



2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMISSION HEARINGS END

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission today finished its hearings into the causes and circumstances of the fires that devastated parts of Victoria in January and February 2009, killing 173 people.

The Commission was established on 16 February, nine days after Black Saturday, and the hearings began on 20 April 2009. Since then, the three Commissioners, Chairman Bernard Teague AO, Ron McLeod AM and Susan Pascoe AM, have spent a total of 155 days hearing evidence from 434 witnesses, including 100 lay witnesses and two expert panels.

There were nine days of hearings in three regional centres and 83 separate hearings into all fire-related deaths

The Commission's investigation was further enhanced by its interaction with the community. Twenty-six separate community consultation sessions were conducted in 14 fire-affected areas and almost 1,700 submissions from individuals and organisations were received and reviewed by the Commission. Almost 1,000 exhibits were tendered and the hearings produced over 20,500 pages of written transcripts.

"Foremost in our minds throughout these hearings have been the 173 people who died and those they left behind," said Commissioner Teague. "That will remain our focus as we complete our final recommendations."

Commissioner Susan Pascoe thanked everyone connected with the Commission over the past 15 months. "It has been a long and complex process," she said, "and the contribution from the staff behind the scenes, as well as our legal team and counsel assisting, has been outstanding."

Commissioner Pascoe also paid tribute to everyone who had given evidence, especially the lay witnesses. "Time after time we heard remarkable stories of courage, heroism and unselfish behaviour by emergency services personnel and members of the community."

Commissioner Ron McLeod acknowledged the professional and dedicated contribution by the media. "A number of media outlets have reported on the proceedings from the outset and have ensured that the community was kept constantly informed of the important work of the Commission."

The Commission will now consider its findings and prepare its final report for delivery to the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC, by Saturday, 31 July.

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