



Sarsfield Community Association &  
Sarsfield Recreation Reserve Committee of Management  
10 School Road  
Sarsfield, VIC 3875

Website: <https://www.sarsfield.com.au/>  
Enquiries: [enquiries@sarsfield.com.au](mailto:enquiries@sarsfield.com.au)

16 February 2022

Hon. Darren Chester MP  
Federal member for Gippsland - Victoria  
Via e-mail: [darren.chester.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:darren.chester.mp@aph.gov.au)

Subject: Feedback on unsuccessful NRRRA Black Summer Bushfire Recovery (BSBR) Grant Application 2022

Dear Darren,

On behalf of the Sarsfield Community Association (SCA) and Sarsfield Recreation Reserve Committee of Management (SRRCoM), we are writing to you to thank you for your prompt follow up on our unsuccessful NRRRA Black Summer Bushfire Recovery (BSBR) grant application. We write to formally request that you seek further feedback on this outcome and investigate options to review this decision.

The Federal Government Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER) formally notified the SRRCoM today that our application was deemed ineligible because the SRRCoM is not an eligible entity under Section 5.3 of the guidelines (see attached email). This determination was made based on the SRRCoMs status in the Australian Business Register as a 'State Government Entity'.

A Victorian Department of Land, Environment, Water and Planning (DELWP) representative has confirmed today the SRRCoM status of 'State Government Entity', because the SRRCoM is appointed by DELWP to manage the community facility.

To assist you in seeking further feedback from DISER, we provide the following context about our community and fire recovery support; our BSBR application and the broader BSBR process.

### **Community impact and need**

As you know, the Sarsfield community were significantly impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. Greater than 49% of our locality was burnt and out of 270 homes in Sarsfield, 200 homes were fire impacted with 80 homes destroyed. Arguably, Sarsfield was one of the most impacted townships in East Gippsland and the country.

The trauma experienced by our community has been significant and compounded by the preceding drought and following pandemic (COVID-19). Despite these challenges our small but resilient community has rallied, constantly supporting each other. Those who could find the energy have also

engaged in community planning. Sarsfield now has a community endorsed plan: *Sarsfield 2030*. Spinning off from the community plan is a site-specific master plan that was prepared for the Sarsfield Recreation Reserve.

The Recreation Reserve is our only community asset. It is the only public land we can directly influence, which is achieved through the volunteer committee of management (working closely with the SCA). Multiple community surveys conducted by the SCA have identified that a key priority for the community is to develop the Recreation Reserve in line with the master plan.

Our amazing community have all come on the journey of understanding what we want and need. The Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Funding application looked to realise this vision. While there will be other grant streams, both committees felt this grant stream matched our circumstances and needs. As such we are devastated to have our application deemed to be ineligible.

### **Our understanding of the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants guidelines**

As you will understand, the SCA and SRRCoM carefully checked the BSBR Grant Guidelines prior to preparing our application. We note that the eligibility criteria in Section 5.1 specifies that organisations eligible for funding must have an ABN and be one of a list of entities. The SRRCoM meets at least two of these criteria for eligible entities, being both 'An entity incorporated in Australia' and 'An incorporated not for profit organisation'. We further note that section 5.3 specifies that a 'Commonwealth or state government agency or body' is ineligible to apply, however this is qualified by the words '*with the exception of those entities referred to in Section 5.1*' (my italics).

The SCA and SRRCoM were assisted by Bushfire Recovery Victoria, East Gippsland Shire Council and a professional grant writer to prepare our grant submission. It was our hope that with this strong assistance and oversight, any risks of grant non-compliance would be avoided. No-one within this support team, nor the volunteer grant writing committee identified this as a potential issue.

### **Other organisations funded and ABN arrangements**

It appears that there are a range of projects accepted into the Grants program that are located on Crown land, which suggests this is not a contributing factor to the ineligibility of the SCA and SRRCoM application. The key issue is now confirmed that the lead applicant (SRRCoM) has an ABN registration which precludes our eligibility to support the Sarsfield community through our chosen project, a simple fix would be to switch the lead applicant to the Sarsfield Community Association (SCA) (ABN 35 824 804 725).

The SCA and SRRCoM have consistently worked together and will continue to do so. The grant application (like this letter) was prepared by both committees. The grant writing subcommittee opted to use the SRRCoM as the lead applicant as they are the land manager, however we see no reason why the SCA, as an incorporated association, could not be the lead applicant.

### **Lack of major funding into Sarsfield Community**

SCA and SRRCoM are very proud of our community led approach to bushfire recovery and community development. Our groups have heavily invested in consultation and planning. There is little doubt this process has also been impacted significantly by the COVID 19 pandemic. It is only now (two years after the fires) that we have the necessary information and a mandate from our community to apply for significant grants like BSBR Grants program.

Unlike other bushfire impacted communities, Sarsfield has not received a single major State or Federal grant since the fires tore through our community.

We believe our application to the NRRRA Black Summer Bushfire Recovery (BSBR) Grants program was community led, fair and reasonable and was definitely not designed, written or submitted by a State Government Entity. We request you pursue a clarification of this outcome and seek re-assessment of the decision based on the information provided in this letter.

We thank you for taking an interest in this matter and look forward to hearing from you within a reasonable timeframe. Please don't hesitate to reach out to Rod Thomas or myself (Simon Hof) if you wish to discuss the matter further.

Kind Regards,



Simon Hof –President  
**Sarsfield Community Association Inc.**  
Email: [president@sarsfield.com.au](mailto:president@sarsfield.com.au)  
Phone: 0472 838 149  
Web: <http://www.sarsfield.com.au>



Rod Thomas –President  
**Sarsfield Recreation Reserve  
Committee of Management**  
Email: [treasurer@sarsfield.com.au](mailto:treasurer@sarsfield.com.au)  
Phone: 0419 305 379