

Report to SCI for Natural Disaster Fund.

Bushfire Recovery Action: Plants for Peace

A project to help with recovery after the catastrophic fires of the Summer of 2019-20 has been enthusiastically received by residents of NSW. International Volunteers for Peace is collecting surplus plants from nurseries and delivering them to affected communities from Blue Mountains to Sydney's west and Southern Highlands to as far south as Cobargo, approximately 400km south of Sydney. The project is designed not only to assist with environmental recovery but also help with mental health of traumatised residents.

With the help of local councils we are reaching out to often isolated rural communities that were in the path of the fires, where recovery from personal, social and economic losses can be slowest. Deliveries have been coordinated with local community leaders, and are either at an existing community event or an event organised especially around our arrival.

In the beginning we delivered around 150 plants in each load, but as we gained experience and better equipment we were able to deliver 500 plants at a time. The bulk of the plants come from a wholesale commercial nursery in Sydney and are mostly well established natives with a smaller number of exotics. As well, several small local nurseries have also contributed flower and vegetable seedlings. We can't know in advance if the plants will be taken, planted, loved, or flourish but we hope that by offering them we can create a feeling of care and abundance as well as making an effort towards recovery of the landscape.



Our first delivery to Wingello.

The small team of IVP volunteers has been very moved by the gratitude of the recipients and by hearing many heartbreaking stories. In each community we discover that there are many people still struggling, living in caravans and high priced rentals after fires, and trying to recover their lives. Builders are all tied up, getting debris removed is often slow, and insurance and other assistance often delayed. The trauma is far from over. These insights keep us motivated to continue.

Publicity and Outreach

The project soon was given the name Plants for Peace. At each event we unfurl our IVP banner, interact with the people who come for the plants and take photos. We request recipients of the plants to send us photos once planted. The photos are uploaded to our facebook and website, as well as being forwarded to Thuru, a linked climate related organisation based in Sri Lanka. www.thuru.lk/ <https://thuru.lk/>

For each delivery we have a handout, explaining the project, something about IVP and a plant list for that particular delivery. This is important not only to spread the word about IVPs existence, but also to eliminate confusion when we are working closely with local councils. A grant from Coordinare has funded development and printing of a very nice brochure with the help of a graphic designer (attached).

Good media publicity was obtained both through our own efforts and through the community networks. Articles have been printed in the local paper and various recipient groups have written reports in their own publications.

<https://sci.ngo/plants-for-peace/>

<https://www.facebook.com/IVPAustralia>

Documentation.

Careful records have been kept of the plant species and numbers in each delivery. A short report is written after each trip and photos downloaded into the database. These are for our own records and memories and are available for scrutiny. An example is pasted below.

Was the project successful?

The project in building from a single proposition to reaching far into a scattered, often isolated, and trauma-affected population has been a great success. It has grown to be much bigger than we could have imagined. Communication networks expanded dramatically from our initial personal contacts with individuals in affected communities and emails to several Shire Councils. We were invited to community workshops with survivors and this brought us in touch with support networks of Council Resilience Officers, Red Cross, Local Land Services, State Government services officers and civilian volunteers. These have acted as amplifiers of our simple proposition as well as being a great opportunity for us to learn more about the effects of the fires, the needs of the communities and how best to support landscape recovery.

While the fires attracted immediate public responses - including internationally - the long term nature of recovery was misjudged. Most obvious impact was damage to commerce, stock or property; for which funds were made available. Communities themselves - from

fighting the fires, to clean up, to repairs to kilometres of fencing destroyed, to care for injured wildlife - come together outside of the official response. Our modest role was understood in this context, the obvious limits to what we offered fitted the pace of recovery and was in tune with the mutuality principle we observed widely.

Number of people impacted directly through the project and larger community impact

From October 2020 to 1st May 2021 seven deliveries were made to seven small and large communities. These varied from our attendance at Council run workshops or live concerts for affected communities to community organised fairs or gatherings. Pre-notice of our deliveries meant that locals gathered for distribution at the local shop, or on another occasion a working bee with community volunteers was organised to replant a small town park that was badly fire-affected. At another location our plants were left at a town community hub to be taken from there by support volunteers when visiting the scattering of more isolated places - farming localities in the surrounding hills. At each of the locations, individuals were able to choose the plants they wanted, usually taking between one and ten plants.



Community shop in the tiny village of Penrose, locals come for plants and a great chance to socialise.

Lessons to be learnt from the project

From the beginning there were just four of us developing and running this project. This has meant a high workload but easier communication and planning. Several others have helped along the way with particular deliveries. The admin, communication and logistics for this project have been very time consuming and really needs a specific person to cover this.

We took care to take plants suitable for the area we were delivering to, and not to include plants that could escape into the bushland. We soon encountered the difficulty of providing specific plants that had been lost in the area. This has led to communication with

indigenous community leaders about culturally important species. The work of loading and unloading the plants is quite physically demanding and tricky logistics mean there are often several stages along the route where plants are stored until we can gather enough for a delivery. We are now advertising for local youth to get involved and by this means hope to also recruit some new members.

We have improved our transportation and logistics and are now able to take around 400-500 plants with each delivery which makes travelling to distant locations more worthwhile. Purchase of a wheelbarrow proved necessary and on some occasions we have been able to borrow a trailer which has helped enormously.

Future plans

The grant from the SCI Natural Disaster Fund enabled us to establish the project on a sustainable basis. This in turn gave us the ability to apply for a longer term grant through Coordinare as part of the State Resilience Network. The Coordinare grant will fund our delivery costs until October 2022. Requests for plants are escalating as the project becomes better known and we plan one or two deliveries a month until funding runs out.

Another great advance was made when we were contacted by Foundation for National Parks who have a grant to support local nurseries to grow locality specific species. Along with IVP's grant to cover transport this is the perfect combination and means that in the future we can work with local knowledge to provide the right plants for each location.

Acknowledgements:

- IVP is grateful to SCI for providing a grant of 500 euro from the Natural Disaster Fund.
- This report written by Rita Warleigh and Stephen Horn.

Date: 30th June 2021

Plants for Peace

IVP internal Report: Moruya 21st March 2021

Contact person Kathryn Maxwell: SAGE V4A Coordinator.
Contact made through council Eurobodalla Council Resilience Officer.



Happy customer

Plants - Mahesh brought 150 to Gbn which were stored at Rita's place. Gary took four loads from Sydney to Marulan in hired van. He then sorted them and loaded the van and brought them to Goulburn. Stephen came to Goulburn on Sunday morning, picked up trailer, loaded car and trailer. Approx 400 plants were delivered (list below).

Logistics: Rita Gary and Stephen took the two and a half hour journey to Moruya. Met Kathryn and Phil Timms (assistant for workshop) at Red Door, St John's parish. There was no workshop. One customer turned up and took four plants. Kathryn assured us that plants would be taken and appreciated and that a future delivery would be most welcome. She has 200 families on her SAGE list and Recovery group have 800 on their list. Photos were taken and she will put them in SAGE newsletter and send us a copy. Phil could be a contact for future nursery project.

Scenario: SAGE project started with helping low income people but have expanded to help the many people struggling, living in caravans and high priced rentals after fires and trying to recover their lives. Builders all tied up, etc. Trauma far from over.

The fires burnt our 80% of the Eurobodalla Shire. They lost over 500 houses (with Development approval) and up to 300 unapproved accommodations. There are currently about 140 families living in tents, caravans and pods.

SAGE Veggies for All has been running since 2017 with financial assistance from IMB Bank community foundation grants. They have installed over 200 veggie beds across the Eurobodalla. This year they received funding to install 32 veggie beds for bushfire survivors. They also run basic veggie growing workshops for bushfire survivors and SAGE members. Next workshop will be held on Sunday 28 March.

Plant list:

Species	Variety or common name
Melaleuca thymifolia	white lace
Melaleuca thymifolia	pink lace
Pennisetum	purple fountain grass
Syzygium	lillypilly
Melaleuca Claret top	ti-tree
Kunzea Ambigua	tick bush
Muelenbeckia complexa	Necklace vine
Coprosma Kirkii	creeping mirror plant
Westringea Naringa	native mint bush
Westringia Wynyabbie gem	
Westringia fruticosa	
Dichelachne crinata	grass
Bekea vergata	
Nandina nana	sacred bamboo
Nandina Gulf Stream	
Salvia micropholla	'Margaret River'
Phormium	
Abelia	
Purple iris	
Oregano	



The plants unloaded



Kathryn from SAGE project counting plants. Gary and Rita in background. Red Door behind, where SAGE project takes place. Photo: Stephen

