

Boydton Beach, covered in ash and debris on January 7.

Rising from the ashes

Bushfires severely impacted the South Coast region soon after Briar Jensen undertook the Light to Light guided walk, but recovery plans are underway

LOCALS AND TOURISTS around Eden were evacuated during the peak holiday season (some locals had to leave up to five times), and parts of the Princes Highway linking Victoria to Eden remained closed for more than a month.

Anthony Osborne, spokesperson for Sapphire Coast Tourism, says the economic impact has been catastrophic, as the region relies heavily on tourism. Although the townships of Eden, Pambula and Merimbula weren't on fire, the evacuation and subsequent closure of roads and national parks has been devastating for cafés, restaurants, accommodation providers and tour operators. They rely on summer holiday trade and Osborne says the region desperately needs people to come back quickly.


Jenny Robb, of Kiah Wilderness Tours, says the fires have had a massive impact on the whole community. All her 26-hectare farm, except for the house, was scorched, and she only saved her kayaks by moving them into town. Her Youcamp sites are now open and she is leading kayak tours again, saying, "Clarity on the Towamba River is surprisingly good and the regeneration is beautiful to watch."

While 47 per cent of southern Ben Boyd National Park was burnt, Green Cape Lightstation, Saltwater Creek Campground and Bittangabee Campground weren't damaged, although access was affected. Boyds Tower is still standing, but is closed while undergoing assessment, as is Davidson Whaling Station. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service are striving to open as much



of the park as quickly as possible and, at the time of going to print, the two campgrounds and Disaster Bay Lookout and Green Cape Lightstation are scheduled to reopen early March, along with sections of the Light to Light track. The northern section of park was unaffected.

Cam Read of Light2light Coastal Walks says they anticipate offering full-length guided walks by May or June. In the interim, you can do bespoke hikes with accommodation at either Saltwater Creek Campground or Green Cape Lightstation. With the park's stunning geology and coastline now juxtaposed in parts against a black canvas bursting with green regrowth, it's a fascinating, photogenic and inspiring time to undertake the walk.

Before the bushfires, the NSW Government had allocated \$8 million for upgrading the Light to Light walk - including track realignment and building eco-huts - to turn it into a world-class four-day hike. If implemented quickly, it's a project that could offer a much-needed boost to the community. 

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