

Filling the tanks: How Nambucca Valley Council is boosting rural resilience to bushfires

COUNCIL NAME

Nambucca Valley Council

WEB ADDRESS

nambucca.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

1,491 square kilometres

POPULATION

19,000

FUNDING PROGRAM

Increasing Resilience to Climate Change

Overview

The large blue box beside Park Street in Bowraville may look unassuming – but it could be a lifeline for rural residents in the Nambucca Valley Shire when the next emergency strikes.

With the help of the NSW Government and Local Government NSW, Nambucca Valley Council has installed a water filling station in a central spot in Bowraville.

Today, a pilot project is underway to test how water filling stations could increase the resilience of rural and remote residents as our climate changes.

Background

As catastrophic bushfires blazed throughout the Nambucca Valley Shire in 2019 and 2020, some residents had limited access to our most precious resource – water.

Years of drought had taken their toll. Water supplies on rural properties were running dry and water tanks stood empty. Volunteers brought water in on trucks and people travelled many kilometres to access the water they needed to hose down their houses.

As one South Arm Farmer Darell Perks recalls: “The dams were down. The creeks up my way hadn't run for six months. There was nothing there. I had underground water, but others were scratching for it. When the fires came there was none and even to use for firefighting, we had to bring it in. It was very hard.”

Implementation

Nambucca Valley Council's project established three clear objectives: to increase the resilience of rural and remote residents in the event of emergencies or droughts; to pilot a solution that could be replicated throughout the valley; and to improve community resilience to climate change. A simple but smart solution has addressed all three.



Bowraville – a central point for the rural areas of Taylors Arm, South Arm, Buckra Bendinni, Argents Hill, North Arm and Missabotti – made an obvious choice for a water filling station. And the easily accessible location at Park Street proved the perfect spot for this purpose because it could accommodate all types of vehicles, from cars to emergency service vehicles used during bushfire emergencies.

The location cuts the length of time people must travel to access water during bushfire and other emergencies, especially bushfire crews that may otherwise travel further between water supply points and operational frontlines.

The station – a standard unit supplied with a backflow prevention device – was installed with a solar panel to provide power. The station features two outlets – one 25mm in diameter and the other 80mm diameter – to cater for both domestic and commercial users.

The pay-as-you-go facility operates by credit card, but council can change the station's settings remotely to issue water free of charge in an emergency.

Outcomes

Council is currently monitoring use of the water filling station and intends to apply the information and insights gleaned to future installations.

If this pilot project is successful, it will be replicated in other locations throughout the valley to assist residents most affected by natural disasters that are a direct result of the changing climate," says Nambucca Valley Council's Grants and Contributions Officer, Teresa Boorer.

Key Learnings

Council has encountered no significant issues with the project. While the supply and installation of the water filling station was a simple procedure, some council coordination was required to install the credit card reader. Service charges associated with the credit card reader could influence the cost of water in the future.

The Nambucca Valley is no longer in drought and the region's dams are full. But Teresa says Council is focused on activities that build long-term resilience and prepare the community for the next bushfire season.

"We hope the water filling station will ease some of the stress that residents feel during emergencies, as they know they have access to a reliable water source during trying times."

More information

Learn more about the [Bowraville water station](#) on YouTube.

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Funded by the
NSW Government
in association with
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