



## 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

### **BOOLARRA COMMUNITY CONSULTATION – 2 APRIL 2009 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission held a community consultation at the Boolarra Memorial Hall on Thursday, 2 April 2009. The community consultation was attended by more than 70 local people. The following summary reports key themes and issues that were raised by community members during the consultation discussions. This summary reports on what was stated and does not attribute views to any or all community members.

#### **IMPACTS**

- People experienced trauma, stress, devastation, guilt, anxiety, and community fragmentation, especially for those who have temporarily relocated being out of the communication loop.
- Damage from the fire included the loss of flora and fauna, assets and homes damaged or destroyed, water storage, environmental damage, and financial strain through lower property values and people leaving the area.
- Other major losses include damage to the rail trail which is a major tourism drawcard, local artists who have lost irreplaceable artworks, and gardens that have been built up over many years.

#### **WHAT WORKED WELL**

- CFA training, briefings and community meetings, although these could have better attended.
- Individual fire plans were of some assistance.
- Water dumps from helicopters.
- The CFA siren alerted those that could hear it.
- 774 ABC updates initially.
- Telephone trees worked well where phone coverage was not affected.



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### WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL AND WHAT SHOULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY

- Communications networks and equipment were inadequate: there should be back up or alternative energy sources to keep water pumps operating and access to radio communications intact.
- Official local emergency warnings were inadequate: the bushfire line and 000 should be better resourced on high fire danger days to avoid lengthy delays.
- There had been inadequate management of vegetation: fuel reduction burns need to be done more regularly, with a balance between clearing fuel and protecting the natural beauty of the landscape; towns should have a buffer zone of grasslands rather than forest and plantations should not be allowed to border too close to towns.
- Roads and tracks were not properly marked on maps and were hazardous: road maps must be accurate and clearly show roads that are safe access/exit routes (no through roads and impassable roads should be marked as such); roadsides should be cleared of overhanging trees.
- Information received on fires was sometimes out of date or not localised: local networks/knowledge should be linked to ABC 774; the ICC should access local intelligence; and fire fighters from other areas should be better briefed/supported with local topographical information.
- Co-ordination between emergency services agencies was poor: a one-stop shop or centralised co-ordination point for emergency services and relief agencies should be established, along with a safe, central evacuation point.
- Roadblocks were unhelpful: roadblocks should be manned by people with the authority and information to make decisions at the local level; an ID system to identify local residents to make it easier for them to negotiate roadblocks is needed.
- Emergency services and community members were not aware of who had stayed and who had left their properties: a simple and fire-resistant signage system is needed on individual properties for community members to indicate whether they have left their properties or not.
- There is a financial burden on smaller communities who are serviced by volunteer fire fighters: the government should compensate local businesses who release staff for volunteer fire-fighting duties; and more resources are needed.