

Reimagining Outward Bound - Bete Belong North, East Gippsland

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY GRANT APPLICATION

Outward Bound Bushfire Recovery

Outward Bound Australia has submitted a Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grant application. This grant application is for \$443k is to re-establish outdoor program delivery at our Snowy River base in Bete Belong North, inoperable since the bushfires. It provides for 3 base campsites, new rivercraft, development of new 'Recalibrate' programs, and refurbishes the base including solar, ICT and repair of tracks and fencing.

Outward Bound has developed a new adaptive and resilient post bushfire and COVID strategy, 'Reimagining Outward Bound'.

Established in 1954, Outward Bound is the heart and heritage of outdoor adventure and experiential learning in Australia (see [video link](#)). Outward Bound was significantly impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires, with 3 of its 5 operational areas across Australia decimated by fires (ACT, Nth NSW, Vic Snowies). The East Gippsland Buchan fire swept through OB's Snowy River Base, destroying all property except the large hill top operations shed, which served as a refuge for local farmers as they re-built. The bushfires caused programs cancellations, introduced additional risks from tree falls, erosion, flooding and volatile weather events, and added costs to scout new areas for safe camping and hiking. Since the bushfires, schools and communities have become more risk adverse to remote expedition outdoor learning programs.

Outward Bound has developed a new adaptive and resilient post bushfire and COVID strategy, '[Reimagining Outward Bound](#)'. Our aim is to diversify and grow our programs, reduce reliance on bushfire vulnerable National Parks and remote expeditions that are exposed to climate change impacts, and develop programs that aid recovery, aligned with community needs. We are keen to help get young people back out into the bush – at a time when it is needed more than ever.



2. Victorian Snowies Recovery

Prior to the Black Summer Bushfires, OB ran expedition programs for up to 25 concurrent groups throughout the Snowy River National Park, with back up support from OB's base at Bete Belong North. The bushfires decimated the National Park and OB's base, with equipment & facilities destroyed. The area was not safe or suitable for programs to run in 2020. In April 2021, a risk evaluation reconnaissance and small pilot program were run to evaluate conditions. This found that the expedition circuit's capacity for programs will be significantly reduced for some years. However, there is potential to develop a new type of program, with base camping on the river incorporating environmental and personal regeneration.

This grant application aims to realise this potential. The first part of the project is the development of base camp facilities & equipment. This will fund the construction of 3 campsites with shelters, picnic tables and compost toilets for groups to base camp by the river. A fleet of new rivercraft, 'funyaks' and rafts suited to environmental exploration will be purchased. The operational facilities will be re-instated to support programs, replacing and updating facilities destroyed in the fires and work out while the shed has provided refuge for locals rebuilding.



1 - Gippsland Fire scar and OB base destruction

The grant will fund new outdoor kitchen gas burners, cabinetry, fridge & freezer, washer & dryer and communal dining furniture. New upgraded internet access, satellite communications and security cameras will be installed to provide communications technology to meet contemporary standards for safe operations, adapting to the increasing risk of extreme weather events. Solar cells will be installed to provide sustainable energy. The access tracks will be graded and gravelled to repair severe erosion post bushfires and maintain campsite access. A new fence and cattle grid will be installed to separate operations work areas from participants. A new mower will replace the one lost in the bush fire to maintain base camp, reducing ongoing fire risks.



2 - Bete Belong North OB Base December 2020

However, there is potential to develop a new type of program, with base camping on the river incorporating environmental and personal regeneration.

A new 'Recalibrate' program will be designed and developed, with the grant funding a Program Business Development Manager for two years to support the program development, promotion and bookings, and manage participant preparation. These programs will be centred on base camping, with a range of day activities on the river and in the surrounds. *Recalibrate* programs will have three learning outcomes: firstly a focus on well-being, utilising the escape from busy urban digital context to slow down with activities including mindfulness, sunrise & sunset reflections, yoga and journaling; secondly environmental exploration and connection with bushfire regeneration and ecosystem repair, with activities including environmental exploration on the river in kayaks and rafts, eco-service, citizen science and learning about indigenous culture; and thirdly, on community living, developing relationships through bush camp group living. This type of program reflects an evolution in outdoor experiential learning, moving beyond the heritage of 'stress and test', to a contemporary model that intertwines adventure and challenge with well-being and environmental awareness. OB will provide staff training in the new program design. The grant will also help fund an annual risk assessment to ensure that program delivery is safe within the ongoing constraints of bushfire regeneration.



Outward Bound Base at Bete Belong North: Pre Black Summer bushfires. Main shed survived, all other infrastructure destroyed.

3 - Pre Black Summer bushfires. Main shed survived, all other infrastructure destroyed

A community working bee with OB staff, alumni, longstanding clients and local community members, will be held on the ANZAC day long weekend in April 2022. The working bee will set up the new base campsite facilities and equipment for the site to again be program ready. It will include environmental service on the adjacent 'Trust for Nature' land, a service activity in Buchan, and dinner at the pub! The event will bring the community together to celebrate regeneration and reconnect with a common purpose, providing a symbolic regeneration milestone. It will also provide an opportunity to promote the new programs and engender momentum in the evolution of OB on the Snowy River.



OB Base: two indicative sites for base camps marked



Reference Image: Campsite picnic shelter, OB Tharwa

4 - Snowy River Base and Picnic Shelter reference image

The grant will help to protect the environmental values of the site and help restore the ecosystem through environmental service. The Gunaikurnai people will be acknowledged as the traditional custodians of the land, with program activities incorporating indigenous learning, in consultation with local indigenous groups. Environmental stewardship will be met, with solar energy, sustainable landscaping and invasive weed removal.

'Recalibrate' Program opportunities will be grown with schools, community groups (including indigenous youth and disadvantaged groups), and school holiday programs, enabling up to 25 new programs each year. It will also support OB's development as an Open Awards Centre for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, with programs designed to meet the Award's requirements. It aims to generate \$1.7m in revenue and over 8,000 participant program days each year if the target of 60% seasonal program capacity is met. It will create 10-12 new jobs supported by staff training. Flow on economic benefits to Buchan and the region will arise through local supply of food and services and with participants also visiting other nearby attractions.



Reference Image: Fun Yak, inflatable kayak



Reference Image: Group travel by raft Snowy River

5 - *"You feel like you are in another world, just you and your friends and the river. It is both beautiful and exciting at the same time!"*

Letters of support for the grant application have been received from:

- Buchan Caves Hotel
- Kevin Heyhoe

- Victoria Police - Buchan Police Station
- Trust for Nature
- St Francis Xavier College
- Risk Resolve
- Neo Psychology

Project Summary

Infrastructure, facilities and equipment grant application: \$237,375

Recalibrate Program design and development grant application: \$206,000

Outward Bound Applicant project funding: \$45,300

Further Information

Further information about Outward Bound Black Summer Bushfire Grant application can be obtained through contacting:

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Outward Bound Australia pays respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, and pay respect to elders past, present and future

[The Heart and Heritage of Outdoor Education in Australia](#)

