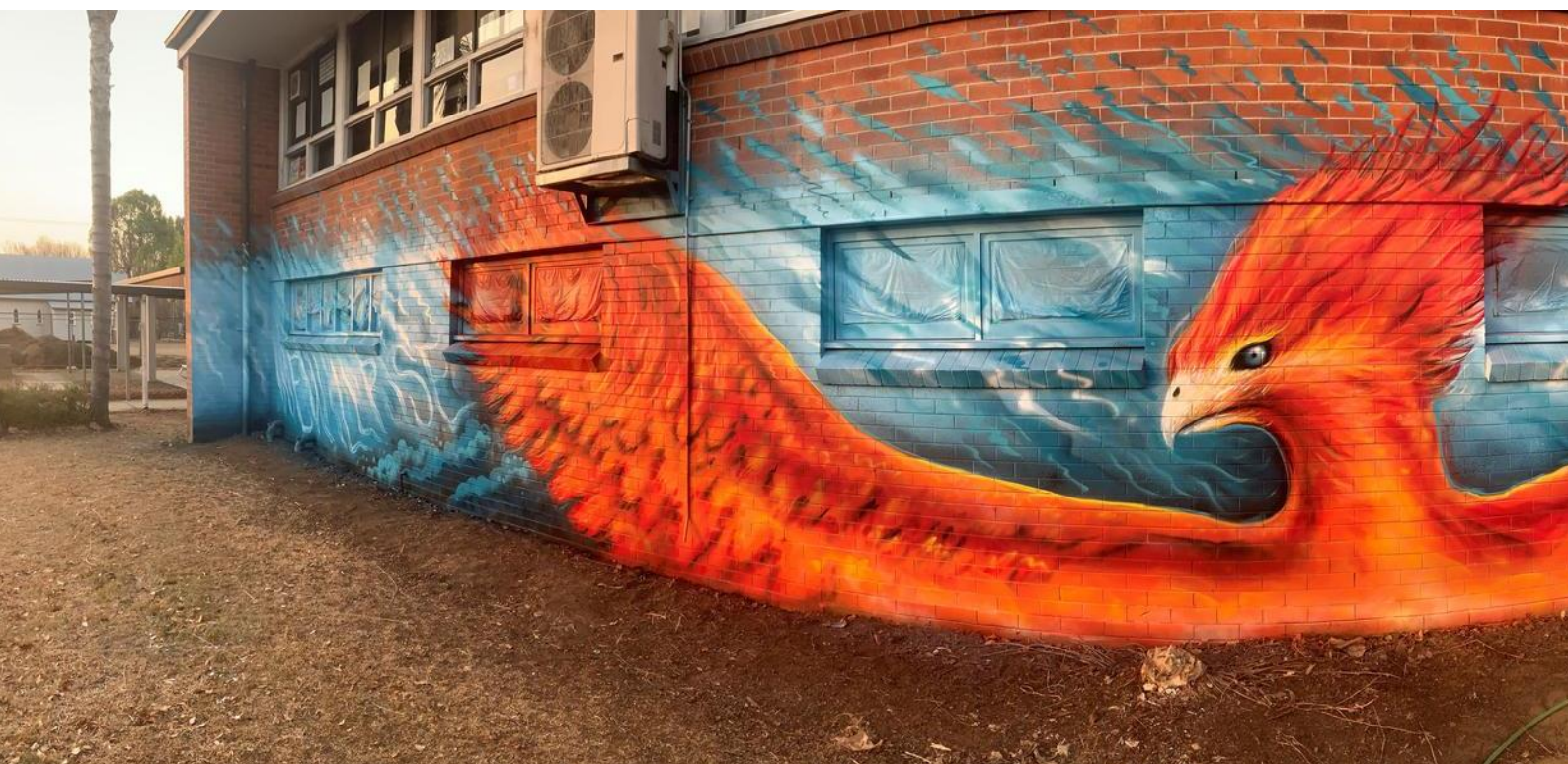
- Seriousness of the event
- Numbers of people involved
- Risk exposure
- Financial impacts
- Media interest
- Need to involve other stakeholders

Therefore, the response to each adverse event should be proportionate to its scale, scope and complexity.

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***The impacts of disasters are complex and a need to plan for future disasters and provide our community with information is necessary to ensure we are assisting the community in its recovery and maximise our potential to rebuild and recover better.***

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## WHAT ARE THE HAZARDS?

The Richmond Valley Council LGA has in recent years been impacted by drought, bushfire, storms, flooding and the Covid-19 pandemic, presenting many challenges for the community and all levels of government. These devastating events have seen many homes, grazing land, forestry, crops, machinery and infrastructure lost or damaged impacting on the community, businesses and tourism across the valley.

A critical assessment of the key hazards for the Richmond Valley LGA is detailed in the Northern Rivers EMPLAN and is depicted below. Each hazard has been rated according to the likelihood of the hazard occurring and the potential consequence of each hazard on the Richmond Valley LGA community, environment and economy.

It is important to recognise that the likelihood of some hazards may be seasonal and fluctuate up or down at different times of the year or between years. Similarly, the consequences of these hazards can vary based on the severity and/or duration of the occurrence.

For the Richmond Valley LGA, with our heavy reliance on the agricultural sector for employment, anything which significantly impacts on the environment can be identified as 'High' risk. These include weather and climate related hazards (flood, heatwave); communicable diseases (human epidemic or pandemic, animal or plant disease, agricultural pests); fires, especially bush or grass fires. Floods are a frequent event within the Northern Rivers of NSW, with high rainfall and our tendency to be impacted by Queensland tropical storms, resulting in damage to our roads and bridge infrastructure and environmental issues such as erosion of riverbanks, farmland and the overall health of waterways.

The next highest level of risk classification is the 'Medium' risk category. This includes natural hazards such as storms, drought and blue green algae outbreaks, as well as utilities failure (electricity, water, telecommunications).

And our lowest risk category identifies hazards with potentially devastating impacts which are less likely to occur in our LGA, such as an earthquake.

<b>HIGH</b>	Fire	Flood	Hazardous substance release	Heatwave	Communicable disease	
<b>MEDIUM</b>	Utilities failure	Agricultural disease	Blue green algae outbreak	Storm	Drought	Landslip
<b>LOW</b>	Earthquake	Transport emergency	Terrorism	Coastal erosion	Bridge or building collapse	Tsunami

## THE BUSHFIRE EVENT

On 8 October 2019 the rural township of Rappville was devastated by the Busbys Flat Road fire which burned through the township and surrounding areas. Of the 42 homes in the village of Rappville, 9 were destroyed and six damaged by the fire, the community hall was also destroyed by fire.

The day after the disaster struck, work began on the clean-up and recovery for these small but resilient communities. The primary focus was to restore access, electricity and provide potable water to the impacted areas. Council has played a vital role in the coordination of both recovery and the emergency response as the bushfire event continues to impact our region.

On 8 November the Myall Creek Road fire first started and burnt significant rural areas from Bora Ridge across to New Italy South, to Woombah in the Clarence Valley and west to Whiporie for almost two months.

Overall, the Richmond Valley has been significantly impacted by the bush fire events with 48.6% of the local government area burnt.

### TOTAL AREA BURNT

**142,741** HECTARES



### TOTAL FINAL BURNT PERIMETER

**647** KMS



### NATIONAL PARK

**23,314** HECTARES



### STATE FOREST

**42,618** HECTARES



### PRIVATE LAND

**74,070** HECTARES



### CROWN LAND

**2,739** HECTARES

Includes Crown Land Parcels, Crown Road Reserves (mainly unformed)



BUILDING IMPACT	BUSBYS FLAT RD FIRE (COMMENCED 8 OCTOBER 2019)	MYALL CREEK ROAD FIRE (COMMENCED 8 NOVEMBER 2019)
DESTROYED HOUSES	44	18
DESTROYED OUTBUILDINGS	81	84
DESTROYED FACILITIES	7 (INCLUDES SAWMILL)	1 (TEA TREE DISTILLERY)
DAMAGED HOUSES	9	10
DAMAGED OUTBUILDINGS	31	31
DAMAGED FACILITIES	9	3

In February 2020 Richmond Valley Council adopted a revitalisation plan, Rebuilding the Richmond Valley: Community Revitalisation Plan from 2019 Bushfires, to analyse the impact of the bushfire disaster and initiate recovery actions and projects to help impacted communities recover, rebuild, grow and thrive. The projects identified in the plan were based on need and community feedback. With Council and community working together, and the support of the state and federal governments, significant progress has been made with this plan.

Richmond Valley Council has learnt a lot from this devastating event in regard to the recovery process and the need to better prepare the community for adverse events and has incorporated these strategies in this plan.



## KEY STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The key strategies and actions within the Richmond Valley Adverse Event Plan respond to the objectives of the plan to build community leadership capability and community resilience and the capacity to adapt and cope with chronic stresses and acute shocks caused by adverse events.


The identified hazards, in particular drought as well as the potential for floods and bushfires, affect local businesses and communities. These events impact upon the productivity and profitability of farms and manufacturing which are the main employment areas within the Richmond Valley.

With the constraints of poor internet, phone and physical connectivity the impact of these

threats is increased without a clear plan to prepare the community.

In terms of adverse event management, there are four (4) recognised stages of managing events: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, also known as the PPRR model.

Richmond Valley Council has identified the following key strategies and actions in order to prepare for and manage adverse events that affect the Richmond Valley LGA. These initiatives are part of preparedness but also influence the recovery of the LGA from the existing bushfire and flood impacts and COVID-19 pandemic.



“Council’s priority following the Black Summer Bushfires is to rebuild stronger and more resilient communities.”

## PREVENTION

Prevention refers to actions Council could undertake to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of an incident.

Strategy	Action
Encourage efficient stewardship of important natural resources	Support and encourage workshops and seminars organised by government agencies, including Local Land Services to assist farmers and farm businesses, including feed and pest management.
Actively manage water assets within the Richmond Valley	Invest in and manage water and sewer assets in the Richmond Valley LGA whilst looking for opportunities to improve our water resources; and educate the community on preserving the health of the Richmond River and our waterways.
Improve emergency water supply for rural residents	Improve access to emergency non-potable water filling stations for residents not serviced by town water through the installation of bulk water filling stations.
Improve access to communication networks in the Richmond Valley LGA	Advocate for improved telecommunications infrastructure across the LGA, particularly in our villages and small rural localities.
Improve the provision of local infrastructure, facilities and services in our towns	Actively pursue grant opportunities that benefit the Richmond Valley community in the long term.
Ensure Council owned resources are well maintained to manage the impacts of adverse events on facilities	Continue to maintain Council facilities including roads and buildings in accordance with Council's maintenance schedules to manage impacts of minor adverse events, including minor storm events through drainage work maintenance.
Inform the community about the local flood risk; allowing the community to build safely and resiliently	Ensure flood modelling for the Richmond Valley LGA is up-to-date; and planning and development controls are in place to prevent inappropriate development in areas of flood risk.



# PREPAREDNESS

## How do we help our communities prepare for future disasters?

Preparedness refers to the steps taken before an incident to ensure effective response and enhance the capacity of an agency to manage response and recovery. A number of recovery action plans and tools have been identified to assist our community in future disasters.

Strategy	Action
Council staff are trained and prepared to assist in managing the impacts of adverse events	Council staff receive training relevant to their area of work to assist and protect the community in adverse events, such as clearing fallen trees from roads as a result of storms and managing road access during flood events and traffic incidents.
Review our road and bridge network for escape options	The road and bridge network should be reviewed to identify any points that, if cut off, would isolate communities in times of flood, bushfire or storm events. If alternate options for escape can be made available, they should be considered.
Support and promote disaster preparedness in the community	Facilitate disaster preparedness activities/ events (including bushfire, flood and storm preparedness sessions) and help to distribute up-to-date preparedness resources to the community, e.g. the Get Ready program
Build community resilience	Support capacity and resilience of individuals to support others through programs such as mental health/ incidental counsellor training, first aid and digital and financial literacy sessions.
Introduce Community-led Resilience Teams (CRTs)	Partner with Red Cross to implement Community Resilience Teams in villages across the LGA. Local communities are best placed to know what their community needs, and with advice and support from emergency management agencies, communities can improve their level of preparedness for future events.
Improve cross-sector communication, coordination, and collaboration mechanisms between emergency management, community services and people with disability	Assist in the rollout of Disability Inclusiveness Disaster Risk Management. Training will be offered to disability service providers to develop emergency preparedness plans for people with disability. The aim of this project is to ensure people with disability are included in emergency preparedness programs and enabling community partners to address the barriers to emergency preparedness for people with disability.
Improve access for emergency aircraft	Seek funding to make improvements to Casino Aerodrome, thereby increasing its capacity to be used for emergency aircraft

## RESPONSE

### Timely action during and after a disaster is challenging, particularly in our small rural communities.

In the event of a disaster, Council will act in accordance with the Northern Rivers EMPLAN and Council's operational plans, which detail obligations in responding to events which fall under regulatory requirements (e.g. managing road safety by clearing trees, ensuring waste water facilities continue to operate, assisting in the management and recovery of council-owned environmental assets).

Strategy	Action
Provide accurate, clear and timely communication in relation to adverse events	Develop an Emergency Communication Plan detailing how Council will communicate with the community during and following an adverse event.
Provide easy-to-access real time information related to emergencies and assistance	Introduce, promote and maintain a community disaster dashboard as a one-stop location for adverse event information.
Support the establishment of a Recovery Hub	Following a disaster, event emergency staff from the relevant NSW agencies will set up a recovery hub to provide assistance and information to the impacted community. Council needs to assist in this process identifying suitable locations and providing staff to resource the hub. Council is a trusted source of information and local knowledge is beneficial to assist agency staff best assist the impacted community.
Manage spontaneous volunteerism and donated goods	To harness the charity and well wishes of the wider community to assist the impacted community, effective plans need to be implemented to manage spontaneous volunteerism and donated goods. This includes understanding the needs after the event, clear communication, and an effective management system or agency to prioritise donations. Any strategy or plan needs to be embedded within existing emergency management plans.



# RECOVERY

Recovery refers to the steps taken to minimise disruption and attempt to assist the community, businesses and government to return to a normalised state and restore wellbeing. For example, disaster recovery can include the coordinated process of supporting emergency- affected communities in reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical well-being. Recovery is crucial to and has been further divided into three focus areas.

## Focus Area 1: Community and Social Recovery

Timely action after a disaster is challenging particularly in small communities. It is important that Council is committed to investing in these communities to support community led recovery.

Strategy	Action/ Project
Support a variety of recovery outreach events/ activities	Identify the preferred approach for recovery events, engaging with the community on what type of events will be beneficial to the community's recovery.
Facilitate a Community Advisory Group	A community advisory group framework should be considered as part of any major disaster planning and recovery action plan. After the 2019 bushfire disaster an advisory group was implemented in the Rappville area. Members of the group, including Council staff and community members, meet regularly to consult on recovery needs, future activities and to provide feedback to Council and other government agencies.
Support the development of a Community Resilience Network (CRN)	The CRN brings together organisations that are not traditionally represented within local recovery committees, this enables local community service organisations and non-government organisations to take part in recovery planning and resilience building.
Build the capacity of the community	Support awareness of available government assistance and resources.
Advocate on behalf of the Richmond Valley community	Support continued advocacy by Councillors and the General Manager towards Federal and State Government members of parliament in the interests of the Richmond Valley community.
Improve access to emotional wellbeing support	After a disaster it is vital mental health support is available to the community. Advocate for community access to these services and ensure information on services available is effectively communicated. This support will be needed for years to come with increased rates of PTSD, depression and/or severe distress.
Reduce the financial stress of impacted residents	Provision of Council policy that allows for deferral of Council rates with no penalty for those landholders, experiencing genuine hardship as a result of an adverse event, who have a good rates payment history.

## Focus Area 2: Economic Recovery

Local business and tourism operators have been feeling the effects of compounding disasters over recent years which directly impacts on employment, revenue and services available within the community. Council has advocated for several projects aimed at boosting the economy for our existing business and tourism operators and to attract future investment, employment and tourism opportunities.

Strategy	Action
Diversify the local economy to minimise impacts of adverse events	Support a proactive Council that is innovative and progressive in responding to opportunities to diversify the Richmond Valley's economic base.
Support local business by procuring goods locally	Council should consider opportunities to source local goods and services from within the LGA, subject to achieving the "best value" outcome for the community in determining tenders and contracts for services and goods
Build the capacity of small local agricultural businesses	Facilitate and promote the Richmond Valley Paddock to Plate Collaborative, supporting Richmond Valley producers to develop their paddock-to-farm sector collectively.
Activate our towns and villages	Partner with local Chambers of Commerce to implement marketing plans for towns and villages to understand business and industry needs including economic profile strengths, challenges and opportunities.
Establish the Casino Industries Activation Project	The Casino Industries Activation project will deliver critical infrastructure needed to secure major business investment in Casino, driving significant economic and social outcomes for the region.
Upgrade Casino Showground, a major recreational facility to attract more regional and interstate events	The master plan features a new indoor equestrian arena, redevelopment of the horse racing training stables, upgrade to the sand-based training track, establishment of a cross country equestrian course, new day yards, holding yards and pens to support equestrian events. This will position Casino to be the equestrian capital of the Northern Rivers, bringing visitors from across the region and interstate providing a sustained economic boost.
Support local businesses through the implementation of a Business Recovery Plan	Assist Chambers of Commerce to implement emergency preparedness and recovery plans for future disasters. This could be supported by a program of workshops, business seminars and opportunities to help local business adapt and build resilience.
Develop an investment prospectus and marketing campaign to promote investment opportunities	Develop an investment prospectus and marketing campaign to promote opportunities in support of the Regional Jobs Precinct and Casino Industries Activation Project. Job Precincts are designed to cut red tape. With a 30-day target for planning approvals, the job precinct will provide opportunities for current employers looking to expand operations and new investors looking to invest in the region

### Focus Area 3: Built and Natural Environment Recovery

The environmental impacts of a disaster can be felt for generations.

Critical infrastructure can be placed under great strain during and after a disaster including rail, road, telecommunications, water and sewer. The restoration of essential services to the community is crucial, as is identifying infrastructure that will assist the community in its recovery.

Additionally, the destruction of the natural environment cannot be underestimated. The emotional wellbeing of landowners and the community due to lost livestock, destroyed crops and grazing land, and the loss of forests and wildlife can be significant.

Strategy	Action
Support the community through the rebuild process	Following a disaster, Council should consider prioritising development applications to support community through the rebuild process.
Rebuild important community infrastructure: Rappville Community Hall Precinct	The Rappville Community Hall was completely destroyed in the 2019 bushfires and has been identified by the community as integral to the community's recovery. This important project is being jointly funded by the Australian Government, the Business Council of Australia through its BizRebuild program and through insurance funds from the loss of the original hall.
Support future residential development: Sewer Treatment Option Rappville Village	At present the township of Rappville is not sewered and each residence has its own stand-alone system. If a property owner wishes to rebuild or a new resident wished to build within the village the current environmental requirement does not permit this due to allotment size. Options are currently being investigated for a sustainable process to support future development within the village.
Develop a Resilience Innovation Program	Council to identify and develop shovel-ready projects ready for future disaster or other funding.
Encourage initiatives and projects which seek to regenerate and support recovery of our natural environment	Seek out funding opportunities and encourage interested groups, such as National Parks, Envite, Landcare, Aboriginal organisations and Council, to apply and deliver environmental projects.





Council's Vision:  
The Richmond Valley community is  
prepared for, and is capable of managing,  
adverse events to remain prosperous and  
sustainable into the future



# WHAT IS COUNCIL'S ROLE?

This Adverse Event Plan has been prepared by Richmond Valley Council but is not solely for Council to implement. The Plan will only be successful with the input of many people and organisations across the community.

The contribution that Council will provide is described below:

## **Coordination**

To use its convening power to bring together the various community committees and working groups discussed earlier in the plan to progress the preparedness and capacity building agenda of this Plan.

## **Communication**

Communication plays a critical role in empowering community lead recovery. Communication in relation to any adverse events shall be in accordance with Council's existing communication procedures. Council will use a variety of communication media to provide the community with relevant information in relation to adverse events including print, radio and social media.

Communications should:

- begin as early as possible in an emergency or adverse event
- include an event-specific website and/or other medium that show all available information and is updated regularly
- specifically address the needs and concerns of local communities
- be expressed in clear, consistent, plain English
- be tailored to local communities and delivered to the various groups within communities
- be provided in easy to understand formats with the aid of visual comparisons
- include practical information and advice

(Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook 2, Community Recovery, 2018, p. 46)

A well-informed community is a critical aspect in terms of Council managing expectations of timeframes, costs and impacts along the road to recovery.

## **Advocacy**

To use its influence and to create a platform to gain support and funding from state and federal governments for socioeconomic and cultural support for the resilience of the LGA.

## **Training**

Several training sessions have been recommended in this plan. Providing training to build the capacity of the community to be prepared to cope is a great way that Council can lead preparedness.

## **Review**

Council will also be responsible for regularly reviewing and testing the Adverse Event Plan and keeping it in the consciousness of the community. This plan should be reviewed after an adverse event occurs to include any lessons learned and to update appropriate initiatives for recovery.