

Southern Downs Regional Council

---

# LOCAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN Bushfires 2023



**Southern Downs**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

## Recovery Narrative

### About our community

Encompassing the rural centres of Warwick and Stanthorpe, Southern Downs is conveniently located within two hours' drive from Brisbane and in the high growth region of Southern Queensland. The region services a growing population of approximately 35,400 and covers an area of approximately 7,120 square kilometers. Our main population centres are Warwick, Stanthorpe, Allora and Killarney with many other smaller villages located throughout the council area.

Our economy relies heavily on agriculture (cattle, sheep, fruit and vegetables). Other important industries include wine production, intensive animal production (cattle, pigs, chicken), value added agricultural products, renewable energy and transport. Tourism is a major economic driver for our region with many significant events.

From magnificent historic sandstone buildings to sophisticated wine cellars and areas of outstanding natural beauty, Southern Downs offers an annual calendar filled with internationally renowned events and attractions to satisfy all interests. The region is renowned for producing high quality agricultural products and offers an ideal environment for business and industry growth.

In October 2023, the Southern Queensland Bushfires impacted communities across the Southern Downs, specifically Wallangarra, Ballandean, Dalveen and Swanfells areas. Over 18,000 hectares of land was impacted, with a larger number of rural residential landholders directly affected in these bushfires with damage to houses, fences, farm sheds and other infrastructure. Several horticulture enterprises sustained significant damage to crops.

### Council and vision statement

Our recovery will be founded on a collective, community led approach, enabled by inclusive communication and partnerships. Our approach will be to ensure the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt communities are able to improve capacity, grow and prosper to enhance community resilience. The Southern Downs Recovery and Resilience Plan was endorsed by Southern Downs Regional Council on 10 March 2024.

### Council values

- Success
- Determination
- Resilience
- Commitment

### Recovery and Resilience Group

Established: 2 November 2023  
Chaired by: Cr Sheryl Windle

### Recovery and Resilience Sub-Committees

- Human and Social
- Economic
- Environmental
- Roads and Transport
- Buildings

### Key stakeholders

Southern Downs Regional Council, Southern Downs community members, Australian Red Cross, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA), Department of Housing, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Queensland Police Service (QPS), Rural Fire Services Queensland (RFS), State Emergency Services (SES), Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR), Department of Education (DoE), Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), Queensland Health, Lifeline, Agforce, Sunwater and Ergon Energy, Telstra, Salvation Army, TRACCs, Bushkids, Granite Belt Neighborhood Centre.

### Recovery and resilience themes

1. Response: ensure community safety.
2. Rebuilding: bring the community forward to a new normal.
3. Restoration: working together to repair and re-establish community linkages across the lines of recovery.
4. Resilience: embed the principle in all activities to mitigate, improve and build betterment for the community.



## Damage and Impacts

### Human and Social

- Cumulative psychosocial impacts on the community as result of drought, bushfire, floods, exacerbated by further bushfires, leading to bushfire related job losses, increased financial stress due to bushfire related reduction in income and/or work hours and increased living expenses.
- Evacuations from residential properties.
- Evacuation centres set up at Stanthorpe Civic Centre (nil registrations) and Warwick Town Hall (19 people @ peak operational level). 29 people sought refuge at the Wallangarra Hall, others sheltering in place, with animals being housed at local facilities.
- Acute mental health impact on evacuees as a result of animal disaster management arrangements including related communication (preparedness and response).
- Mental health impact on affected residents as a result of negative media coverage.
- Displaced residents with homes either razed, damaged beyond repair, or with damage rendering them unliveable until repaired.
- Bushfire impacts exacerbated existing disadvantage in community resulting in increased need for psychosocial support services.
- Increased burden on support service capacity due to increased need for psychosocial support services.
- Psychosocial impact and increased anxiety for children and young people in Wallangarra and Dalveen due to the fire event, parents being volunteer firefighters, school closures and disruption to Year 12 students studying for exams.
- Loss of the Wallangarra Child Care/Kindergarten school bus in the fire.
- School bus runs impacted due to damaged/closed road.
- Psychosocial impact in Wallangarra due to inequity of assistance cross-border, aggravation of existing social issues with further fragmentation of existing social networks.
- Mental health impacts on Primary Producers and community members due to continually coming across dead and burnt livestock, wildlife, and pets.
- Community-wide mental and physical health impacts as a result of the speed of the Wallangarra-Jennings fire; community members reported that they thought they were going to die.
- Psychosocial impact of perceived disparity of bushfire response throughout this event in different parts of the region.
- Bushfire impacts increased breathing problems, asthma and heart conditions; increased financial burden due to cost of medicines due to increased ailments.
- Increased anxiety for residents due to not being able to return home as a result of not having any power or water.
- Increased anxiety for some community members due to potential contamination of drinking water resulting from fire ash and retardant.
- Increased financial burden for impacted individuals and families due to loss of food as result of loss of power, not being able to work due to road closures, loss of contents in damaged/destroyed sheds, loss of vehicles, and smoke damage to soft furnishings and clothing.

### Economic

- Loss of income to community members due to forced weekend closures of small businesses, especially in Wallangarra and Dalveen.
- Loss of income to community members due to evacuations/road closures and no passing highway trade.
- Increased financial burden to community members due to:
  - reports of community members not being able to work due to road closures associated with firefighting incident control.
  - having to care for family members experiencing respiratory and stress / trauma illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke and damage to property.
  - respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
  - having to purchase additional medication due to respiratory illnesses associated with reduced air quality as a result of bushfire smoke.
  - having to replace tank water due to effects of ash and fire suppressant on water supply
  - loss of employment as a result of businesses closing due to impacts associated with bushfires.
- Increased financial burden to primary producers due to loss of feed – approximately 20,000 hectares of agricultural land lost as a result of bushfires around Swanfel's, Montrose, Dalveen and Wallangarra areas.
- Loss of income/profits to:
  - landholders across the region – water allocated against pre-existing commercial agreements (private water licenses) used by QFES for firefighting purposes.
  - local suppliers due to donations of goods to the region.
  - specific businesses along the New England Highway such as Wallangarra, Dalveen– due to road closures on 31 October – 2 November from active bushfire.
  - tourism industry - perception that visitors were unable to attend local tourist attractions – accommodation occupancy for tourism stalled for a number of days.
  - tourism industry and small businesses - decrease in the number of tourists visiting the region due to reduced air quality as a result of smoke generated from bushfires.
  - Loss of income/profits to agriculture and viticulture industries, transportation and freight companies, stock agents due to major highway closures.
  - primary producers - \$value of livestock lost.
- Girraween National Park – no camping permits issued due to threat of bushfires and major impact on tourism visitation for the Region
- Fire impacts on good quality agricultural land and cessation of grazing production systems with large volumes of alternative fodder required.
- Increased financial expenditure burden on Council due to:
  - having to undertake a separate marketing campaign in tourism promotion to turn around and counteract negative media coverage and promote confidence in the visitor / tourism economy of the region post the bushfire event.
  - pay for costs of laundering bedding from Warwick evacuation center.
  - management and logistics associated with impacts on capital and operations works delivery program.
  - the redeployment of resources to incident support and recovery programs.
- Financial burden as some properties not insured and some properties are under-insured with significant rebuilding capacity delays.
- Significant financial burden upon rural producers who have suffered multiple natural disasters including drought, bushfires and flooding all within 5 years, with insufficient production system recovery time between events.

## Damage and Impacts (cont.)

### Environmental

- Large pockets of vegetation destroyed, native bushland around and inside affected areas.
- Threat to unique flora and fauna endemic to the region.
- Generation of additional waste and landfill as a result of burnt items.
- Short term impacts to the Warwick Waste Management Facility and roadside waste collections in the region, due to road closures and evacuation areas.
- Public health concerns due to continued effects of ash and fire suppressant on roofing, water supply and air quality due to smoke generated from bushfires.
- Biosecurity concerns – risk of weed and seed spread due to influx of fodder received from across Australia.
- Public health – potential incorrect handling and transport of asbestos materials burnt/destroyed by bushfire. Potential exposure to asbestos for those looking at fire damaged properties, including media.
- Public health concerns – reduced air quality as a result of smoke generated from bushfires.
- Power outages for 14 hours across affected communities.
- Large numbers of native fauna burnt
- Damage to waste water assets at Wallangarra
- Increase in wild dog activity in areas impacted by the bushfires.
- Public Health concerns from burning offal pit at Wallangarra

### Buildings

- Damage to:
  - Energy Queensland, Essential Energy (NSW) infrastructure and telecommunications infrastructure (NBN, Telstra and Optus). This damage includes a number of power and telecommunication poles burnt out, and loss of power to towers.
  - pipework at CED dam in Wallangarra.
  - taxiway at Massie Aerodrome, plane filling station.
- Two houses lost, one house significantly damaged, 8 sheds lost, 1 shed with moderate damage, and other structures damaged in Wallangarra area.
- Two houses lost, 2 sheds lost and other structures damaged in Dalveen area.
- A number of on-site waste water system systems damaged, including Rams Oval.
- Damage to Wallangarra State School oval.
- Hundreds of kilometers of livestock fencing damaged/destroyed around both Wallangarra and Dalveen areas
- Telstra mobile tower at Wallangarra lost power impacting emergency services, the community and service providers.
- Multiply SWER power lines damaged/destroyed across impacted areas.

- Residents without power due to damage to electricity grid infrastructure.
- Private Property power poles damaged/destroyed.
- Infrastructure on properties damaged/destroyed.
- Signage and recreational infrastructure damaged/destroyed.

### Roads and Transport

- Local road closures as a result of being impacted by smoke & debris (fallen trees):
  - Old Stanthorpe Road
  - New England Highway between Warwick and Dalveen closed.
  - New England Highway between Stanthorpe and Wallangarra closed.
  - New England Highway between Wallangarra and Tenterfield closed.
- Bushfire damage to road furniture.
- Warwick to Stanthorpe railway line closed.
- Stanthorpe to Wallangarra railway line closed (4 x Railway timber bridge burnt)
- Railway Road Bridge at Bridgelink Drive Wallangarra is closed due to fire damage

## Recovery Tasks

### Human and Social

- In partnership with relevant local service providers and/or state agencies:
  - coordinate outreach calls/visits to individuals/communities isolated from bushfires to assess human and social impacts and provide access to psychosocial support services when required;
  - provide emergency hardship payments where eligible;
  - provide access to psychosocial support services when required with Lifeline;
  - coordinate the distribution of donations, gift vouchers and vouchers to impacted community members when required;
  - host community recovery information sessions at Wallangarra, Swanfels and Dalveen.
- Coordinate an event debrief with Council staff and LDMG to inform plan updates and processes.
- Strengthen the region's recovery and resilience capability and mitigate future potential public safety risks through:
  - Investigating funding opportunities to:
    - Support recovery and resilience across Human and Social specifically accumulative effects of disasters;
    - Complete a resilience study of the Southern Downs region and implement resilience strategies identified by the Study;
    - Improve telecommunications and connectivity for emergency personnel (for communications and safety during disaster events) and community (mobile connectivity for receiving emergency alerts and notifications; and
    - Work collaboratively with community members and identified stakeholders to construct fire breaks on property perimeters and around dwellings and remove waste stockpiles.
  - appointment of a Regional Resilience Coordinator to drive resilience action at a regional level; and
  - coordination of disaster recovery training for local recovery group membership (including local recovery advisors)
- Residents placed in emergency accommodation, or temporarily staying with friends/relatives.
- Assist short, medium, and long-term recovery, and be a conduit to support services as required.
- Transition community from evacuation centres back to their permanent residences/dwellings.
- Community Recovery/Pop Up Hubs established at Wallangarra, Dalveen and Yangan Halls.
- Additional support services situated at the Pop Up Hubs include Australian Red Cross, Salvation Army, Community Recovery, Lifeline Darling Downs, SDRC, Rural Financial Counselling Service, DrugArm, Wildcare, Star Community Services, Headspace, Uniting Care, Qld Mental Health TRACC,
- Reopen Wallangarra State School and Child care centre

### Economic

- Secure financial assistance support through activation of extraordinary funding measures for primary producers and businesses.
- Assess the economic impact on businesses (including small to medium enterprises, home-based businesses) and primary producers to promote opportunities to drive economic recovery and greater resilience.
- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities to support economic recovery.

- Promote mental health and wellbeing resources for businesses, Wellness coaches and financial counselling services to industry as required.
- Work with affected property owners as required to guide the development approvals processes for the reestablishment of damaged assets.
- Assist with fencing replacement by directing businesses/properties to funding opportunities.
- Support the operations of the Blaze Aid base in Stanthorpe to assist primary producers re-establish critical damaged fencing.
- Actively lobby State Government and Queensland Rail for the replacement of the damaged railway culverts and bridges to allow the Southern Downs Steam Railway to return tourist rail operations to Wallangarra.
- Actively promote tourism messaging and marketing in place to encourage travelers to visit and or return to the impacted region.

### Building

- Undertake damage assessments across impacted areas.
- Reconnect essential services (power and telecommunications) within impacted areas.
- Investigate opportunities and advocate for programs that support bushfire mitigation.
- Undertake reconstruction monitoring of private residences and businesses- assessed in the immediate response phase as damaged.
- Waiver building and plumbing certification applications fees for those community members rebuilding their homes
- Repair RAMS Sports ground septic tank
- Provide impacted residents with land clearing information to ensure clearing exemptions were being adhered to.

### Roads and Transport

- Undertake initial assessments across impacted areas to ascertain damage impacts to roads.
- Undertake a hazardous tree assessment and remove burnt trees as required from road corridors
- Repair and/or replace damaged road furniture.
- Lobby Queensland Rail to repair the Bridgelink Drive Railway bridge as a matter of urgency.
- Source funding to repair Massie Aerodrome pavement damage.
- Install additional tank inlets at Massie airport to support future firebombing activities

### Environmental

- Immediate reconnection of power and communications to impacted residences.
- Connect with NRM groups to manage weeds and pests and remove bushfire waste along riverine environment.
- Obtain and provide biosecurity advice and safety measures for prevention of spread of weeds and pests from vehicles entering properties for recovery works.
- In partnership with wildlife carers, support impacted native fauna.
- Replace damaged waste water assets at Wallangarra.
- Coordinate additional feed or water assistance for impacted small scale (hobby) farms, including small livestock holdings or domestic pets.
- Eliminate environmental hazards from burning offal pit at Wallangarra.

## Recovery Objectives

---

- **Short Term**

- Essential services - Power, water, waste, telecommunications – repaired and restored
- Community health, wellbeing and safety restored and resilience improved
- Environmental restoration and protection (prevention of spread of weeds and seeds) – Awareness/monitoring
- Economic activity restored and resilience improved
- Infrastructure is restored – property fencing, roadside furniture and water supply assets
- Quarterly meetings of Southern Downs Recovery and Resilience Taskforces reporting to LDMG
- Community members reach a state of recovery, including being able to make decisions about destroyed or damaged property

- **Medium Term**

- Essential services - Power, water, waste, telecommunications –improved resilience
- Stanthorpe to Wallangarra railway line reopened
- Confidence in the tourism market restored
- Environmental restoration and protection (prevention of spread of weeds and seeds) - monitoring
- Economic activity restored and resilience improved
- Community members reach a state of recovery

- **Ongoing**

- Increase community awareness and preparedness for all hazards through community engagement- ongoing

## Measures of Success

### Human and Social

- Coordinated outreach visits to all areas identified on the rapid damage assessment have been completed and human and social impacts have been identified and referrals made to relevant partner agencies where required.
- Community meetings have been held in Wallangarra, Dalveen and Swanfels.
- Community members have returned home.
- Community members have transitioned from evacuation centres into temporary/long-term accommodation or returned home.
- Community members have returned to work and are attending essential appointments (medical/allied health).
- Children have returned to school/childcare.
- Community members have accessed financial assistance where eligible.
- Community members have accessed psychosocial support where required.
- Community members participate in:
  - sports and community meetings;
  - sports and recreation events;
  - community events;
  - health services, aged care, and nursing home outings, programs, and activities; and
  - gatherings for religious worship.
- Funding secured to support community recovery and resilience strategies.

### Economic

- Economic impact on business and agriculture has been ascertained and opportunities to promote and drive economic recovery have been implemented (including visitor economy).
- Tourist visitation returns to pre-event levels.
- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.
- Livestock stock fencing has been repaired/reinstated.
- Livestock numbers return to pre-event levels
- Steam train services return to Wallangarra resume to at least pre-event levels.

### Infrastructure and Roads and Transport

- Damage assessments have been completed.
- Roads are open and fully operational.
- Damaged road furniture has been repaired and/or replaced as required on SDRC controlled roads
- Damaged road furniture has been repaired and/or replaced as required on DTMR controlled roads
- Queensland Rail has reopened the railway line from Stanthorpe-Wallangarra.
- Queensland Rail has reopened the railway line from Warwick - Stanthorpe.
- Massie Airport pavement damage has been repaired

### Environment

- Damage assessments have been completed and impacts across impacted areas have been recorded and restoration completed as required.
- Power and communications have been reconnected and are fully operational.
- Council, in consultation with NRM groups has developed and implemented a program to manage weeds and pests and bushfire waste along riverine environment has been removed.
- Biosecurity advice provided and safety measures for prevention of spread of weeds and pests from vehicles entering properties for recovery works have been implemented.
- Hazardous tree assessment has been completed burnt trees removed road corridors as required.
- Disposal of native fauna has been completed.
- In partnership with wildlife carers, impacted animals and native fauna have been rescued, rehabilitated, and released back into the environment or to their homes.
- Wallangarra waste water assets restored
- Domestic pets have been returned to their owners.
- Offal pit fire at Wallangarra has been extinguished with no environmental impacts.

### Buildings

- Damage assessments have been completed.
- Telstra mobile towers are fully operational with improved resilience.
- Multiply Ergon power lines have been repaired and are fully operational.
- Power poles on private properties have been reinstated and are fully operational.
- Fencing and infrastructure on properties has been repaired.
- Signage and recreational infrastructure have been repaired.
- Destroyed homes have been rebuilt and residents have returned home where they wish to.



Activations for Disaster Recovery Funding Assistance

For details of activations and assistance measures visit [www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations](http://www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations)

Disaster relief measure	Activation Date
• Counter Disaster Operations	8/11/2023
• Essential Services Safety & Reconnection Scheme	1/11/2023
• Personal Hardship Assistance Scheme	1/11/2023
• Freight Subsidy Scheme	3/11/2023
• Disaster Assistance (Working Capital Loans Scheme)	3/11/2023

Exceptional Category D Assistance measures

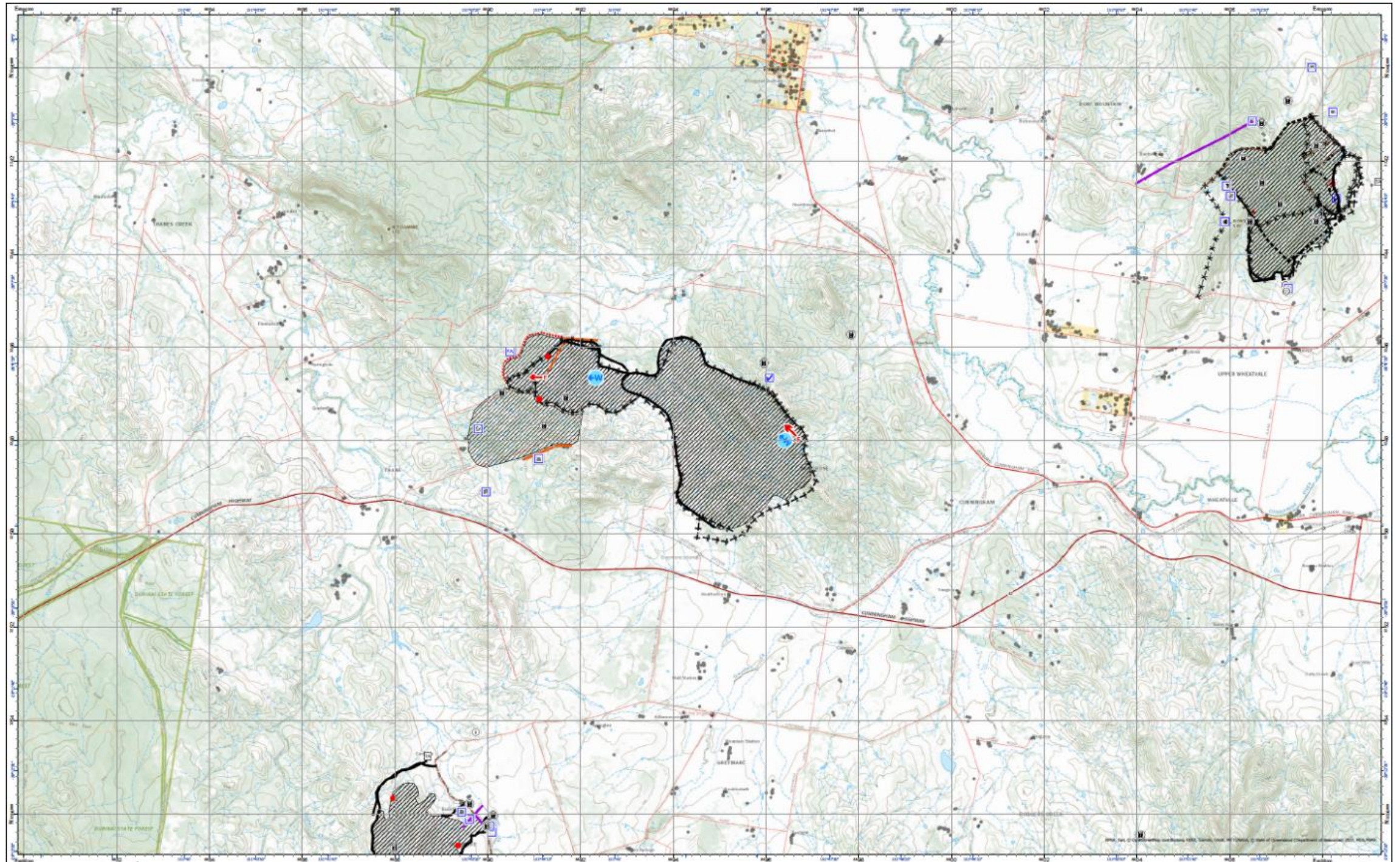
• Extraordinary disaster assistance grants (Grants for Primary Producers up to \$75000)	30/11/2023
--	------------



## Damage – Southern Queensland Bushfires

(8 September – 7 November 2023)

### Montrose Fire Area

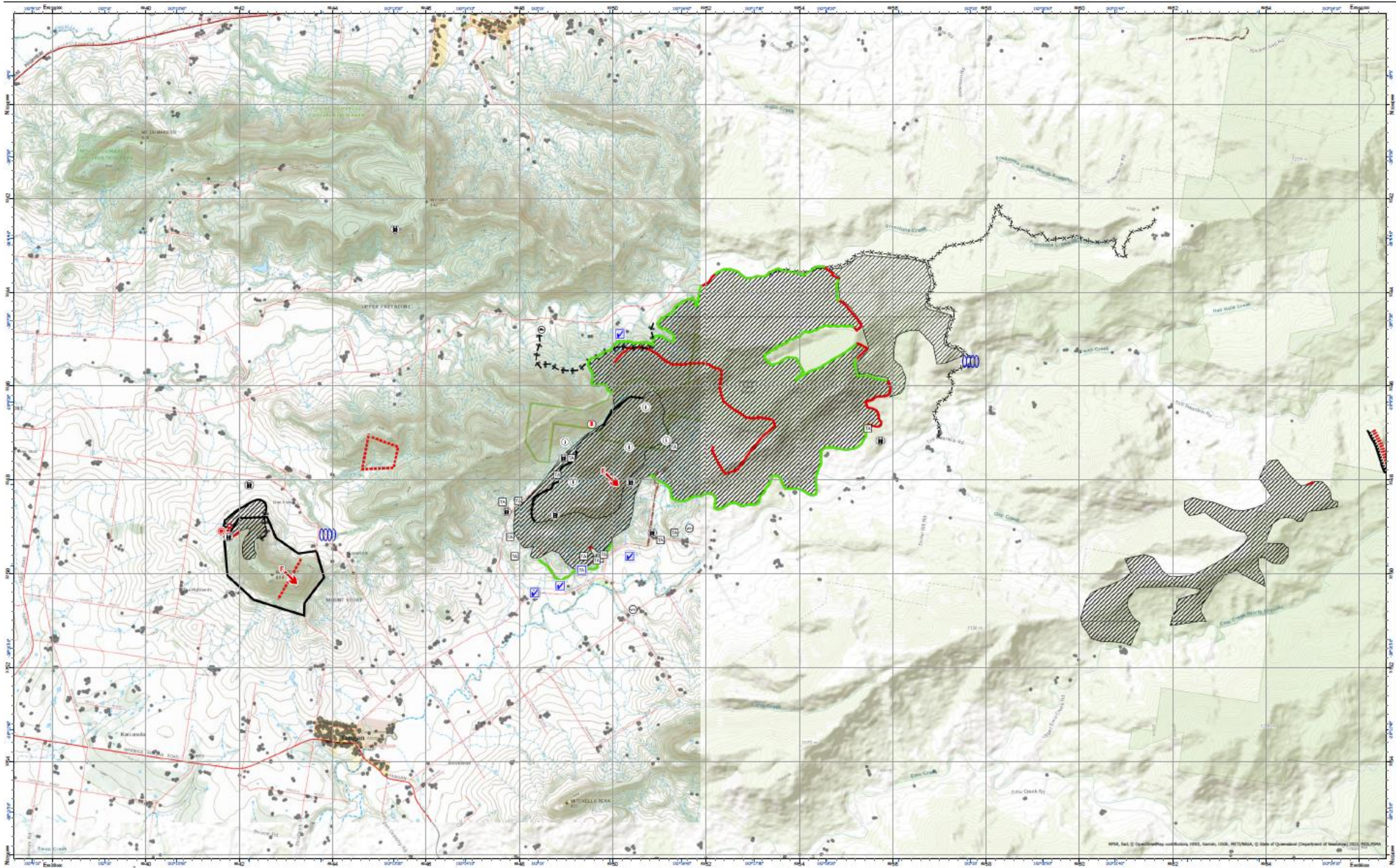




**Damage – Southern Queensland Bushfires**  
(8 September – 7 November 2023)

**Swanfels Fire Area**

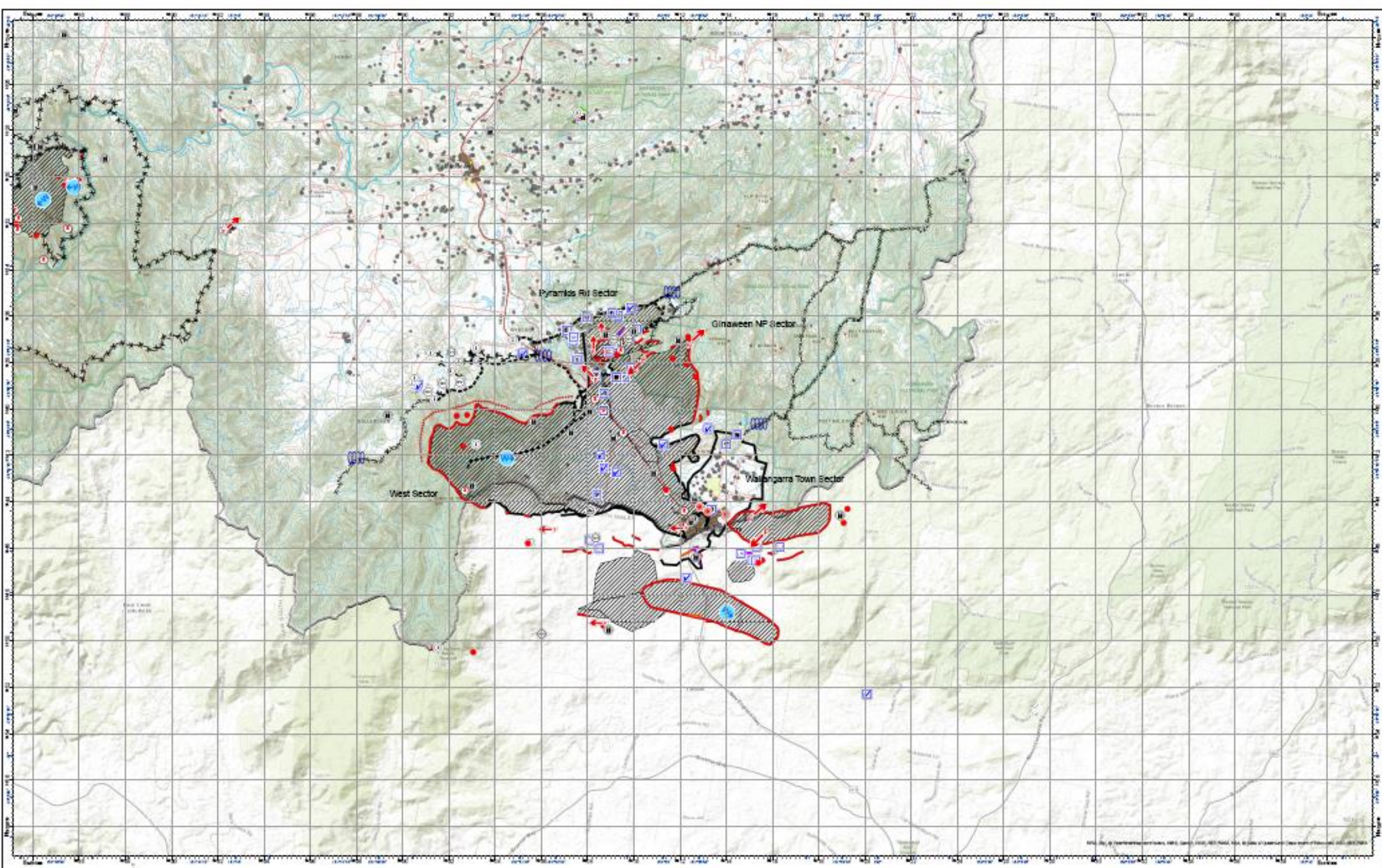
Damage - Locations





**Damage – Southern Queensland Bushfires**  
(8 September – 7 November 2023)

Wallangarra Fire Area



Damage - Locations



## Damage – Southern Queensland Bushfires

(8 September – 7 November 2023)

### Dalveen Fire Area

