



Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

100 Day Report



Message from Christine Nixon



Victoria is only just beginning to recover from the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Rebuilding homes and towns, supporting local economies, regenerating the natural environment and restoring community identity is an enormous task – for government, for businesses, and most of all for the communities themselves. Many people are starting to plan for their future, but many others are still deeply affected by the traumatic experiences they have suffered.

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments established the Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority to coordinate and oversee the rebuilding program. This Report outlines the steps we have taken in our first 100 days.

Each fire affected community has very specific rebuilding needs. We are now in the process of identifying those needs so we can support communities to rebuild in the way they want. The sheer size of the devastated area and the huge number of people and organisations involved have presented challenges, but we are working through those issues in partnership with Community Recovery Committees, local councils, state and federal government departments and agencies, not-for-profit organisations and the private sector.

Among many other recovery activities, the clean-up is underway, temporary villages are being established at Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale, and 29 community meetings have been held with more than 4400 people to develop medium and long-term rebuilding plans that reflect the wishes of each fire affected region.

The reconstruction effort is a sensitive, evolving, step-by-step process. I would like to thank the many thousands of people I have met for their incredible spirit and determination to get on with the job of rebuilding. I would also like to acknowledge the commitment and contribution of our key partners, including the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.

Victoria's fire affected communities will heal at different times, in different ways. As the rebuilding program gains momentum, we will continue to respect their views, to consult widely, to continuously improve the way we work, and to do everything possible to enable communities to move forward with confidence into the future.

We have a long and difficult road ahead of us – but together we will rebuild.

Christine Nixon, APM
Chair, Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

The Authority's Terms of Reference

1. Advise governments, coordinate efforts and develop an over-arching plan for the restoration and recovery of regions, towns and communities affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires
2. Work closely with the community in the process of rebuilding and recovery, and ensure that individuals and communities are consulted closely – with such consultations to be transparent and sensitive to local needs
3. Analyse, and advise governments on, the impact of the bushfires on the communities, economy, infrastructure and environment in affected areas
4. Coordinate activities and the work of relevant organisations to help regions, towns and individuals re-establish their communities once it is safe to do so, in a way that is respectful of individual and community needs
5. Ensure that services to people affected are easily available and coordinated across all levels of government and community organisations
6. Work with communities to develop coordinated plans to deal with the effects of the disaster on local economies, communities, infrastructure and the environment. These plans should cover the immediate recovery requirements and longer term development
7. Have overall responsibility for ensuring that communities are rebuilt and projects are delivered quickly and efficiently
8. Work closely with all funding sources, including the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, to ensure effective and coordinated expenditure of funds

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We will rebuild

Unprecedented natural disaster

In February 2009 Victoria was devastated by the worst bushfires in Australia's history.

The scale of this tragedy was unprecedented. By the time the fires were contained, 173 people had lost their lives and many others were seriously injured, 78 communities were impacted and 430,000 hectares of land was destroyed.



Temporary Village, Flowerdale, April 2009

The long-term social, economic, cultural, physical and environmental impacts of the February bushfires are yet to be fully assessed. To date, insurance claims for residential, commercial, industrial and farming losses total around \$1.2 billion.

In the 2009–10 Victorian Budget approximately \$1 billion was allocated to fund the cost of fighting the fires and supporting fire affected individuals, communities and business to recover. The bushfire activities that are being delivered by the Victorian Government are funded either through new commitments, including those published in the 2009–10 Budget, or are being funded from within existing resources (such as from reprioritisation, existing grant programs or other means).

The Commonwealth Government has also made a significant contribution to the recovery, with financial and other assistance totalling \$212 million. In recognition of the unprecedented impact and devastation caused by the bushfires, the Commonwealth Government has agreed to fund 50 per cent of eligible relief and recovery activities being delivered by the Victorian Government. This includes a number of exceptional circumstance assistance measures under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. This agreement represents the Commonwealth Government's commitment to assist Victoria to recover from this tragic event.

Both Governments will continue to support the bushfire recovery and rebuilding phase.

The rebuilding task will be complex and far-reaching.

As each of Victoria's fire affected communities moves down the road to recovery, they will be supported to rebuild based on their local needs and at their own pace.

Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority was established three days after Black Saturday on 7 February.

The role of the Authority is to oversee and coordinate the largest recovery and rebuilding program Victoria has ever faced. It will ensure that fire affected communities are rebuilt, that projects

are delivered quickly and efficiently, and all those affected by the fires have access to relevant government and non-government assistance.

The Authority is primarily a coordinating body, working closely with communities, businesses, charities, local councils and Victorian and Commonwealth Government departments and agencies to oversee the rebuilding and recovery program.

Individual fire affected communities are now being supported to rebuild in the way they want. The Authority's objective is to understand the different needs of those communities and to help them rebuild and recover in a way that is safe, timely, efficient, cost-effective and sensitive.

At this point, the Authority is also coordinating two reconstruction and recovery projects which are unprecedented roles for government in disaster recovery – the demolition and clean-up operation and the creation of temporary villages in Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale.

Key Leaders and Committees

Christine Nixon APM has been Chair of the Authority since 2 March and is responsible for overseeing the rebuilding and recovery effort.

On 25 February, the Commonwealth Government appointed Bill Shorten MP as its Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction to assist the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in leading the Commonwealth contribution and ensuring a collaborative Commonwealth-State response to the bushfire reconstruction and recovery process.

The Authority has established other leadership roles and governance mechanisms to support its work. Major General John Cantwell AO was appointed as the interim head of the Authority from 12 February to 2 March until Ms Nixon took over. Major General Cantwell is now the Authority's Chief of Operations.

The Authority is in the process of appointing a permanent Chief Executive Officer to oversee its day-to-day operations.

The Authority reports to the Premier of Victoria and is finalising its staffing and support structures.

The Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Committee of Cabinet – comprising Victorian and Commonwealth Government Ministers – is responsible for making the policy decisions on the Victorian Government's response to the bushfires.

An Interagency Taskforce and an Expert Reference Group have been established to provide advice to and work with the Authority – and comprise of key community stakeholders including industry bodies, community organisations, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Victoria Police, Members of Parliament, and Victorian and Commonwealth Government officials.

Meetings of Bushfire Industry Champions – leading business and community figures – have been held to respond to the offers of assistance and discuss ways in which the private sector can help in the reconstruction effort. Future meetings will be arranged if the need arises.

Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was established on 16 February to investigate the causes of and responses to the bushfires.

The Authority is assisting the Royal Commission by responding to requests and redirecting any enquiries and submissions inadvertently received from the public. It will also note the findings of the Royal Commission's interim report to be released by 17 August.

Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund was established on 8 February by the Victorian Government in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and Australian Red Cross in response to the overwhelming generosity from across Australia and internationally wanting to support individuals and communities affected by the bushfires.

Funds donated through Red Cross have been transferred into a separate Trust Account established by the Victorian Government. As of 13 May, over \$346 million has been received and over \$240 million has been allocated and made available to bushfire survivors. Funds are being distributed through the Department of Human Services (DHS) under the oversight of an independent Advisory Panel comprising:

- Former Victorian Governor John Landy AC MBE (Chair)
- Professor Glyn Davis AC (Vice Chancellor, University of Melbourne)
- The Hon Patrick McNamara (former Deputy Premier of Victoria)
- Councillor Lyn Gunter (Mayor of Murrindindi Shire Council)
- The Hon Robert Tickner (Chief Executive of Australian Red Cross and former Commonwealth Government Minister)
- Christine Nixon APM (the Authority's Chair)
- Ex-officio member, Pam White (DHS)

Funds are already flowing to people and communities affected through a series of grants. A separate report is being released by the independent Advisory Panel detailing all assistance allocated and distributed to date.

The Authority will continue to work alongside the independent Advisory Panel to share the data and information needed to assist fire affected communities and to coordinate the rebuilding program.

Coronial Investigations and Taskforce Phoenix

The Victorian Coroner is primarily responsible for investigating the circumstances of deaths related to the bushfires. The first stage of this has been to ensure that a rigorous process of identification is followed in the timeliest way possible. A key part of this process is ensuring that the many people who lost loved ones in this disaster are supported during the Coronial process.

The bushfire victim identification process for the 173 people reported missing was completed by the Coroner on 8 May.

The Coroner's Office is working with a number of professionals and experts, including Victoria Police and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths. Victoria Police has established Taskforce Phoenix which will provide briefs of evidence to the Coroner about the circumstances surrounding the fires. If Taskforce Phoenix charge a person or persons with criminal offences, that criminal investigation and any prosecution will need to be completed before the Coroner's investigation can be completed.

Long-term planning framework

Recovery and reconstruction in fire affected regions is an enormous task that must take into account the needs of all affected communities.

The involvement of communities is at the forefront of the planning process and their contribution is being progressed through the ongoing community engagement activities led by the Authority. The first step has been to establish Community Recovery Committees to represent community views.

The Authority is coordinating the input of communities, local councils, Victorian Government departments and agencies and the Commonwealth Government as part of the planning process.

Project control groups have been established with local councils to assist the rebuilding planning process.

Community recovery plans are now being developed by Community Recovery Committees. These plans will capture all of the recovery and reconstruction activity and will be integrated into a Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Master Plan, which the Authority expects to be completed later in 2009.

Recovery and reconstruction framework

The Authority is using a recognised disaster recovery framework and has designed some overall guiding principles to govern activities:



Guiding Principles

As a starting point for the framework the following guiding principles will govern the overall activities of the Authority through the recovery process:

Welfare

The safety and welfare of people in the local community including householders, volunteers and workers will be the top level priority and will not be compromised

Meeting Needs

Resources for recovery will be focused on areas of greatest need in each community

Community Engagement

Community involvement is key and will be pursued through all activities with management at the local level empowered to deliver results

Integrity

Provision of services and resources will be governed by the principles of fairness and equity

Tailored solutions

The needs of each community impacted by the fires are different and the recovery solutions will be tailored to the specific needs of each community.

Snapshot

Impact of the Bushfires

By the time the bushfires were contained, they had destroyed or affected:

- almost 430,000 hectares of forests, crops and pasture, the equivalent of 212,000 Melbourne Cricket Ground arenas
- more than 2000 properties destroyed – another 1400 damaged
- over 55 businesses destroyed
- three primary schools and three children's services destroyed – with 47 primary schools partially damaged or requiring cleaning
- over 10,000 kilometres of fencing – private, road and Crown land boundaries, and internal, the equivalent of four return trips from Melbourne to Brisbane
- over 11,000 farm animals killed or injured
- over 3550 agricultural facilities, including dairies, hay, wool and machinery sheds
- around 211,000 tonnes of hay
- 70 national parks and reserves
- 950 local parks
- 467 cultural sites
- more than 200 historic places
- disrupted electricity supply to 60,000 households.

Emergency Relief

| | |
|--|---------|
| Presentations to public hospital emergency wards | 800 |
| Patients admitted to public hospitals | 180 |
| First aid treatments administered by Red Cross | 5200 |
| Kilograms of food aid provided | 500,000 |
| Offers of accommodation provided | 10,000 |
| Relief Centres established | 18 |
| Recovery Centres established | 25 |

Community Consultation and Engagement

| | |
|--|------|
| Community meetings held by the Authority | 29 |
| Attendees at these meetings | 4400 |
| Community Recovery Committees forming | 30 |
| Community Service Hubs established | 12 |

Case Management System

| | |
|--|------|
| Case managers | 385 |
| Families/individuals accessing case managers | 5000 |

Clean-up

| | |
|---|------|
| Properties registered for clean-up | 3000 |
| Grocon crews working in fire affected areas | 140 |
| Properties cleaned up | 1008 |

Insurance Claims

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Insurance claims received | 10,020 |
| Total cost of insurance claims | \$1.2 billion |
| Emergency payments and cash settlements made | \$457 million |
| Claims completed for damaged residential properties | 98 per cent |
| Claims completed for damaged commercial properties | 99 per cent |

Housing

| | |
|---|------|
| Housing assessments made by DHS | 1344 |
| Public housing provided | 113 |
| Community housing provided | 14 |
| Emergency accommodation provided | 252 |
| Bond supplied | 156 |
| Private rentals secured | 427 |
| Donated caravans allocated | 55 |
| Shared accommodation provided | 42 |
| Own accommodation acquired (family/friends) | 429 |

Grants

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Amount received in Appeal Fund | \$341 million |
| Amount allocated from Appeal Fund | \$235 million |

* Some statistics have been rounded and were correct at the time of printing



People and communities

Victoria's fire affected communities will recover at different rates and at different times. Despite this, local families, individuals, businesses and councils are now actively involved in planning for their future.

Emergency Relief and Housing

The day after the fires, immediate help and support was put in place.

The Commonwealth Disaster Plan was activated and thousands of people came together from across a range of emergency service organisations, government departments and agencies – including CFA, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Parks Victoria, State Emergency Service (SES), Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Victoria Police, Australian Defence Force (ADF), Australian Federal Police (AFP) and other Victorian and Commonwealth Government agencies.

Victorian firefighters were also supported by their colleagues from Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, the United States, New Zealand and Canada. The ADF established a Victorian-based joint taskforce of more than 850 people to assist with specialist advice and emergency engineering, medical and psychological support.

In the aftermath of the fires, thousands of volunteer groups, individuals and community organisations did whatever they could to help.

As an example Red Cross administered more than 5200 first aid treatments, took over 22,000 registrations and in conjunction with VicRelief Foodbank supported the provision of approximately 500,000 kilograms of food aid.

Emergency relief organisations received support from the Commonwealth Government, through \$6 million

provided to assist service providers meet the increased demands for emergency relief and to connect those affected with the community support services they required.

Over 10,000 offers of accommodation were made to the newly established toll-free Victorian Bushfire Accommodation Donation Line – with over 5200 offers considered suitable.

Tent cities, now disbanded, were established at relief centres on ovals in Yea, Whittlesea and Alexandra. Temporary accommodation options have included public housing, community housing, emergency accommodation, private rentals, private caravans and placement with families around Victoria.

This was an extraordinary response and greatly appreciated by all Victorians.

Power and Telecommunications

In bushfire affected areas, local electricity distribution networks were severely damaged.

On the evening of 7 February more than 60,000 customers were without electricity as a result of the bushfires. By the following morning approximately 19,500 customers were still without electricity. Electricity was progressively restored to customers over the next three weeks as severely damaged parts of the distribution system were re-built.

In the interim electricity supply was restored to many intact buildings with portable generators. Energy

Safe Victoria worked closely with the industry and unions to ensure that generators were safely connected to properties without electricity.

The bushfires also damaged major transmission lines linking the Victorian and New South Wales electricity grids. The temporary loss of these lines caused extensive local loss of supply on the morning of 8 February.

The bushfires also caused substantial damage to telecommunication networks, particularly exchanges, base stations and cabling. Bushfires damaged 18 Telstra base stations and affected certain services including five telephone exchanges, some 2200 ADSL services, 2900 PSTN services, as well as mobile, ISDN and IP services.

Additional temporary mobile phone coverage was established at Yea, Alexandra, Whittlesea, Whittlesea East, Healesville, Healesville Central, Seymour Central, Trawool, Kinglake, Flowerdale and Strathewen to enable people to remain in contact.

Medical Assistance and Public Health

Victorian public hospitals provided emergency care to more than 800 people and admitted more than 130 patients with a fire-related injury or illness. Victorian Medical Assistance Teams were also deployed from metropolitan hospitals to various regional and rural hospitals to assist in treating those requiring medical care.

Field Primary Care Clinics were established in the fire affected regions of Kinglake, Kinglake West, Flowerdale,

Whittlesea and Traralgon South, with paramedics, volunteer nurses and general practitioners to support community and emergency services.

Over 100 environmental health staff were deployed to assist councils and communities in the days and weeks after the fires to help manage public health issues including food safety, water quality, waste management and effluent disposal.

There were significant public health risks related to hazardous materials on fire affected sites, such as asbestos, damaged septic tanks and unstable structures. As a result, DHS led the coordination of a public safety awareness campaign. This included providing information on returning to fire affected sites and the distribution of approximately 14,000 'fossicker kits' to allow people

to safely go back onto their property to salvage their surviving possessions. These included face masks, gardening gloves, disposable overalls and bags to collect waste.

The Environment Protection Authority (Victoria), in collaboration with DHS, undertook an asbestos monitoring program immediately prior to and during the clean-up phase. To date, over 250 samples have been collected across the bushfire affected areas and analysed for total air fibres. In each of these samples the level of fibres is less than 0.01 fibre/ml, the level at which the test can detect fibres.

Community Safety

The size and scope of the policing component of the emergency response

and initial recovery was the largest ever undertaken by Victoria Police and AFP – with all of Victoria Police's five policing regions and 16 departments and more than 150 AFP officers contributing support.

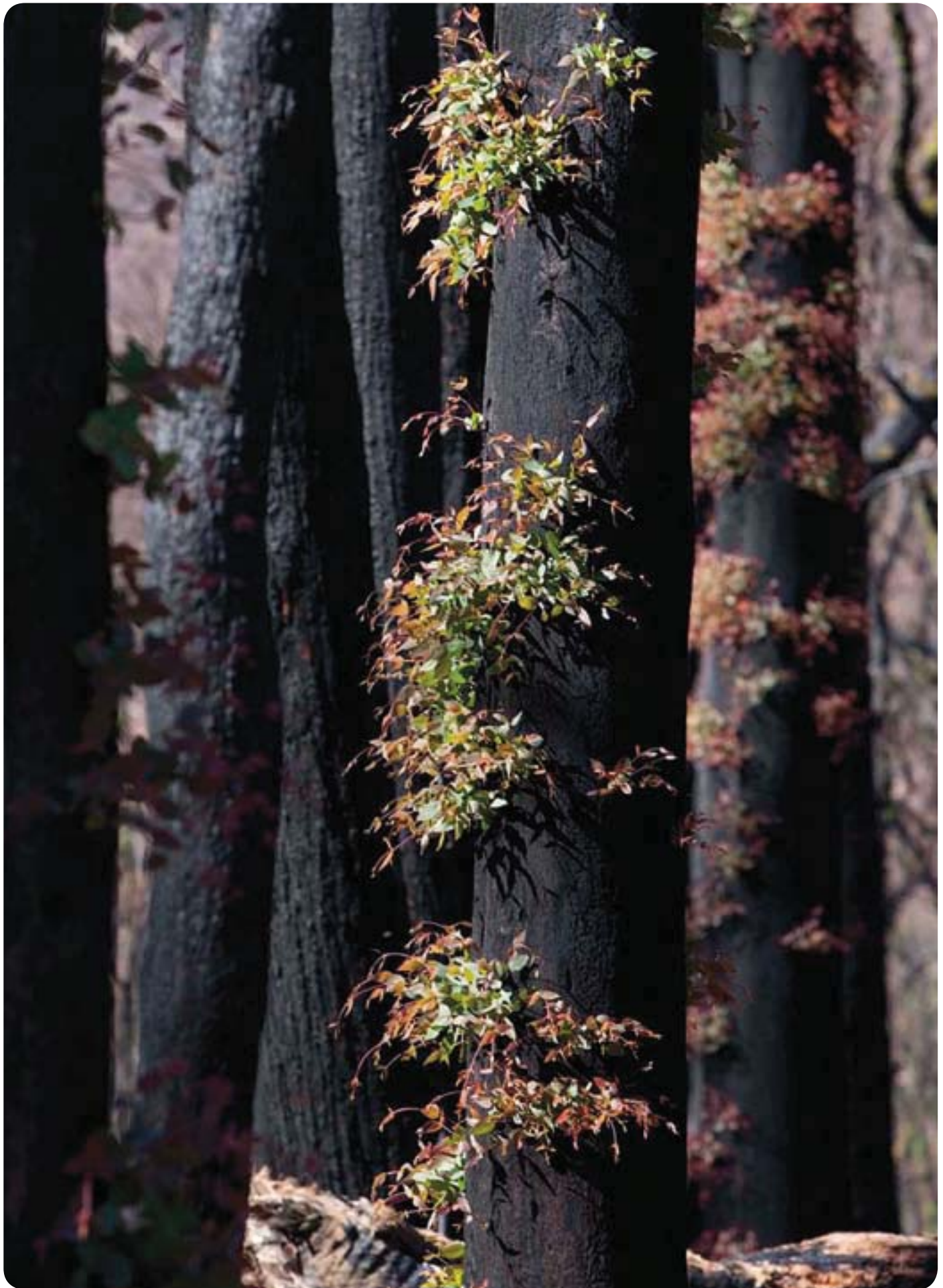
Victoria Police coordinated with the ADF to conduct initial Rapid Impact Assessments. These assessments were conducted on behalf of the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner and provided an understanding of the extent of the devastation, to assist response and recovery work.

More than 22 manned roadblocks – partial and full road closures – were established and operated 24-hours-a-day at various stages in the fire affected areas of Kinglake and Marysville.

Community meetings the Authority has held or attended

| Date | Where | Attendees (approximately) | Date | Where | Attendees (approximately) |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Sunday 01 March | Boolarra | 150 | Saturday 21 March | Marysville | 800 |
| Sunday 01 March | Mirboo North | 150 | Sunday 22 March | Yarram | 150 |
| Monday 02 March | Traralgon South | 350 | Sunday 29 March | Churchill | 60 |
| Wednesday 04 March | Kinglake | 200 | Tuesday 31 March | Buxton and Taggerty | 150 |
| Wednesday 04 March | Kinglake West | 50 | Friday 3 April | Frankston | 35 |
| Sunday 08 March | Flowerdale | 60 | Sunday 5 April | Strathewen | 70 |
| Thursday 12 March | Labertouche | 300 | Wednesday 8 April | Healesville | 60 |
| Thursday 12 March | Tonimbuk | 30 | Wednesday 8 April | Yarra Glen | 200 |
| Friday 13 March | Kinglake West | 600 | Tuesday 14 April | Haven (Horsham) | 30 |
| Sunday 15 March | St Andrews | 80 | Wednesday 15 April | Coleraine | 30 |
| Monday 16 March | Broadford | 350 | Wednesday 15 April | Pomborneit | 25 |
| Wednesday 18 March | Redesdale | 25 | Friday 17 April | Flowerdale | 40 |
| Wednesday 18 March | Long Gully | 70 | Friday 1 May | Narbethong | 40 |
| Thursday 19 March | Stanley | 40 | Sunday 3 May | Marysville | 150 |
| Thursday 19 March | Mudgegonga | 100 | | | |

Total 4395



Burnt forest, near St Andrews, March 2009



Christine Nixon, Community Time Out Day, Traralgon South, March 2009

Additional unmanned road closures operated with road signage. These restrictions were critical in minimising risks to the community both during the fires and during the aftermath because of damage to roads and removal of unsafe trees.

Disaster Victim Identification teams were deployed to support police investigations into bushfire related deaths. International support came from New Zealand Police and Indonesian National Police. Interstate support came from Western Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Under operation “Royals”, Victoria Police – with support from the New South Wales Police, AFP, ADF, SES and CFA – conducted comprehensive searches of more than 5700 properties. Almost 3400 of those had burnt or destroyed homes or other structures.

The Red Cross provided support to Victoria Police in managing the National Registration and Inquiry System to record and account for persons affected by the fires.

Marysville Police Station was destroyed and is to be rebuilt. Temporary accommodation within the township is being used to maintain Marysville police service delivery 24-hours-a-day. Kinglake Police Station suffered minor damage and policing services have been maintained.

Community Consultation and Engagement

Communities recover best when they are supported to manage their own recovery.

The Authority is committed to a recovery process that includes and engages communities with determining their recovery requirements and priorities. To begin this process, a series of community meetings across Victoria have been held to listen to communities and to begin to understand their specific recovery and rebuilding needs.

Christine Nixon and members of the Authority have attended a wide range of community meetings and public events. To date, the Authority has held 29 community meetings with approximately 4400 attendees – with Ms Nixon addressing communities at 26 of these meetings. In addition to these meetings and public events, the Authority has also met with a number of community committees and supported other forums across Victoria.

Hundreds of issues have been raised at these meetings. Many comments and suggestions have influenced the activities and decisions of the Authority and have been raised with other organisations, including the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. The Authority is yet to meet with a small number of communities and expects to do so in the coming weeks and months.

Ms Nixon has also visited many towns and areas and attended a number of community events, including the opening of the Kinglake Football and Netball Season, the Traralgon South and Community Time Out Day and the Toolangi and Castella Bush Celebration.

In addition, the Premier of Victoria, the Prime Minister and both Victorian and Commonwealth Government Ministers

have travelled widely to visit fire affected communities and the Victorian Government has held Community Cabinet meetings in the Yarra Valley, Eaglehawk and Redesdale.

Across Victoria, up to 30 Community Recovery Committees are being established to coordinate the recovery efforts and requirements in their community. As a first step, these Community Recovery Committees will prepare a community recovery plan, which will outline the many aspects of recovery that need to be considered.

These plans will encompass the shorter-term and longer-term wishes of the community for rebuilding and recovery, including:

- reconstruction (homes, urban design, community infrastructure and facilities)
- environment (parks, reserves, forests and wildlife)
- people and community (health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities)
- economic (rebuilding and supporting business and industry).

Donations

An overwhelming number of goods and services were generously donated by many people – from individuals to multinational companies.

The management and distribution of all the generous contributions received during the emergency response and

early recovery phase pushed various agencies to their capacity. Importantly, the Victorian Government was heavily supported by many companies, non-government organisations and volunteers with the management and distribution of donated goods.

The unprecedented volume of donations offered within days of the bushfires initially challenged all involved in supporting bushfire affected communities. For example, the immediacy of needs required a rapid response and at times it appeared that multiple agencies were trying to address similar needs.

The Victorian Government quickly developed a database to coordinate the overwhelming amount of donations received from across Australia and around the world. Thousands of donations were matched to people and communities in need, ranging from household and material products to equipment for the clean-up. The generous pro-bono support of a number of companies assisted with the early distribution of material aid to bushfire affected communities.

The Authority is working closely with communities and non-government organisations to ensure that donated goods can continue to be distributed to communities throughout the reconstruction and recovery period. A warehouse and distribution solution, jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, is being implemented by the Authority to support the longer-term distribution of material aid.

The Authority is working with a number of major donors, ranging from foundations to corporate donors, who are seeking to contribute to community projects and provide various forms of support. These donors are working with the Authority to understand the needs and wants of communities, which are guided by a community planning process.

Over 3000 donations of goods and services were pledged through a range of channels and are stored on the Authority's database. These donations also include a number from major donors who have pledged varying types of significant donations – including offers such as flights, kitchenware, building services and building materials - to support the reconstruction and recovery efforts. This amounts to over \$10 million worth of goods, services and financial project-focused contributions donated or pledged to date.

The Authority is developing a system to match pledged goods and services to the needs of individuals and communities. This system will include a new database of donations, which regionally located staff can feed into community channels to understand the local needs. In terms of the larger donations, the Authority is awaiting the establishment of community recovery plans, being developed by Community Recovery Committees. Once the plans are finalised the Authority will be better placed to advise major donors on the medium to long-term community needs. Importantly, the Authority will continue to act in its key role as coordinator and facilitator of donations between donors and people in need. The process will ensure the distribution of donations are targeted and allocated fairly and efficiently.

Case Management System

On 10 February, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments jointly announced that a case manager would be assigned to each Victorian family affected by the bushfires. A case management system and call centre were established three days later to ensure fire affected communities have coordinated access to support, information and advocacy services.

Recruiting and supporting the required number of suitable case managers within weeks of the fires has been a challenging task, but was one to which Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and community agencies rose. To date, the case management system has 385 case managers supporting over 5000 individuals or families. There is continuing demand for this service, with approximately 100 new people registering each week. Case managers are being recruited.

Case managers are working with families and individuals to assist them with locating and understanding the services available, and connecting them with the services that best meet their needs.

Education and Early Childhood Assistance

The 2009 February bushfires destroyed three primary schools at Middle Kinglake, Marysville and Strathewen. A further 47 primary schools were partially damaged or required cleaning as a result of the bushfires.

Interim arrangements have seen students from Strathewen Primary School attending Wattle Glen Primary School; students from Marysville Primary School attending Taggerty Primary School; and students from Middle Kinglake Primary School attending Epping Views Primary School or Kinglake Primary School while their interim schools are established. Middle Kinglake Primary School was provided with a relocatable building complex on land next to the destroyed school, which opened on 30 March.

Community members are now starting to plan the rebuilding of schools destroyed by fire at Strathewen, Middle Kinglake and Marysville. School community reference teams are being formed in each of the three towns to give local input into planning what their new schools will look like. Victoria has been given priority access to draw on its share of the Commonwealth Government's \$14.7 billion Building the Education Revolution Program for reconstruction.

The Authority is working with local communities in Marysville, Flowerdale and Kinglake on options for rebuilding children's services. Some community reference teams may explore options that could see schools and children's centres located on the same site.

Regional staff and principals, many of whom were directly affected by the fires, were in constant contact with families affected by the bushfires to ensure counselling, education and early childhood services were provided where appropriate. Immediately after the fires, the Department of Early Education and Childhood Development (DEECD) provided activity programs and support for young children located in relief centres in Kinglake, Yea and Alexandra.

DEECD also provided extensive support, including student support services officers to provide counselling and psychosocial support to schools and children's services in fire affected areas; and support for children, adolescents, parents and carers at a number of relief centres. Funding was provided by the Commonwealth Government to support 29 Victorian playgroups, to ensure bushfire affected children had immediate access to high quality early childhood services.

Relief and Recovery Centres and Community Service Hubs

Emergency relief centres were established, to provide immediate support to those affected by the bushfires, in the towns of Healesville, Yarra Glen, Wallan, Alexandra, Kinglake, Kinglake West, Yea, Arthurs Creek, St Andrews, Diamond Creek, Whittlesea, Daylesford, Lilydale, Warragul, Yarram, Kyneton, Kilsyth and Ferntree Gully. Relief centres remain open in Diamond Creek and Whittlesea.

Recovery centres were established, to provide support and assistance with services to those affected by the bushfires, in the towns of Traralgon, Mirboo North, Yarram, Warragul, Churchill, Traralgon South, Boolarra, Horsham, Wandong, Metcalfe,

Eaglehawk, Narre Warren North, Narre Warren South, Bunyip, Healesville, Labertouche, Yarra Glen, Alexandra, Kinglake, Drouin West, Jindivik, Mudgegonga and Myrtleford. Recovery centres in Mirboo North, Yarra Glen, Alexandra and Boolarra remain open.

Community Service Hubs are a central component of the recovery effort. Hubs serve primarily as a 'one-stop shop' for a range of services including financial support, housing and counselling, and as a 'drop in centre' that facilitates interaction amongst community members, the development of support networks and establishment of locally relevant 'recovery' activities.

Hubs are being established at Traralgon South, Marysville, Kinglake, Kinglake West, Buxton, Narbethong, Strathewen,

Whittlesea, Alexandra, Hurstbridge, St Andrews and Flowerdale.

Each hub will be overseen by a Hub Captain. Recruitment is underway for Hub Captains, who will work closely with Community Development Officers, case managers and Centrelink to ensure coordination of individuals' issues with local communities' issues, and to connect with the community development process. The ongoing operation of Community Service Hubs will be reviewed as necessary.



Marysville Temporary Village under construction, March 2009

Emotional and psychosocial support

In the immediate aftermath of the fires a range of emotional and psychosocial supports were coordinated by local councils, DHS and numerous service providers. Their response was remarkable and something that all those involved should be proud of.

During the height of the response Personal Support Emergency Counsellors coordinated by the Victorian Council of Churches were deployed to relief centres and through the Red Cross outreach program. A total of 954 hours of personal support counselling was provided to the fire affected communities. These counsellors played a critical role in supporting those who were most affected by the fires.

In several instances, the emotional and psychological support needs of affected communities were such that additional supports were brought in to assist the most affected areas. For example, staff from the Austin Hospital's Trauma Related Mental Health Service and Royal Children's Hospital provided support to individuals and families in Marysville and Flowerdale, working in partnership with the Goulburn Valley Area Mental Health Service. The Austin's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provided support to several communities and Eastern Health and North West Mental Health provided extensive support to the Kinglake and Kinglake West communities. The level of cooperation and collaboration was tremendous.

Supporting Community Recovery Committees and Teams

- Many government services are coordinated through a regional structure and the Authority will utilise this to help to deliver its recovery services
- For each region the Authority will appoint Community Recovery Coordinators. Community Recovery Coordinators will ensure that all people working across Government to support recovery efforts are effectively facilitating recovery solutions for communities
- A number of different support mechanisms exist to support the overall community recovery process.



Community Recovery Teams

- Each region will have a dedicated Community Recovery Team comprised of a range of different local council, Victorian and Commonwealth Government staff
- The team will support Community Recovery Committees and be established with a range of appropriate skills and resource levels required for that area
- Community Development Officers can facilitate a range of services and support agencies to assist communities.



Community Service Hubs

- Community Service Hubs will be available in those communities requiring extended recovery services nearby
- The Hubs facilitate the entry and availability of a range of support services for individuals (e.g. Centrelink, rebuilding advice, welfare services)
- Hubs will be staffed by a Hub Captain.



Material Aid Centre

- Some regions will have material aid centres which distribute donated goods
- Where this is not the case, communities will have direct access to the 'Central' Material Aid Centre via case managers and the Community Service Hubs.

Case study

An important part of community recovery in the wake of the bushfires is the creation of Community Recovery Committees.

These committees represent the needs of the community and are working to develop a community recovery plan that covers local business and economic issues, building and facilities requirements, environmental matters, and the health and wellbeing needs of the community.

Latrobe City Council has supported the establishment of three Community Recovery Committees in the

communities of Traralgon South and Callignee, Hazelwood and Jeeralang, and Boolarra and Yinnar. In the Boolarra and Yinnar area, the Council's recovery team first met with the existing Boolarra Community Development Group to form the Boolarra/Yinnar Community Recovery Committee, which focuses on recovery from the 'Delburn' bushfires.

As part of its work the Boolarra/Yinnar Community Recovery Committee has established a mentor program to ensure that displaced people remain in touch with the community, and are informed of community events and activities.

The committee has also worked with a facilitator to support the development of a clear purpose and priorities for the local recovery efforts. A number of short and longer-term community needs have been identified for the community recovery plan. This plan will be presented to the Authority, who will work to facilitate and support the implementation of community plans.

The Boolarra/Yinnar Community Recovery Committee is well placed to support its active community and this is a great example of the community led recovery that is underway.

2009 Victorian bushfires

A Clonbinane, Heathcote Junction, Kilmore East, Reedy Creek, Strath Creek, Wandong, Waterford Park

Lives lost: 3

Properties reported destroyed: 124

Properties cleaned up: 118

Community meeting attendance: 350

B Break of Day, Flowerdale, Hazeldene, Hazeldene South

Lives lost: 11

Properties reported destroyed: 219

Properties cleaned up: 146

Community meeting attendance: 100

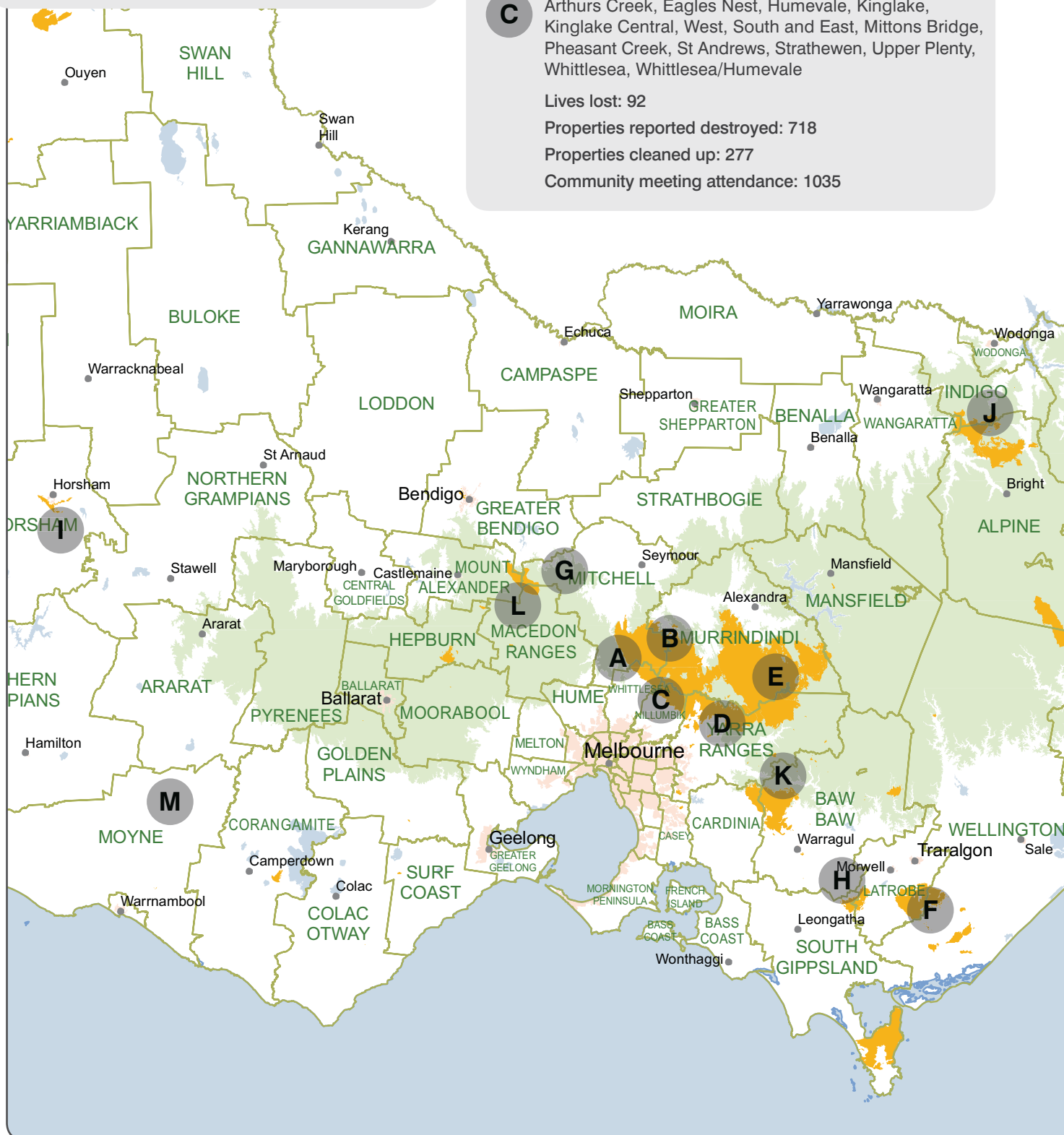
C Arthurs Creek, Eagles Nest, Humevale, Kinglake, Kinglake Central, West, South and East, Mittons Bridge, Pheasant Creek, St Andrews, Strathewen, Upper Plenty, Whittlesea, Whittlesea/Humevale

Lives lost: 92

Properties reported destroyed: 718

Properties cleaned up: 277

Community meeting attendance: 1035



* Figures by community are accurate at the time of printing.

** Properties cleaned up may include both destroyed and damaged properties.

D Castella, Christmas Hills, Chum Creek, Dixons Creek, Glenburn, Murrindindi, Steels Creek, Tarrawarra, Toolangi, Yarra Glen, Narre Warren (including fires at Lynbrook and Harkaway)

Lives lost: 13
 Properties reported destroyed: 220
 Properties cleaned up: 102
 Community meeting attendance: 200

E Buxton, Camberville, Granton, Healesville, Marysville, Narbethong, Taggerty

Lives lost: 40
 Properties reported destroyed: 529
 Properties cleaned up: 141
 Community meeting attendance: 1200

F Allambee South, Baromi, Boolarra, Callignee, Callignee North and South, Churchill, Darlimurla, Delburn, Devon North, Dollar, Drouin, Drouin West, Gormandale, Hazelwood, Hazelwood North and South, Koornalla, Jeeralang, Jeeralang Junction, Labertouche, Longwarry North, Mirboo, Mirboo North, Robin Hood, Rokeyby, Tarago (Bunyip), Tonimbuk, Traralgon, Traralgon South, Yarram, Yinnar

H Lives lost: 11
 Properties reported destroyed: 211

K Properties cleaned up: 80
 Community meeting attendance: 1190

G Barfold, Bendigo West, California Gully, Eaglehawk, Iron Bark, Long Gully, Maiden Gully, Redesdale, Sidonia, Specimen Hill, Drummond North, Sailor's Falls

L Lives lost: 1
 Properties reported destroyed: 74
 Properties cleaned up: 72
 Community meeting attendance: 95

I Drung, Haven (Horsham)

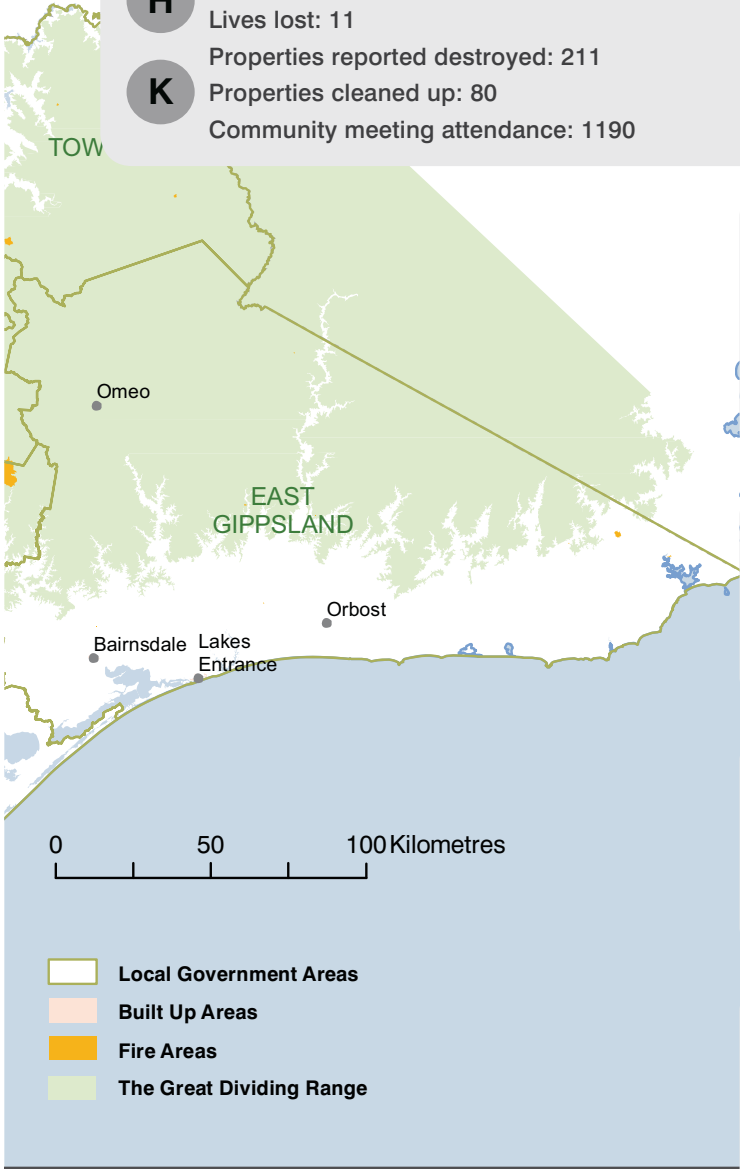
Lives lost: 0
 Properties reported destroyed: 13
 Properties cleaned up: 24
 Community meeting attendance: 30

J Mudgegonga, Rosewhite, Running Creek (Beechworth)

Lives lost: 2
 Properties reported destroyed: 24
 Properties cleaned up: 43
 Community meeting attendance: 140

M Coleraine, Pomorneit, Weerite

Lives lost: 0
 Properties reported destroyed: 1
 Properties cleaned up: 5
 Community meeting attendance: 55



Reconstruction

The longer-term reconstruction process will take time and will be different for each community. Interim measures are now in place to ensure people have the support they need while their homes, towns and regions are being rebuilt.



Clean-up in progress, Marysville May 2009

Clean-up

The Authority is committed to ensuring that properties and infrastructure in fire damaged communities are built quickly and efficiently.

One of the Authority's first priorities has been to clear debris and hazardous material from the thousands of bushfire affected properties. The clean-up and demolition operation is being jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and is free, voluntary and open to any person who owns property affected by the recent bushfires.

Grocon has been contracted to deliver the clean-up operation and has set up ten regional bases across Victoria. The process was slow to commence but Grocon has now established 140 clean-up crews working across the fire affected areas.

A key objective has been to maximise the use of local contractors for clean-up works. On the basis that a non-metropolitan contractor located within or close to bushfire affected areas is considered local, a total of 69 per cent of the work is being undertaken by local contractors and just over 50 per cent of the workforce is local.

To date, about 3000 bushfire affected properties have been registered with Grocon by phone or via the Authority's website, and new registrations continue to be received. Clean-up has been completed on over 1000 properties.

Completion of the clean-up will be progressive across the regions and is projected to conclude on site at the end of September. This timeline is consistent with the Government's original commitment to complete the clean-up within six months of the award of the contract, and in the case of Kinglake and Marysville, within six months of the Coroner's Office leaving the area.

Grocon contractors are also assisting property owners to comply with emergency orders placed by local councils. Approximately 1000 emergency orders have been placed on bushfire affected properties, requiring the owners to make them safe. Grocon contractors have assisted more than 450 property owners to comply with these orders.

In addition to the Grocon clean-up, the Authority has been providing reimbursement to property owners who carried out their own clean-up in the immediate aftermath of the bushfires.

Temporary Housing and Villages

People who lost their home in Victoria's devastating bushfires are being offered temporary housing while their communities are cleaned up and rebuilding begins. Some people have chosen to move away from bushfire affected areas, while others have opted to move back to their home communities.

For those wanting to stay in bushfire affected areas, every effort is being made to assist them to live in their community or as close as is currently viable. To date, DHS has assisted more than 1300 households with a range of housing options, including:

| | |
|---|-----|
| • Public housing provided | 113 |
| • Community housing provided | 14 |
| • Emergency accommodation provided | 252 |
| • Bond supplied | 156 |
| • Private rentals secured | 427 |
| • Donated caravans allocated | 55 |
| • Shared accommodation provided | 42 |
| • Own accommodation arranged (family/friends) | 429 |

Temporary villages are being constructed at Marysville, Flowerdale and Kinglake.

Each village will cater for up to 40 families and 40 single people, with room for expansion, in a mixture of self-contained one and two bedroom moveable units and single and double room accommodation. The Authority is working closely with DHS and local councils to have the villages completed and largely occupied by 30 June.

The site at Flowerdale is currently 70 per cent complete with six households in residence. Seven more households have been allocated housing and are expected to move in shortly. At Kinglake village, work on the site began on 5 May and is expected to be ready for occupancy by late May. Marysville village is up and running, accommodating five families so far, with a further 19 moveable units under construction.

Each village will also have temporary shared amenities, including public toilets, shower blocks, laundries and communal kitchen facilities for use by village residents and the local community. Public facilities will also be available

at Kinglake West. Management of the villages will be provided by professional camp managers. A Village Manager has been appointed at Flowerdale and others will be appointed at all sites to ensure the smooth and efficient operation of the villages.

A village code of conduct as well as health and safety plans, and tenancy management plans are being developed to secure residents' wellbeing. Village Managers will oversee the formation of these plans in consultation with residents, local councils, DHS, Victoria Police, CFA and the Authority. These plans will be incorporated into a Village Operations Manual, which will be completed for Flowerdale by 30 May and shortly thereafter for other villages.

The temporary villages are expected to be in place for between six months and two years, subject to need.

The Victorian Government has been given priority access to its share of the Commonwealth Government's Social Housing Fund, making \$1.5 billion available to respond to the social housing needs of bushfire affected areas.

Drinking and Waste Water

The Authority is working with local water authorities to ensure that drinking water and waste water services are maintained while damaged systems are returned to pre-fire operations. The Authority has worked with Goulburn Valley Water to reconnect water and waste water services to Marysville.

Many properties in fire impacted areas are not under the jurisdiction of a water corporation and use rain water tanks as their primary water supply. In the wake of the fires DSE, in conjunction with the relevant water corporations, has been providing a free temporary water tank, and cleaning and water carting service in and around the Kinglake area. During the recovery phase, access to free reticulated drinking water has been provided at nine locations by Gippsland Water, Goulburn Valley Water and Yarra Valley Water at temporary standpipes and community water tanks.

Over 950 properties have had their rain water tank cleaned and around 1100 properties have received one-off 5000-litre water carting. Another 14 drinking catchments are under restoration, rehabilitation and recovery, and 16 water treatment facilities that were affected are now operational.

Building and Planning Processes

Adoption of the Australian Standard AS 3959-2009 for Design and Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas has been brought forward. The new standard was due to be adopted by all States and Territories in May 2010, but became effective in Victoria from 11 March this year.

Under the new standard, sites are assessed as being one of six Bushfire Attack Levels from low to extreme risk, with specific building measures applying to the higher risk areas. A streamlined planning process was also applied at that time for rebuilding bushfire affected homes, where a Wildfire Management

Overlay was the only permit trigger, with further changes to the Victoria Planning Provisions to ensure, in most cases, that a planning permit will not be required for rebuilding.

The planning provision amendment has also removed the need to obtain a planning permit in most circumstances to support bushfire recovery operations where previously a permit may have been required for the use and/or development due to the zoning or overlay controls relating to the land.

The Building Commission, Plumbing Industry Commission and DPCD with MAV have developed and distributed a series of guides and advice notes to help fire affected communities rebuild. The Building Commission has also

held several public seminars to assist people gain an understanding of the key elements of the new building standard.



Whittlesea Yea Road, Humevale (Photo provided courtesy of Richard Paton)

Case study

Reconstruction and a return to some semblance of 'normality' for bushfire affected communities has been a major objective of the Authority since its inception following the February bushfires.

Kinglake embodies the spirit of reconstruction with Middle Kinglake Primary School students moving into a temporary school next to their old school site on 30 March.

The temporary school provides six portable classrooms, toilets, a library and an administration area. Playground equipment has also been installed at the temporary school site.

The provision of a temporary schooling option as close to home as possible and in familiar surroundings is a great outcome for traumatised students.

The local community will also play an integral role in the planning, scope and shape of the new school.

Local economies

Many small to medium businesses were destroyed or directly damaged in the bushfires and many others are struggling to survive. Rebuilding local economies is crucial to rebuilding local communities.

Business Relief

Thousands of businesses were directly damaged or destroyed by the fires. To help them recover, a number of initiatives have been put in place, including a \$51 million Victorian and Commonwealth Government business support package.

This support package includes a one-off grant of \$5000 for clean-up and immediate restoration costs (Tier 1), with additional funds available up to a maximum of \$25,000 (Tier 2) for eligible small businesses or primary producers.

To date:

- 1106 Tier 1 grants have been approved with a value of \$5.4 million
- 211 Tier 2 grants have been approved with a value of \$3.1 million
- 8482 enquiries on bushfire assistance have been received by Business Victoria and Rural Finance Victoria.

Under a concessional interest rate loans scheme, fire affected businesses can also borrow up to \$200,000 at 3.2 per cent interest over five years through the Victorian Government's Rural Finance Corporation.

A \$5000 special circumstances relief grant is also available for small businesses and primary producers who earn less than \$100,000 a year from other sources and have not already received business assistance.

The Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) has established a Business Emergency

Relief Fund to support small businesses indirectly affected by the fires. The Victorian Government is contributing \$500,000 to the fund, which will give priority to businesses that employed fewer than 20 staff that had little or no alternative sources of income following the bushfires.

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments are funding around 100 professional advisors from VECCI and the Small Business Mentoring Service to provide free professional advice and counselling services to assist small businesses and farmers make informed decisions about their futures.

Insurance Claims

Data from the Insurance Council of Australia identified approximately 10,020 general insurance claims that have been received to date from Insurance Council members for residential, commercial, industrial and farming losses. These total an estimated insurable loss of \$1.2 billion. Of these, 16 per cent have been motor vehicle claims and 84 per cent property or contents claims.

In addition:

- the general insurance industry has made approximately \$457 million in emergency payments and cash settlements to affected policy-holders
- 98 per cent of claims for damaged residential properties and 99 per cent of claims for damaged commercial properties have been completed.

Tourism and Business Regeneration

Although the full extent of the direct and indirect impact on tourism and business is still being assessed, it is clear that businesses in fire affected regions have suffered from cancellations and a drop in visitor numbers. Many municipalities are conducting their own surveys and reviews on the impact on business in their area. The results of these assessments will inform longer-term business development initiatives, to supplement those strategies already announced.

Regional tourism campaigns were suspended from 7 February to 13 March out of respect to those who had lost their homes, businesses and lives. Businesses and communities are now working with all levels of government to rebuild their local economies and regions.

Tourism generates more than \$1.6 billion annually in bushfire affected areas such as Victoria's High Country, Gippsland, Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. A \$10 million Victorian Bushfire Tourism Industry Support Package has been jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to support businesses economically affected by the bushfires. This package has been developed in close consultation with Tourism Victoria, Parks Victoria and tourism operators. The package is being rolled out from March 2009 to June 2011 and will provide \$6 million towards marketing, \$2 million for visitor facilities and \$1 million to bring forward cancelled events.

A Victorian Bushfire Tourism Response and Recovery Committee has been established with representatives from each of the bushfire affected regions, Tourism Alliance Victoria, Parks Victoria and Victorian Government departments. This Committee is overseeing the Victorian Bushfire Tourism Industry Support Package and has approved \$860,000 for marketing projects and \$207,000 for new event projects between March and June 2009.

Local councils and community organisations in fire affected regions can also access grants of up to \$3000, through the Bushfire Community Events Program to host community events and activities.

In addition, a \$70,000 Open for Business corporate campaign has been established to encourage businesses and government agencies to hold conferences, seminars and business events in fire affected regions. The Victorian Government is working with Business Events Victoria and Tourism Alliance Victoria to encourage conference business in bushfire affected areas such as the Yarra Valley, Dandenong Ranges, Gippsland, High Country, Daylesford and the Macedon Ranges.

Farming Support and Advice

The February bushfires caused significant damage to farming operations, private property, crops and livestock.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) mobilised teams to bushfire affected areas to assist with managing the welfare of farm livestock and to conduct fire damage assessments on rural properties. To date, over 4800 properties across a damaged area of 102,113 hectares have been assessed.

DPI established an agreement with the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) to provide emergency fodder to fire affected land owners. The Victorian Government committed \$500,000 to fund the cost of transport of donated fodder. The VFF then coordinated the collection of 10,500 tonnes of donated fodder, to ensure that livestock were fed in the immediate post-fire period.

There are grants available through the Rural Finance Corporation to assist farmers and small businesses affected by the bushfires. Primary producers who suffered damage as a result of the fires and who earn over

51 per cent of their income from their property can access a Clean-up and Restoration Grant from the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments. Eligible farmers can apply for an initial grant of up to \$5000 for immediate clean-up and/or stock welfare. A further grant of up to \$20,000 is available following a more detailed assessment. A one-off special circumstances relief grant of \$5000 is available to assist farmers and small businesses that have otherwise missed out on a business recovery grant where they do not earn 51 per cent of their income from their property.

Private landowners can also access recovery advice through DPI's Agricultural Referral Network. Up to ten Agricultural Referral Officers are available to assist with issues including pasture re-establishment and management, weed and pest animal management, whole farm planning, feed planning, water quality supplies for farm dams, soil conservation and erosion control, stock containment and animal health issues. DPI has also produced a *Recovery After Fire* booklet and fact sheets to help planning for recovery.

Fencing

Many landowners have started or completed repairs to boundary fences to contain livestock on their properties. DSE and CFA fire fighting crews are active in repairing fences damaged during the fire fighting operation. Fencing contractors, neighbours and service clubs have since proved invaluable in repairing fences on fire affected properties.

The Victorian Government will reimburse reasonable insurance excess to a maximum of \$400 on all insured Crown land forest and park boundary fences destroyed or damaged by bushfires (or fire suppression backburns) regardless of the tenure of the land where the fire originated.

Under an agreement with the Victorian Government, the VFF has also activated its network of members, volunteers and staff across Victoria to help restore boundary fences. DPI fencing support officers are working with the VFF, other agencies and volunteer groups to monitor progress towards boundary fence reconstruction and assist with works program planning. There are 13 VFF fencing coordinators working across fire affected regions. To date over 5000 volunteers have worked the

equivalent of 36,500 volunteer hours on clean-up and repairs to 1511 kilometres of boundary fences on 798 properties.

It is estimated that, of the 5087 kilometres of boundary fencing recorded as damaged, 2513 kilometres have been rebuilt and a further 1266 kilometres have been cleared prior to reconstruction.



Wineries and businesses in the Yarra Valley (pre-fires)

Case study

The town of Healesville has been proactive in encouraging tourism back to the area in the wake of the bushfires.

The Healesville Chamber of Commerce and Industry is producing a 'Shoppers Guide for Healesville', with funding support from Healesville's White Rabbit Brewery and its sister site, Little Creatures Dining Hall in Fitzroy.

Available free for visitors to the Yarra Valley, the guide promotes the diverse range of businesses in Healesville at a time when tourist expenditure is sorely needed in the area.

A total of 10,000 guides are to be printed locally by Breen Printing and distributed to shops, accommodation and tourist information centres.

The guide is a positive step towards strong and sustainable recovery after the bushfires. It is an excellent example of efforts to encourage visitors back to bushfire affected regions.

Environment

The bushfires had a major impact on Victoria's forests and national parks, native animals and plants, and waterways and catchments. Rehabilitating and regenerating our natural environment is critical to helping communities recover.



Young deer, Kinglake region (Photo provided courtesy of Keith Pakenham, CFA Corporate Affairs)

Forests, Parks and Reserves

Almost 280,000 hectares of public land were affected including 70 national parks and reserves. The total fire affected area within parks and reserves was approximately 100,000 hectares.

The 180,000 hectares of state forest that was affected included significant commercial and recreational forest areas. These parks and forests provide important catchment services, and catchment yield and quality will be affected for some time. The fires are estimated to have affected more than 200 historic places on public and private land. Work is underway to assess the damage.

More than 200 places of recorded Indigenous heritage have been affected. New sites are still being identified.

The Parks Victoria office at Kinglake was destroyed. A temporary office has been set up at the Wallaby Creek, Melbourne Water depot in Kinglake West. The DSE office at Marysville was extensively damaged, with the fire fighting equipment and works depot destroyed. A temporary office has been set up in Alexandra for the Marysville staff. Repairs to the Marysville office are underway.

The Commonwealth Government is providing funding as part of its 'Caring for our Country' program, through grants to catchment authorities, community groups and individual landholders for environmental and landscape repair work.

Native Biodiversity

Bushfire affected areas covered the habitats of over 40 species of endangered animals in Victoria.

Significant threats to native flora and fauna following the fires include ash pollution and sedimentation in streams, increased exposure to predators in damaged habitats, water loss in sub-alpine areas, weed invasion and loss of shelter and food sources.

Affected species include the Leadbeater's Possum, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Greater and Yellow-bellied Gliders, the Helmeted Honeyeater, Barred Galaxias fish and the Shiny Nematolepis. Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash forest stands were severely impacted. Old-growth ash forests such as Wallaby Creek were severely burnt.

Urgent ecological recovery work targeted at protecting threatened species at risk includes:

- re-sowing Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash seeds by helicopter to replace populations lost near Marysville, Kinglake and Alexandra
- an immediate increase in fox and cat control programs, with a particular focus on protecting the New Holland Mouse at Wilsons Promontory National Park, the Brush-tailed Phascogale in Kinglake National Park and the Southern Brown Bandicoot in Bunyip State Park
- relocating threatened fish populations to safe refuges
- erection of protection fencing to protect the endangered Shiny Nematolepis plant in the Yarra Ranges National Park from grazing.

Further flora and fauna survey work is ongoing to ensure accurate knowledge of what has been affected.

Rehabilitation

Fire suppression activities, including the construction of control lines on Crown land, resulted in the need for rehabilitation works following the fires. This is now 65 per cent complete.

The initial focus of DSE and Parks Victoria has been on private land rehabilitation and where public land adjoins private properties. Around 1800 kilometres of fire control lines on private land are due for completion by 30 June.

Three burned-area emergency response teams from the United States have completed an initial rapid impact assessment, including an Emergency Stabilisation and Rehabilitation Plan for each of the major fires. The plans include emergency rehabilitation actions that will feed into the long-term recovery planning and actions.

DSE and VicForests are also working to ensure salvage timber from fire affected state forest areas is harvested as soon as possible and to ensure the timber industry, which supports many of the fire affected towns, gets back to business as soon as possible. DSE will work with local councils to make timber available to residents for firewood and fence posts.

Support for Wildlife Carers

The tireless efforts of wildlife carers, who provided emergency assistance to animals affected by the fires, was greatly valued.

The Victorian Government has made \$350,000 available for grants to the 363 registered animal foster carers and 340 licensed wildlife shelters. The payments and grants, ranging from \$300 to \$2000, are for veterinarians, wildlife shelters, registered foster carers and licensed wildlife rehabilitators to replace shelters and buy equipment and supplies.

The Healesville Sanctuary's Australian Wildlife Health Centre received a \$60,000 grant to support wildlife welfare and rehabilitation efforts directly related to the devastating fires.

Waterways and Catchments

More than 820 kilometres of streams, rivers and creeks in two Melbourne Water regions were affected by bushfire to some degree. The most severe impacts were seen in the Yarra Ranges, Baw Baw, Nillumbik, Mitchell, Cardinia and Whittlesea areas.

Melbourne Water is closely monitoring the impacts of bushfire on waterways and taking action to hasten the recovery process, including increased monitoring of water quality, weed suppression along riverbanks and encouraging natural regeneration of native species.

Sites in fire affected areas are being surveyed for platypuses and fish to determine the impact and threat to known populations.

About one-third of Melbourne's water supply catchments experienced some level of bushfire damage, but there was no impact on drinking water quality. The two biggest water supply catchments, the Upper Yarra and Thomson dams, were successfully protected. Damage to water supply infrastructure was limited to minor components and a prioritised works program is now in place. Repairing the Wallaby Creek weir and aqueduct has a high priority.

Melbourne Water is working closely with the Catchment Management Authorities who have been undertaking emergency sediment control works, both within the bushfire affected catchment areas and more widely, to ensure protection of waterways and reduce the impact of run-off erosion.

Parks that were closed during the February fires but are now open include:

Eastern Victoria

Wilsons Promontory, Alpine National Park, Mount Buffalo National Park, Beechworth Historic Park, Holey Plains State Park, Tarra Bulga National Park, Moodarra State Park, Tyers Park and Mount Worth State Park.

Central Victoria

Kurth Kiln Regional Park, Dandenong Ranges National Park, Arthurs Seat State Park, Mornington Peninsula National Park, Yan Yean Reservoir Park, Plenty Gorge Park, Warrandyte State Park, Upper Yarra Reservoir Park, Silvan Reservoir Park and Dandenong Ranges Gardens.

Western Victoria

Tower Hill State Game Reserve.

Affected parks and reserves

Affected parks and reserves include:

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| • Yarra Ranges National Park 29,412 hectares (38 per cent of park) | • Kinglake National Park 22,110 hectares (96 per cent of park) | • Cathedral Range State Park 3203 hectares (92 per cent of park) |
| • Wilsons Promontory National Park 24,839 hectares (52 per cent of park) | • Bunyip State Park 7651 hectares (46 per cent of park) | • Mount Stanley State Reserve 2617 hectares (95 per cent of park). |

Within the parks, the fires destroyed or damaged:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| • 50 visitor sites | • 340 kilometres of walking tracks | • 650 assets including bridges, car parks, toilet blocks, camp grounds and visitor buildings. |
| • 520 kilometres of roads | | |

Case study

Leadbeater's Possums at Lake Mountain in the Yarra Ranges National Park suffered in the bushfires. Only six possums out of an estimated pre-bushfire population of 300 have been sighted since the fires.

Of the 30 possum boxes at Lake Mountain, 28 of which were being used, 22 were destroyed and six were badly damaged.

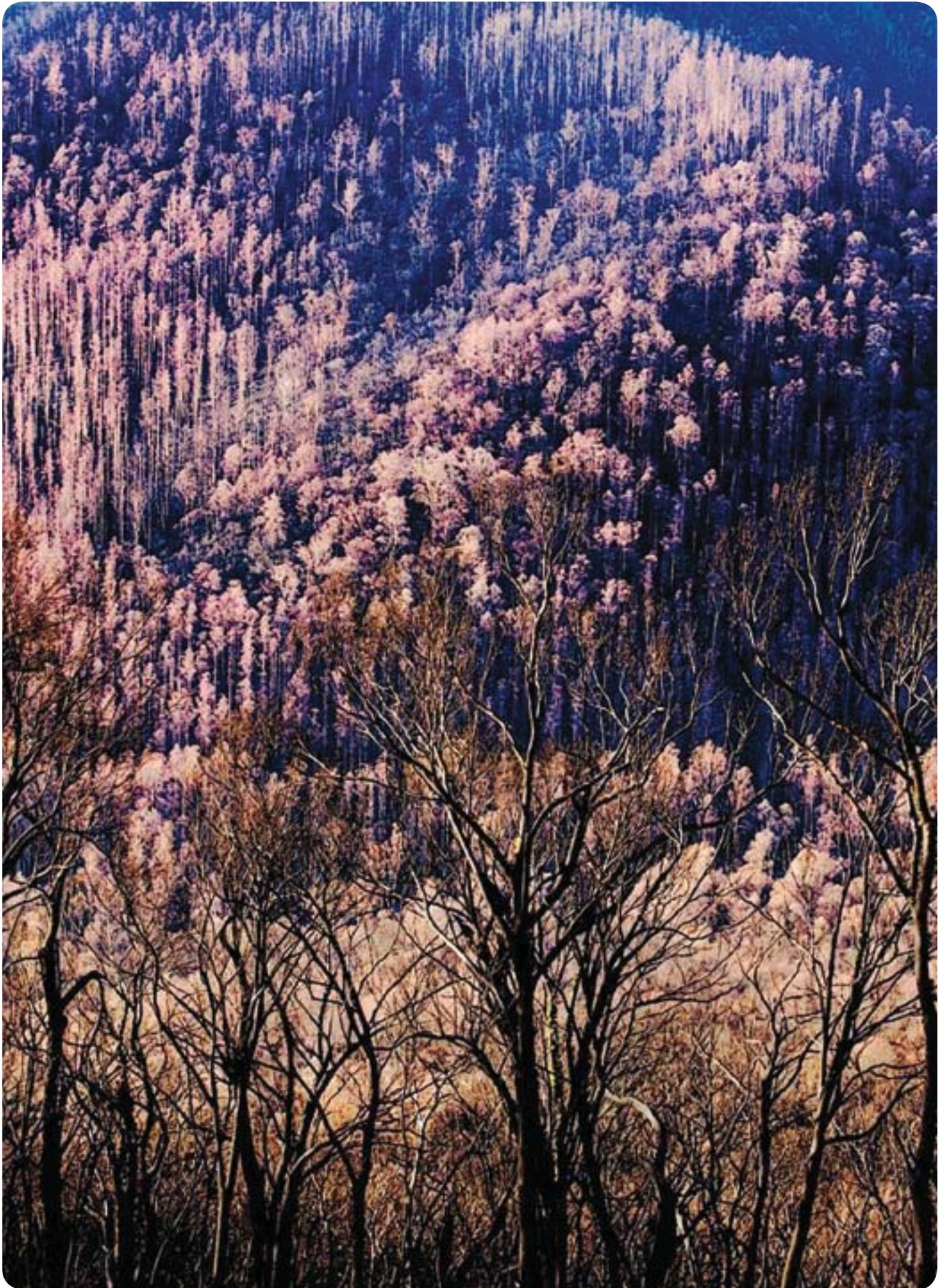
As part of Parks Victoria's immediate fire recovery efforts for the species, all damaged nestboxes were replaced

and additional nestboxes installed in places with remnant green vegetation, or where Leadbeater's Possum survival was possible. Creamed honey was smeared around the small entry holes on the nestboxes to attract any other homeless survivors, and a total of 37 new possum nesting boxes were erected across the Lake Mountain plateau.

The survivors are now the key to re-colonising the plateau and a recovery program has been organised with a trial of supplementary feeding

stations over winter. Supplementary feeding like this is only used under strict scientific supervision where it will support a critically endangered population. In this case the proposed menu of mealworms, fly pupae and a Leadbeater's Possum nectar mix is being made by Healesville Sanctuary.

Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum and the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort are providing volunteers to Parks Victoria to assist with the feeding program.



Burnt forest, Kinglake Ranges, March 2009

Grants and assistance

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have provided a range of emergency relief and recovery measures following the bushfires. A key component of this has been the provision of financial and non-financial assistance to individuals, families and communities.

Numerous grants have been, and will continue to be, issued by the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund which was established on 8 February by the Victorian Government in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and Australian Red Cross. The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments each contributed \$2 million to this fund.

A separate report being released by the Appeal Fund details allocations and disbursements from the Fund, so generously donated. As of 13 May, over \$346 million has been received and over \$240 million has been allocated and made available to bushfire survivors.

In addition, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have jointly funded a \$10 million Community Recovery Fund. This fund will assist with longer-term recovery through community development and capacity building. \$3 million from the fund has been set aside for grants, of up to \$100,000 each, for sports clubs in bushfire affected areas for rebuilding and reparation works. \$2.5 million from the fund has been set aside for memorials. \$1.75 million has been allocated for Community Development Officers, with another \$1.75 million for community grants and \$1 million for community projects.

Financial assistance through grants and payments is available to individuals, families, communities, local councils and businesses, and is provided to help address all the dimensions of recovery. Grants are provided to assist people through the four key recovery phases:

1. Immediate
 - emergency relief and support
2. Short-term
 - sustaining temporary arrangements
3. Medium-term
 - rebuilding homes, lives and communities
4. Long-term
 - assisting with the enduring impact of the fires.

Examples of the grants issued to date include:

Immediate – emergency relief and support

- The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment provides immediate financial assistance in the form of a one-off payment of \$1000 per adult and \$400 per child. To date the Commonwealth Government had paid more than 50,000 claims totalling \$58.7 million
- The Emergency Personal Hardship Payment, jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, consists of up to \$1067 per household to assist households to meet their immediate needs
- Temporary Living Expenses Grants of up to \$8650 from the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have been provided to assist with the cost of temporary accommodation and living expenses
- \$2.3 million has been made available in Compassion and Bereavement Payments from the Appeal Fund, with immediate support of \$10,000 to those families who lost loved ones

- The Commonwealth Government is providing \$5000 for Funeral/Memorial Assistance to one immediate family member of individuals who died in the fires. To date 109 people have been assisted, totalling \$765,000
- The Victorian Government will pay the funeral costs of bushfire affected families, with the payment of funeral expenses up to \$10,000, administered by the Transport Accident Commission
- The Commonwealth Government is offering an Income Recovery Subsidy to provide temporary income support to employees, small business operators and farmers who have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires. To date 3400 people had been assisted, totalling \$6.6 million.

Short-Term – sustaining temporary arrangements

- Re-establishment Grants from the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments provide up to \$8650 to assist with the replacement or repair of essential household contents
- The \$1.5 million Commonwealth Government package of support for aged care providers and clients consists of payments of up to \$10,000 to assist frail, older people and their carers replace uninsured independent living aids lost in the fires
- A \$30 million Initial Home Dislocation Payment through the Appeal Fund has seen families who lost their principal place of residence or were unable to return home for a week or more eligible to receive an average of \$10,000

Immediate support

In the immediate aftermath of the fires, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments put in place extensive measures to support fire affected communities, including:

- Establishing the Nurse-on-Call 1800 number to provide a telephone counselling support service for all Victorians affected by the devastating bushfires
- Providing Mental Health teams to assist people deal with the psychological and emotional impact of the fires, including boosting funding for Commonwealth funded providers of such services
- Providing free legal aid assistance via 1800 helpline and making lawyers available at operational Relief Centres
- Providing free public transport for people who lost their homes until 1 October 2009
- Assisting those who lost birth and marriage certificates in the fires to obtain new certificates at no cost
- The Commonwealth Government providing \$6 million to emergency relief organisations to assist service providers meet the increased demands for emergency relief
- Re-issuing key proof of identity documents, updating contact details and replacing passports at no cost
- State Revenue Office waiving the first \$1050 of stamp duty on a vehicle and \$21,970 on new homes
- Waiving Job Seeker requirements for Newstart for those job seekers who volunteered to help with the bushfire clean-up and recovery efforts or who live in locations where job opportunities were affected
- VicRoads processing requests to cancel registrations and issuing on-the-spot cash refunds, extending vehicle registration renewals by 28 days and replacing learner log books and registration plates
- Giving Victorian children affected by the fires access to at least 10 hours of free kindergarten per week, by extending the current kindergarten fee subsidy of \$751 to children affected by the fires.
- The Victorian Government has allocated \$500,000 for Community Building Initiative projects and other locally based organisations in fire affected areas are eligible for grants of up to \$30,000 to employ bushfire community recovery officers
- The Commonwealth Government provided \$6 million to emergency relief organisations to assist service providers meet the increased demands for emergency relief and to link clients with other community support services.
- Regional Arts Victoria will oversee a \$50,000 Arts Recovery Quick Response Grants program and will provide funds of up to \$2500 for local artists to work in their communities on arts recovery projects
- The Victorian Government is offering \$420,000 of funding to help organisations coordinating the thousands of volunteers who offered support to bushfire affected communities
- The Victorian Government and the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank established a \$4 million Bushfire Recovery Community Infrastructure Program to help rebuild community infrastructure and provide jobs in bushfire affected communities.

Medium-Term – rebuilding homes, lives and communities

- The fourth quarter Commonwealth Infrastructure Grants Payment has been brought forward from May 2009 to February 2009 for all Victorian local councils, in recognition of the difficulties they face. The total amount for Victoria is \$111 million
- More than \$130 million in donations to the Appeal Fund will be distributed to those whose houses were destroyed or partially destroyed in the bushfires
- The Appeal Fund is providing a grant 'Rural Properties Recovery Assistance Payment' of \$5000 to owners of small private farms impacted by the fires to assist in repair and restoration projects on properties, including fencing, sheds, water tanks, troughs, or hiring contractors to assist with on-farm repairs

Long-Term – assisting with the enduring impact of the fires

- The \$4 million Victorian Government Bushfire Recovery Community Infrastructure Program will provide grants of up to \$300,000 to regional, rural and interface councils for vital community infrastructure projects
- Severely injured victims of the bushfires will receive up to \$100,000 from the Appeal Fund to assist with their transition from hospital to home.

Next steps and goals for the bushfire reconstruction and recovery

- Community Service Hubs are operating as 'one-stop shops' and are providing the services required by local communities
- A seamless case management system is supporting the individuals and families that require a case manager
- Pledged goods and services meet the needs of individuals and communities
- Donations are distributed in a fair and equitable way
- Community Recovery Committees develop community recovery plans that reflect the needs of local communities
- Community recovery plans feed into the Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Master Plan, which is to be completed by late 2009
- The rebuilding of key community infrastructure begins, including schools and the Marysville police station
- The clean-up of debris and hazardous material from bushfire affected properties is completed by the end of September
- Temporary villages at Flowerdale, Marysville and Kinglake are completed and largely occupied by 30 June
- Bushfire affected individuals and families have access to suitable and safe housing solutions that meet their particular needs
- Approaches to encourage tourism and assist with business regeneration are implemented in bushfire affected regions
- Advice on pasture re-establishment and management, weed and pest animal management, whole farm and feed planning, water quality supplies for farm dams, soil conservation and erosion control, and animal health issues is provided
- Rehabilitation of fire control lines, and the resulting fence repair and replacement on private land, is completed by mid 2009
- A comprehensive assessment is undertaken of the effects on native wildlife and plant populations
- Grants are administered in a way that is equitable, convenient and reduces unnecessary burden on those in need.

Abbreviations and acronyms

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| ADF | Australian Defence Force (Commonwealth) | DPI | Department of Primary Industries (Victoria) |
| AFP | Australian Federal Police (Commonwealth) | DSE | Department of Sustainability and Environment (Victoria) |
| Appeal Fund | Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund | MFB | Metropolitan Fire Brigade (Victoria) |
| CFA | Country Fire Authority (Victoria) | MAV | Municipal Association of Victoria |
| DEECD | Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) | SES | State Emergency Service (Victoria) |
| DHS | Department of Human Services (Victoria) | The Authority | Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority |
| DIIRD | Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria) | VECCI | Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| DPCD | Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria) | VFF | Victorian Farmers Federation |

Important contacts for people affected by the bushfires

Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority

<http://www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1800 240 667

Victorian Bushfire Appeal Funds

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal
Ph: 1800 180 213

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

<http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1800 243 650

Government Departments

Prime Minister of Australia

<http://www.pm.gov.au/>
Ph: (02) 6277 7700

Premier of Victoria

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 9651 5000

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 9637 2000

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>
<http://www.disasterassist.gov.au>
Ph: 1300 653 227

Department of Human Services (Victoria)

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1300 650 172 or (03) 9096 0000

Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria)

<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>
Ph: (03) 9208 3333

Department of Primary Industries (Victoria)

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 136 186

Department of Sustainability and Environment (Victoria)

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 136 186

Centrelink (Commonwealth)

<http://www.centrelink.gov.au>
Ph: 180 2211

Agencies

Country Fire Authority

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1800 240 667

Metlink

<http://www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au>
Ph: 13 16 38

Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

<http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 9662 2311

Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner

<http://www.oesc.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 8684 7900

State Coroner's Office

<http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1300 309 519

State Revenue Office

<http://www.sro.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 13 21 61

Tourism Victoria

<http://www.tourism.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 9653 9777

Victoria Police

<http://www.police.vic.gov.au>
Ph: (03) 9247 6666

VicRoads

<http://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 13 11 71

Useful Contacts

Building Commission

<http://www.buildingcommission.com.au>
Ph: 1300 557 559 or (03) 9285 6400

Insurance Council of Australia

<http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au>
Ph: 1300 728 228

Municipal Association of Victoria

<http://www.mav.asn.au>
Ph: (03) 9667 5555

Plumbing Industry Commission

<http://www.pic.vic.gov.au>
Ph: 1800 015 129

Victorian Law Foundation

<http://www.victorialaw.org.au>
Ph: (03) 9604 8100

Personal Assistance

Australian Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org.au>
Ph: (03) 8327 7700

Kids Helpline

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au>
Ph: 1800 551 800

Lifeline

<http://www.lifeline.org.au/>
Ph: 13 11 14

Nurse-on-Call Bushfire Health and Counselling Line

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/nurseoncall>
Ph: 1300 60 60 24

Parentline

<http://www.parentline.com.au>
Ph: 13 22 89

Salvation Army

<http://www.salvos.org.au/>
Ph: 13 72 58

Communication channels

The Authority established a number of communication channels to keep fire affected communities up-to-date with the relief, recovery and rebuilding process, including:

- 1800 telephone number through the Victorian Bushfire Information Line – with over 2800 calls received to date
- 'wewillrebuild' website – with over 25,000 visits to date
- Free SMS alert service – to keep people informed with community updates and rebuilding announcements. A standard SMS charge applied to the initial SMS registration
- Regular Recovery Update newsletters – with a circulation of over 20,000 (these newsletters are in addition to those circulated by fire affected local councils).



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