

# rain

hail *or* shine

853

.....  
stories from the january 2011 floods  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to the people who shared their stories for this book.

- Kooreh Memorial Hall Committee
- Stawell Bowling Club
- The Hamilton Family
- Rupert Bibby
- Andrew and Merilee Reid

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the Northern Grampians Shire  
community

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## The Northern Grampians Shire Council:

- Is working with communities to repair their flood-damaged halls and community buildings. This has included assisting the community of Kooreh, where the hall was badly damaged, and helping the Navarre Recreation Reserve secure a grant for improvements.
- Has received around \$20 million from State and Federal Governments for the flood recovery effort thanks to the advocacy of Councillors and senior management.
- Is coordinating volunteer groups to help farmers and residents, whether it's with general clean-up efforts, social support or fencing restoration.
- Is continuing to advocate for community, sports and not-for-profit groups to obtain government funding to help with repairs to their community facilities.
- Is helping flood-affected residents claim the financial assistance and social support they are entitled to.
- Is working with businesses in flood-affected areas by holding workshops and providing advice and assistance on how to recover from the damage and economic impact.
- Is holding events to lift community spirit, give people a chance to get together over a barbecue and workshop ideas for the future.
- Is working with government agencies to ensure they are reaching the people who need their help.
- Is working on repairs to the Council's physical assets. The recruitment of five new staff members and engagement of civil works contractors to work solely on the massive repair job will ensure a coordinated and timely effort.

Cover photo

A letterbox at Banyena.

# Rain, hail or shine

## – we're all in it together

The rain events and flooding that swept through Northern Grampians Shire in September 2010 and January 2011 will have a long-lasting effect on our community both physically and emotionally.

The floods caused \$20.5 million worth of damage to Council infrastructure, disrupted farming operations, damaged houses and property, affected livelihoods and caused much distress to residents across the Shire. The impact of the floods has been felt far beyond the areas immediately affected and will continue to be felt for many years to come.

Each area in the Shire was impacted differently. In Halls Gap, the rain caused landslides that affected residents and business owners by keeping many parts of the Grampians National Park closed for many months. This in turn affected tourism and many businesses reported a down-turn in trade in the months following.

Great Western, Glenorchy and Marnoo were impacted by flood waters rising from the local rivers and streams and many homes were inundated. The impact of that was still being felt months later when mould and stability issues came to the fore. St Arnaud sustained minor flood damage but the bigger impact came when the town was without power for a week due to damage sustained to power infrastructure.

The stories in this booklet provide a snapshot of how different parts of our Shire were affected and how our residents coped in the weeks and months following the floods.

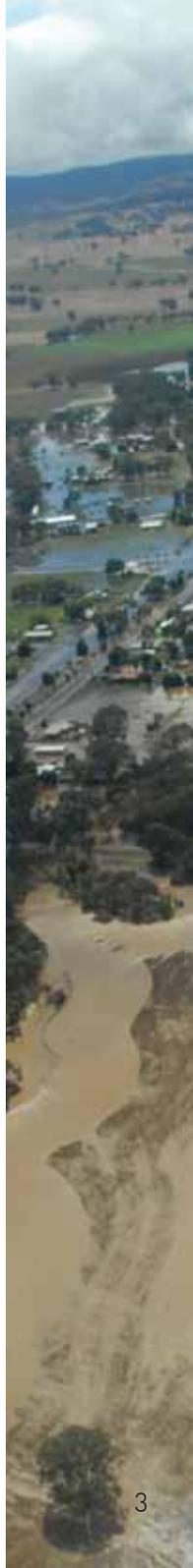
**We've come a long way since the floods and we're working together to repair, restore and reinvigorate.**

Northern Grampians Shire Council is fully committed to restoring the social, economic, built and natural assets of our community in conjunction with State and Federal Government bodies. In the weeks following January 2011, the Council established the Flood Recovery Team, to ensure a coordinated and timely response to the natural disaster. The Municipal Recovery Action Plan (MRAP) 2011-2013 was adopted by the Council in April 2011 and the team is working to implement the actions outlined in the plan.

The Flood Recovery Team was established using State and Federal government funding and aims to ensure recovery work is completed as smoothly and efficiently as possible. As the damage bill from the floods is more than three times Council's annual capital works budget, the work will take around two years to complete.

The built environment was not the only thing affected by the floods and the Flood Recovery Team is also working on the economic, social and natural aspects of recovery. This includes ensuring our flood-affected residents have access to the social services and financial assistance they are entitled to, working with flood-affected businesses and helping with the recovery of our natural assets.

The Council thanks residents for their help and support over the past year and looks forward to working with it as it continues the recovery efforts.





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 "HALF A METRE WENT  
 THROUGH THE HALL"  
 .....



## The Community Group

# Kooreh Hall Committee

An Indigenous name meaning “junction of the waters”, Kooreh (pronounced coo-ree) is located where the St Arnaud and Carapooee Creeks meet.

It’s a pretty area with a pretty name but the Kooreh Hall has been in the wrong place at the wrong time on four occasions since it was built in 1923. It has been flooded in 1939, 1956, 1973 and January 2011.

During the most recent flood, roads in the district were literally swept away and a sheet of water one kilometre square lay across the land.

Kooreh Hall Committee President John Proctor said the sight that greeted hall committee members on January 14 was shocking.

“The water came up 14 bricks high on the toilet block at the back of the hall and half a metre went through the hall,” he said.

“We originally thought the (hall) floor was going to be alright but it wasn’t.”

The floor was ripped up in July, five months after the event, revealing a hall still so damp that water was dripping from the undersides of the floorboards.

January 14 was the worst day for the Kooreh Hall. Committee Secretary Lois Wandel said committee members tried in vain to keep the water out, securing plastic sheets across the doorways but it didn’t help. The water entered through vents in the walls.



Mrs Wandel said committee members and Kooreh residents spent a week mopping up and manually removing a 15cm layer of silt from around the bearers and joists.

Not only were the hall's floorboards damaged beyond repair, the kitchen and supper room, including cupboards, a stove and other fittings, were destroyed.

The Kooreh Hall was built by residents in 1923 from rocks and small stones from the gold fields in the surrounding paddocks. Stone and mortar has held it together for nearly 90 years and not even the four floods have damaged the walls.

Mrs Wandel said the hall is well used as a gathering place for the community and hosts meetings, events such as a Christmas function, and dance classes and dances. All these events have had to be moved to alternate venues while the hall dries out and is then repaired.

"We are currently having dance classes in St Arnaud in the McDonald Hall. Meetings have been moved to people's houses and the hall committee has been meeting outside the hall in the car park. We are making do for the time being. We are a fairly strong community so it hasn't upset us much."

Committee member Marg Proctor agrees the community is very resilient.

"We are a small group but we're fairly strong and that shows up in a crisis," she says.

"You can see that by the way we worked together to get the mud out from under the hall. It took us a week – I think we surprised ourselves and a few others."

The committee is hopeful the hall will be ready for use again by mid 2012 as they are waiting for the building to dry out properly, a process delayed by the winter months. In the meantime, the hall committee will stay positive and start planning their re-opening celebration.

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“(THE COUNCIL) HAS BEEN  
FAN-BLOODY-TASTIC”  
.....

The Sporting Club  
**Stawell  
Bowling Club**



Top

Club Chairman, Andrew Sharp, on one of the greens during reconstruction.

Left

One of the flooded greens at the Stawell Bowling Club.

Above

Damage to Sloane Street, Stawell, across the road from the Bowling Club.



When the carpet of your bowling green is floating on top of 30cm of water, you know you probably won't be playing on it for some time.

Stawell Bowling Club Board Chairman Andrew Sharp says members were stunned when they found out about the extensive damage to their club, which came at a very inconvenient time two thirds of the way through its pennant season.

Adding to members' disappointment, one of the two damaged greens was only four years old and had just started playing well. (It takes some time for bowling green carpets to wear in.)

Quick thinking had to be employed to help the club continue to practice and play the pennant season out. Thankfully the Stawell Golf Bowling Club kindly offered its greens for both training and competition, club members were also able to use less damaged sections of one green before it was demolished for repair.

Andrew says the flood – which thankfully didn't damage the clubrooms – seriously disrupted the club's preparations for the finals. But members, being the resilient bunch they are, did exceptionally well, making the preliminary final in division 1 and winning the division 2 grand final.

Andrew says seeing the damage was devastating, but Northern Grampians Shire Council's Flood Recovery Team quickly helped forge a way forward by inspecting the damage and assessing the club for a State and Federal Government Natural Disaster Fund grant in the days following the floods.

"(The Council) has been fan-bloody-tastic," he says.

"I really don't know where we would be if they had not be there to assist us."

The Stawell Bowling Club repair was the first community project in Northern Grampians Shire to be completed under the Natural Disaster Fund. The first green was finished at the end of August 2011 and the second about a month later.

The club is situated right next to Cato Lake in Stawell. Andrew describes the flooding like "an ocean of water" coming across the road to the park and bowling club.

Having their greens back means a lot to the 130 members, which is evident while watching them practise. Club member Grant Seary needed to prepare for international championships in Hong Kong in November 2011, so the completion of repairs came just in the nick of time.

"There is a lot of excitement around the club at the moment," Andrew says.

"We had the opening of our season on September 10 and it was really great to be able to play on our own greens again."



## The residents

# The Hamilton family, Halls Gap

The rain events of January 2011 have had a lasting impact on the Hamilton family of Halls Gap.

It was landslide that threatened homes in the town in the heart of the Grampians National Park. Torrential rain – more than 270mm in 48 hours – destabilised the mountain slopes surrounding Halls Gap, causing more than 190 landslides across the park.

One of those landslides happened just above the Hamilton's home, travelling down the slope and sweeping away their fences and a ute parked in their driveway, and slamming mud and debris into their house.

Suzie Hamilton is just thankful no-one was hurt in the incident, which happened in the afternoon of Friday January 14 when nobody was home. Apart from a big cleanup, the house sustained only minor damage with a small amount of mud seeping in under the front door and the house moving slightly on its foundations from the force of the landslide.

A neighbour who was home at the time heard the landslide coming, initially believing it was thunder. He was shocked to see a seven-foot wall of mud and debris barrelling towards the Hamilton home.

Suzie says the family lost some possessions that were on the front porch or in the front yard, but even the family dog, who was on the back porch, survived the ordeal.

However it wasn't the physical damage that left a lasting impact on the family. "The thing that upset me most was that

I had a little floaty pool for the kids set up in the front yard and it got swept away," Suzie says.

"It was just a little thing but it was the thing that really got to me. You like to see your kids happy."

The landslide and ensuing events were traumatic for the whole family, especially for Suzie and her husband Troy's three children aged 17, 14 and 10.

The family was displaced for five weeks, living with friends and family in Stawell as safety assessments were conducted on their house. When they finally returned home, a prediction of another dangerous weather event triggered another evacuation.

It took months for an insurance appraisal to approve the replacement of their fences, which compromised their privacy. But Suzie remained positive through it all.

"At least we are able to stay in our home. There are people a lot worse off than us in other parts of Victoria and Queensland. We are just happy that no-one was hurt, that's the most important thing."

The family is still nervous about the continued threat of landslide but Suzie says they are confident they know the triggers and will leave immediately rather than risk being in the path of another landslide.

"Things have calmed down now but having said that, we are still nervous. When big storms are predicted we still have that little worry in the back of our minds," Suzie says.

"But we know the trigger points now and we won't take any risks."

“THERE ARE PEOPLE A LOT WORSE OFF THAN US”



Top

Suzie Hamilton and her children Hayden, 10 and Caitlyn, 17. The mud from the landslide is still visible on the sides of their home.

Bottom left

Landslides in the Grampians National Park.

Bottom right

Fences in the Hamiltons' backyard were destroyed by the landslide.



The farmer

## Rupert Bibby, Navarre

Rupert Bibby has lived and worked on his farm at Navarre his whole life and at 70, he's still as philosophical as ever about the life of a farmer.

"It doesn't get you anywhere by panicking or going crook," he says stoically.

"Most things go right but some years things go wrong. You might think there's something really wrong but everything comes around."

It is this philosophy that saw Rupert get on his all-terrain vehicle and build a two-foot-high levy bank around his machinery and grain shed in pouring rain during the January floods. There was nothing else to do.

Rupert and his son Bradley run sheep and grow grain (mainly wheat but also oats, barley and canola) on the family farm. Bradley was away on the weekend of January 14 to 16 but he rushed home to help protect the farm and its assets.

Rupert says all their crops, apart from the wheat, were in the ground when the rain started. A few weeks earlier the farm had been hit by hail stones and cyclonic winds and they lost 85% of the canola crop. They were about to go back and pick up the remaining 15% when the floods hit, wiping out the remainder.

They also lost more than 10km of fencing and 300 sheep despite moving the flocks to higher ground.

The farm received around 170mm in a 36-hour period, an inch and a half (about 38mm) just before dark on the Thursday.

"It was already bucketing and then we got another inch," Rupert recalls.



"I had to go out again and put another foot on the levy bank around the shed. The water came up to the back step of the house but thankfully it stopped there."

Not only did Rupert build the levy, move sheep and protect other assets on the farm, he and his wife Helen also helped out in the Navarre township during the wet weekend. They helped elderly residents, sandbagged the shop and local churches, and helped lift the church organs so they weren't water damaged.

In the months after the floods, the Bibby family had much of their farm fencing reinstated by a FloodMate crew from the Ararat Prison, funded through the Council's Flood Recovery Team, and the Catchment Management Authority, which has replaced fences along waterways.

The Council has also helped with community



**Above**

Rupert standing on the levee bank he built around his shed.

**Right**

Rupert with the Governor of Victoria, Alex Chernov.

**Left**

Some of the fencing damaged on the Bibbys' Navarre farm.

repair projects Rupert and Helen are involved with, including the Joel Joel Hall. A few months after the floods in May, the Bibby's hosted a visit by the Governor of Victoria Alex Chernov and his wife Elizabeth, which Rupert says was a great experience. Rupert and Helen drove the Governor and Mrs Chernov around the farm, showing the couple the affected areas. They were then invited to meet with the Governor again at a reception for flood-affected Victorians held at Government House in September, 2011.

Rupert says the effects of the flooding on the family have been hard but he reiterates that these kinds of events don't affect him too much. There have been worse floods in the area including one in 1939.

"That's what gets me through – I say it could have been worse," he says, ever the optimist.



.....  
"IT DOESN'T GET YOU  
ANYWHERE BY PANICKING  
OR GOING CROOK"  
.....

“YOU JUST GET ON WITH IT  
BUT IT WAS DAMN HARD”

The business

## Reid’s Mixed Business, St Arnaud

In St Arnaud, it wasn’t flood water that did the most damage during the weather events of January 2011.

It was a power outage that lasted nearly two days over the weekend of 14-16 January that really impacted on residents and business owners, including Merrilee and Andrew Reid.

The Reids own a mixed business that sells hot food, drinks, bread, milk and other staples in the main street of St Arnaud. They lost thousands of dollars worth of stock and all their business turnover during the weekend the power was out.

“You just get on with it but it was damn hard at the time because our weekends are big,” Merrilee says.

“But there were people much worse off than us, all those people in Charlton.”

The power outage was caused by extensive flooding in Charlton, north of St Arnaud, where more than 300 homes were inundated and many residents displaced and left with huge damage bills. The town’s electricity sub-station, which supplies St Arnaud, was also flooded causing the blackout.

While the power outage was the main issue in St Arnaud that weekend, it only compounded other problems for the Reids. Their business was one of the few buildings in St Arnaud affected by water as it was unlucky enough to be in the path of a dam above the town that, in the early hours of Friday morning, burst its banks after heavy rain overnight.

“Andrew found a small leak in the roof on Thursday night and put a bucket underneath, not thinking too much about it,” Merrilee said.

“He got up about 6.30am and stepped down into the shop into a huge pool of water. He wasn’t sure where the water had come from as the bucket under the

### Top right

The clean-up at Reid's Mixed Business in progress.

### Bottom right

Debris and mud at the rear of the business.

### Opposite page

Andrew and Merrilee Reid outside their business in St Arnaud.

leak was only half full. It turns out the water and mud had come through the backyard, seeped under the back door and come through the residence out the back and right through the shop to the front window."

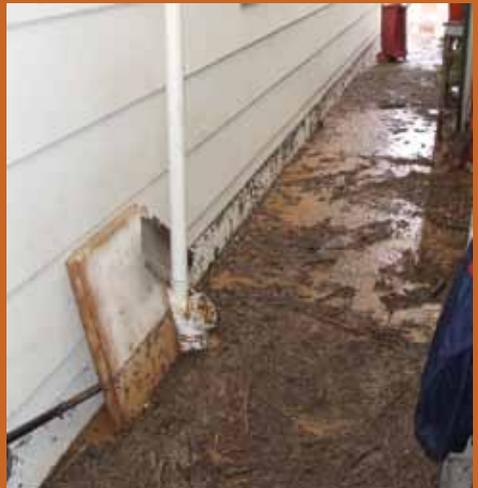
With the help of 25 friends, staff members, former staff, neighbouring business owners and even their housekeeper, the Reids spent all of Friday morning cleaning up the shop so they could reopen for business as soon as possible.

Reid's Mixed Business was the final resting place for the water that came from the burst dam and everything in its path ended up in their business' backyard. Merrilee says they were lucky the back gates were shut as that stopped a lot of debris coming through.

"We were very unfortunate that the dam let go. We wouldn't have been flooded otherwise," Andrew says.

As a result of their hard work cleaning up, Reid's Mixed Business opened at noon on Friday but it was that night that the power went out and they were back to square one. Electricity to the town was cut for 43 hours and the Reid's had to throw out around \$5,000 worth of stock including meat, milk and dairy products, saving some of their more expensive stock by using generators.

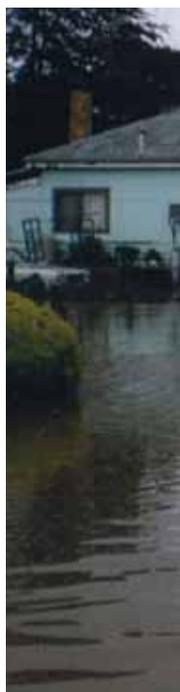
Merrilee says their business losses amounted to about \$10,000 as the weekend is their busiest time. They were insured for stock loss and building damage,



but not income loss.

Luckily for the Reids, repairs to the shop were minimal. It was the clean up and stock loss from the power outage that caused the most grief.

The couple is eternally grateful for all the help and support they received from the community in the wake of the event, something they say is a wonderful benefit of living in a country town.



Top right

Road damage on the Wimmera Highway at Kooreh.

Bottom right

The view up High Street, Navarre.

Top

A flooded paddock in the north of the Shire.

Above middle

Extensive damage to Sloane Street, near Stawell Bowls Club.

Right

Teddington Weir in flood.







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### **Contact the Northern Grampians Shire Council Flood Recovery Team**

The Council's website has a host of information about what it's been up to, including press releases, important links and the monthly Flood Recovery Update. Visit the site to find out more or contact us directly.

#### **Phone the hotline**

(03) 5358 7599

#### **Send an email**

[ngshire@ngshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:ngshire@ngshire.vic.gov.au)

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