774 ABC RADIO BROADCAST

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7am - Midnight

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[7am]

[Music]

JOHN REID: Firefighters facing the worse bushfire conditions since 1983; a flood warning for northern and central Queensland; and Australia's one-day cricketers suffer their fifth defeat in a row.

Good morning, John Reid with ABC News. Fire authorities say a fire burning in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne is out of control. Jean Edwards reports.

JEAN EDWARDS: Firefighters have spent the night working on the blaze as Victoria braces for the worst fire weather in more than 20 years. The Department of Sustainability and Environment's State duty officer, Dennis Ward, says the fire has broken containment lines on the eastern side.

DENNIS WARD: At this stage that fire's out of control. It's estimated that it's greater than 150-odd hectares in size.

JEAN EDWARDS: The fire could pose a threat to the nearby communities of Labertouche and Tonimbuk. Residents in Drouin West, Longwarry, Bunyip and Jindivick have been told to prepare their homes for falling embers. There's a total fire ban in place for all of the State. Jean Edwards, ABC News, Melbourne.

JOHN REID: The fire could also pose a threat to major power lines to Melbourne, and V/Line says it's likely trains and coaches to Gippsland will be cancelled.

The Weather Bureau says the temperature is expected to reach close to 40 degrees by midday, along with strong winds. Senior forecaster, Dean Stewart, says winds could reach up to 80 km/h where the fire is burning at the Bunyip State Park.

DEAN STEWART: At the moment the winds are quite light out the - near the Bunyip fire site. However, those northerlies are likely to pick up this morning. They are also expecting a south-westerly change through there this evening, most likely around 7 o'clock this evening, and it could be quite squally as that change moves through as well, which also creates a hazard.

[7.02am]

JOHN REID: People are being urged to keep a close eye on the elderly during the forecast extreme heat today. Paramedics are asking people to stay indoors if they can. Ambulance Victoria says a range of contingencies are in place to ensure it can meet an expected increase in demand for help, including calling staff back from leave if they're needed. The operations manager, Paul Holman, says people should look after one another and take steps to avoid heat-related illnesses.

PAUL HOLMAN: If you have neighbours, check on those neighbours; make sure that they're okay. This is an extreme weather event that we've never experienced before right across the State and combined with high winds. You need to keep cool, you need to keep hydrated, and you need to wear loose clothing.

JOHN REID: Interstate firefighters are also facing a tough weekend, with unprecedented bushfire conditions also expected in New South Wales and South Australia. Three large bushfires are burning in New South Wales, and firefighters are expecting some of those to intensify in coming days. A fire near Muswellbrook 200 kilometres north of Sydney is the most serious, although the front has started moving away from homes. The Rural Fire Service has also dozens of personnel at fires near Bega in the State's far south and Lake Macquarie on the North Coast, but no communities are in immediate danger. South Australian authorities are also bracing for expected hot conditions.

Flood waters are again rising around Ingham in north Queensland after another night of heavy rain. The Herbert River is expected to near flood levels earlier in the week. Roads in the region remain cut, including the Bruce Highway in several places. Authorities remain on standby in case of any problems. Tony Gordon from the Weather Bureau says it'll be a wet weekend for the region.

TONY GORDON: We're expecting heavy rainfall to continue with the monsoon trough in probably areas between Cairns and extending down to Mackay later in the day. Overnight we've seen falls of up to 350mm near Innisfail, and anything up to about 50 to 100 near Ingham, and that's probably the most heavily flooded area so far.

JOHN REID: A group of senators with the power to scuttle the Federal Government's $42 billion economic rescue plan are continuing to raise their concerns. Danny Morgan reports from Parliament House.

DANNY MORGAN: The list of changes being sought by cross-bench senators continues to mount. The Family First senator, Steve Fielding, says he wants more money directed towards the unemployed. The Greens want more energy efficient public housing, and the Independent, Nick Xenophon, says there's no justification for millions of dollars going to rich private schools. With the Government desperate to get the package through Parliament, Senator Xenophon expects a torrid round of negotiations.

SENATOR XENOPHON: It was a hell of a week last week and next week is, I think, going to be significantly worse.

DANNY MORGAN: A Senate vote on the package is expected late next week. Danny Morgan, ABC News, Canberra.

JOHN REID: A woman's been critically injured in a car crash in Melbourne's CBD. Police say the woman was hit while she was trying to cross King Street shortly before 2 o'clock this morning. The driver of the car is helping police with their inquiries.

Police have arrested a man they think is responsible for a series of armed robberies across Melbourne. The 26 year old allegedly stole cash from a convenience store in South Yarra armed with a knife late last night. Police caught him soon afterwards. He's facing 22 charges. Police believe the man is behind eight other armed robberies at stores around the city. ABC News, it's 5 minutes past 7.

Police will today speak to two Americans who went missing from a dive boat off the Far North Queensland coast yesterday. As Thea Phillips reports, the drivers were - rather, the divers were rescued after several hours at sea.

THEA PHILLIPS: The man and woman became separated from their boat during a diving expedition on Challenger Reef off Cooktown at about 10 o'clock yesterday morning. Four helicopters, a search and rescue plane and a Coastguard boat helped search for the divers who were found near Ribbon Reef No. 9 a short distance away from where they

went missing. An investigation into the incident's been launched and police are hoping to speak to the divers some time today. Both have rejoined their chartered trip after being given the all clear by a doctor shortly after they were rescued.

JOHN REID: Employers in the United States slashed nearly 600,000 jobs in January. Washington correspondent Mark Simkin reports.

MR SIMKIN: In the last 12 months the world's biggest economy's lost 3.5 million jobs. January's dismal contribution sent the unemployment rate to its highest level in 16 years. Economists now expect the recession will continue until at least the middle of the year. The worse than expected figures put more pressure on Congress, which is still debating and negotiating Barack Obama's massive economic stimulus plan. Democratic leaders hope to get the package through the Senate today, but they are yet to win over sceptical Republicans. Mark Simkin, ABC News, Washington.

JOHN REID: The world's top selling car maker, Toyota, says it's facing an operating loss of $7 billion. As North Asia correspondent Mark Willesee reports from Tokyo, that's three times more than the company initially forecast.

MR WILLESEE: Toyota says a massive slump in global demand and a surge in the yen against the Euro and the US dollar are the main reasons for the massive loss. 6 billion of the $7 billion operating loss was recorded in one quarter alone. Electronics maker, Sharp, has also announced it's facing the first operating loss in its history, predicting a slip into the red of half a billion dollars, and Japan's biggest bank, Mitsubishi UFJ, says it has recorded a net loss of $700 million. Mark Willesee, ABC News, Tokyo.

JOHN REID: The President of South Africa, Kgaleme Motlanthe, has said the global economic crisis poses serious dangers for his country. Giving the annual State of the Nation address, Mr Motlanthe said the crisis could lead to job losses, but that South Africa was poised for growth, albeit at a slower rate. But he said South Africa would withstand the challenge.

Now, with sport, here's James Coventry.

JAMES COVENTRY: Australia's one-day cricket side has slumped to its fifth consecutive defeat with a six wicket loss to New Zealand at the MCG. Set 226 to win, the Black Caps reached the target with seven balls to spare, to take a 2-nil lead in the five-match series. New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori says his team is playing above expectations.

DANIEL VETTORI: There's not many New Zealand teams who have come over here and beaten Australia two games in a row, so it's a bit of foreign territory, but something that we're really enjoying.

JAMES COVENTRY: Queensland Roar has beaten the Central Coast Mariners 2-nil in Gosford in the first leg of the minor semi-final in soccer's A League. Adelaide United hosts Melbourne in the first leg of the major semi tonight. Townsville defended the National Basketball leaders, the South Dragons, 101-98 last night, while Wollongong beat New Zealand 103-98. In the WNBL, the AIS beat Dandenong 79-74 in Canberra, and Logan defeated Adelaide 75-70 in Brisbane.

Australian golfer Nikki Campbell is 10 under par and holds a one stroke lead over compatriot Kristie Smith heading in today's third round of the Ladies' Masters on the Gold Coast. And Australia's Fed Cup tennis team faces New Zealand in the final of the Asia Oceania Group 1 play off in Perth today.

JOHN REID: Belgian cyclist Tom Boonen has won the Tour of Qatar. He finished 8 seconds clear of Australian-born German Heinrich Hassler. Boonen came 10th in the 6th and vital stage, which was won by British rider, Mark Cavendish.

[7.09am]

Now to the main points again: Victorian and interstate firefighters are waiting the possibility of the worst fire storms since 1983, with forecasts of strong winds and temperatures in to the mid 40s.

[7.09am]

And a front warning's been issued for northern and central Queensland.

Now to the weather, and the CFA has declared today a

day of total fire ban for the entire State. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory, and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays. For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

And for Melbourne: dry and mostly sunny with areas of raised dust, the winds tending north to north-westerly and increasing to 55 km/h during the morning, a cooler south-westerly change later this afternoon. A top of 44. Tomorrow: windy with showers, 23; Monday, light showers, 21; light showers Tuesday, 20; 24 at the moment.

Call now on 1300 222 774, or text 1977 4774. Hilary Harper, on 774, ABC, Melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: It's 10 past 7. How hot is it where you are? You can send us a text if you like. Let us know how it's heating up and how quickly, 1977 4774. In a moment we'll be telling you how to take really good care of your muscles. I guess it's something that a lot of us don't really think about most of the time. They just function or they hurt, and that's the only time you think about them, but they actually work in really interesting ways, and we'll be asking how you can build them up effectively, how you can let them heal and recover, and how they - how they go as you age. We've got someone who's been studying muscles for 25 years and he can tell us a bit about them. Also some tips for staying cool and beating the heat stress as well, as the day soars up to 44 - very, very windy day with a late change. It's 11 past 7.

[7.11am]

You might have heard that there are some fires burning. Well, the fire in the Bunyip State Park is now out of control, and to tell us a bit more about it Stuart Ord is here from the DSE. Good morning, Stuart.

STUART ORD: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Now, how big is that fire out at Bunyip?

STUART ORD: The fire's about 150 hectares, which is -

which is a fair size but, you know, it's nothing that we haven't had a go at before, but unfortunately this one during the night did jump the containment lines, as you - as you stated. So we've got a pretty serious situation with the weather coming up today in that area, and we're just alerting the communities in the area of Jindivick, Drouin, Drouin West, Longwarry, Longwarry North, Neerim, Neerim South, Noojee, Bunyip, Shady Creek and Rosworth. There's a lot of - lot of areas there, but they're - they're likely to see a lot of smoke today, a lot of embers, and possibly fire in that area.

HILARY HARPER: So is it too late to leave now if you have your bushfire survival plan and you're making that decision?

STUART ORD: No, it's not, and people should by now have really have thought about this, they've known that the fire's been in the area for the last couple of days. Now is the time early this morning, not - not leave it any longer, because as this day goes on, the weather conditions are going to get worse, the day's going to heat up, the winds are going to get stronger. It's time now that residents really have made up their decision whether they intend staying and have done the preparatory work around - around their assets, or whether they're going to leave. If they are leave, let someone know, or leave - leave a message at the house, 'cos sometimes it's difficult for firefighters to know whether people are still there or not.

HILARY HARPER: So there are - there are no road closures listed at the moment; is that right?

STUART ORD: That's correct.

HILARY HARPER: And that - but that situation may well change?

STUART ORD: Yes, it will, and I think it goes without saying that people - we don't want people up in that area at all. We've got to let the firefighters have the best possible go. It is going to be a very, very difficult situation up in that area today.

HILARY HARPER: So how many appliances are at the area and how many people have you got up there fighting it?

STUART ORD: Look, we've got - we've got many, many aircraft. Yesterday I think there were up to 11 aircraft, but once again, today in terms of aerial support it's going to be very difficult, whether the aircraft can in fact get into the air for a number of reasons - it will be smoky, it will be hazy, and the - and the conditions over the fire will be very, very difficult. We do have in terms of a couple of hundred resources up there. Once again, because of the flame heights at the moment - and this is really unusual fire conditions we've got - the flame heights already at this time of the morning are 5 to 10 metres. That says that we can't put our firefighters right on the fire edge like we normally would try and do. We've got to back off and try to set up some control lines further back.

HILARY HARPER: So does that indicate the - the seriousness of the threat and - and the need for people to make a decision now, based on a very clear understanding of what their ability to fight that fire is at their --

STUART ORD: Absolutely.

HILARY HARPER: -- house?

STUART ORD: Absolutely, Hilary. People need to understand that this fire is a particularly serious one. The flame heights will be something that they will not be able to stand themselves and have a bit of a go at. Depending on how strong these winds get, and the Weather Bureau's predicting anywhere between 50 and 80 km/h, the fire during the day will tend to move pretty quickly.

HILARY HARPER: Well, we'll be keeping people updated throughout the day with coverage of those fires, and thank you very much for joining us, Stuart.

STUART ORD: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Stuart Ord, a spokesperson for the DSE, and they will be doing their utmost to contain that fire today. But it does sound like a serious threat, so obviously now is the time to make that decision about whether you stay or go.

[7.15am]

Quarter past 7 on 774, ABC, Melbourne. If you're in

Melbourne today, or wherever you around the State really, it's going to be very, very hot. I don't think there's going to be any places where it's going to be extremely comfortable, so you might want to think about ways that you can make the best of the situation that we are in to stay as cool as you can. Dr John Carney is the chief - sorry, is the chief health officer for Victoria. Good morning, John.

DR CARNEY: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Now, the cumulative impact of last week's heat made people very grumpy and obviously had a lot of health impacts. What are you expecting to see today?

DR CARNEY: Well, we're going to have extreme weather conditions again today, so what we'd like to do is to tell people about preventing heat-related illness. Clearly, during days like this, more people get ill and, unfortunately, some people die from heat-related illness, so the sorts of information we'd like to give can be summarised into about five important points. One is if you're caring for the young or the elderly, monitor their condition, and this especially goes for the frail elderly living on their own, so friends, relatives, neighbours, who ever - if you know of some frail elderly person, please check on them.

Second is never leave anyone in a closed parked car, because that's when the temperature goes really very high very quickly. Third is stay cool by whatever means possible, reduce physical activity, stay indoors if possible in an air-conditioned surrounding, or if you're outdoors, in the shade, wear light clothing. If you're really feeling very hot, take a cool shower or bath.

The next thing is drink plenty of water and reduce your consumption of alcohol. Now, if your fluid intake has been limited by your doctor because of some medical condition, please check with your doctor as to how much you can drink when you're feeling hot. And, lastly, know to recognise the signs of heat-related illness and take appropriate action - you know, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, which is the - which is a serious condition developing after you get cramps - you can get a rapid heart rate, weakness, dizziness, headache and so on - if you're feeling like that, you really need to get cool quickly.

HILARY HARPER: So if you're with someone who's showing those symptoms and might be seeming to be a bit groggy --

DR CARNEY: Yes.

HILARY HARPER: -- or mentally impaired --

DR CARNEY: Yes.

HILARY HARPER: -- what can you do for them?

DR CARNEY: Well, get them into the shade if you're outdoors, cool them down by sponging them down with cool water. If it's possible, get them into a cool shower or a cool bath; give them plenty of water to drink. Thirdly, if you need advice at such a situation call Nurse on Call, which is 1300 606 024, or if their condition is not improving very quickly, certainly call a doctor, get them to hospital if they're not recovering quickly.

HILARY HARPER: Because that can be a potentially fatal condition.

DR CARNEY: Well, heat stroke, which is the - which is the condition that goes on after heat exhaustion, is a - is a life threatening condition and that's where the person might be confused, they might stagger about, they seem to collapse, go unconscious - very serious condition, they need to be in a hospital.

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you very much for updating us on that, Dr Carney. We'll pop those tips up on our website and make sure they're available for everyone.

DR CARNEY: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you. Dr John Carney, the chief health officer for Victoria, and our website is abc.net.au/melbourne. We'll pop those five simple tips up for staying cool, and also some of the symptoms of heat stress so that you can make sure you can help people avoid them. Also, if you do get into trouble, you can call your - the Nurse on Call line, which is 1300 606 024, and you can also do some pre-emptive work. Call your local council and see what services are available, and the DHS, the Department of Health and - no, not the DHS - Department

of Human Services - I'm getting confused already - they have an emergency page with lots of useful information on it so it's worth checking that one as well. It's 19 past 7 on 774 ABC Melbourne.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC, Melbourne, your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

[7.19am]

HILARY HARPER: Today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria and in the Southern Riverina incorporating Corowa and Berrigan shires in New South Wales and the Eastern Riverina incorporating Albury City and Greater Hume shires. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open and you must not allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery such as angle grinders and welders is banned in the region. Tractors, chain saws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary. For more information you can call the bushfire information line. That number's 1800 240 667 and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[7.20am]

It's 20 past 7. In a moment we'll be looking at muscle health. We've all got them, but some of them don't work so well. We'll be working out how to get the most out of your muscles. First, though, cyclists across Melbourne - and not just because of the heat - are in a bit of a lather of excitement with the return of a long lost friend for commuter cyclists particularly coming from the west of Melbourne. The Westgate punt is having a short revisit to our shores. Alex is the skipper of the Westgate punt, and he joins us. Good morning, Alex.

ALEX: G'day, Hil.

HILARY HARPER: What's it like being a punt skipper?

ALEX: Well, look, there's no grumpy punters, I have to

say. It's - it's pretty invigorating. I get to speak to more people than you would believe - a great variety of people. Cyclists and pedestrians are, I don't know, relaxed, fun to be with. But, look, a small correction: we haven't really departed the shores. We closed for a short time before - during wintertime, before Ride to Work Day when we resumed, but the punt's operated pretty much non-stop on weekends and public holidays, but we're just trying to start up a weekly service again.

HILARY HARPER: So has there been lots of demand from these relaxed cyclists who like to use it on week days?

ALEX: Look, it's really - it's really variable. It's weather dependent. It will be interesting to see what today's like. It's the coolest place in Melbourne, of course. So those that are out riding will probably want to break their ride and get on the punt, but the reason I stopped during the wintertime was we had three or four weekends in a row with nobody there, and the same applies to weekday cyclists. If the weather's too bad - whether it's too hot, too windy, too cold and wet - then people don't ride. There are those dedicated ones that do it in all weather and they like to see us there.

HILARY HARPER: Well, how long does it save you on a journey? Say, if you're riding in from the west to the city, how long do you save by going on the punt?

ALEX: Depends how quick a rider you are and to where - you know, what exactly your destination is. But let's say somebody's leaving from the Williamstown side, that's the Spotswood landing, the crossing takes about five minutes, so if they're there immediately before the punt arrives and leaves, they're saving probably 20 minutes there. And if they're going straight across towards Port Melbourne or down the - that eastern side of the river, the saving can be, I've been told, you know, at least half an hour.

HILARY HARPER: So how many people would it take to get it back for good as a regular weekday commuter service?

ALEX: Hilary, we're a long way behind the 8-ball. How many? Quite obviously - we can shift 300 on a big day. Now, when we go down to 3s and 30s, just like anything that makes it, you know, quite obviously not viable, and what we as operators and what I think the punters have been after

is looking at how we can fit into the public transport system, because ebbs and flows are part of public transport. We're not; we're a private operation. There are plenty of operations close to us that are contracted to - to, you know, V/Line or the larger public transport system that can operate whether they're full or empty because they have a baseline contract, which we don't. It's one of those services that - we'll wait and see what happens during this coming week, but you could get - as I say, on big days we can move 300 people.

HILARY HARPER: Well, and I suppose if you're open between 6 and 10 in the morning and 3 and 7 in the evening there's that potential, particularly on a week where it's not going to be 44 degrees. And what do you when you're not skippering, Alex?

ALEX: I've spent most of my life on the land, with a few years at sea trawling. I've got a small farm and a couple of kids that keep me occupied.

HILARY HARPER: That's definitely enough, isn't it? Well, I do hope - you know, I don't want to drag you away from the farm and the kids, but I do hope we see a bit more of the punt, and thanks for joining us this morning.

ALEX: Hope to see you there some time. Thank you very much.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you.

ALEX: 'Bye.

HILARY HARPER: Alex, the skipper of the Westgate punt, on which I have been at some point. We did a ride out to Port Melbourne and it did save a lot of time, and it was very, very pleasant. So if you'd like to check it out, it's open between 6 and 10 in the morning running backwards and forwards between Port Melbourne and Spotswood near Scienceworks, and 3 and 7 in the evening, just for this week, during week days. It is always open on weekends and public holidays.

24 past 7 on 774, ABC, Melbourne.

FEMALE SPEAKER: From 5.30am each week day.

MALE SPEAKER: Do you know the safest place to be?

MALE SPEAKER: Where's that?

MALE SPEAKER: It's actually on the radio, because, you know, it's just so noisy in the car, like a log fire burning in the corner. We say whatever we like. Nobody's paying attention.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Red Symons.

MALE SPEAKER: You never know, I mean someone could be recording it, editing, rearranging the words.

MALE SPEAKER: Don't - don't even think it.

MALE SPEAKER: Good talking to you, Red.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Red Symons.

MALE SPEAKER: (Indistinct) Washington, ABC correspondent.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On 774, ABC, Melbourne.

MALE SPEAKER: Call now on 1300 222 774 or text 1977 4774. Hilary Harper.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On 774, ABC, Melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: 25 past 7. After the news and AM, when we return at half past 8 we'll be showing you how to spend your new windfall from the Prime Minister's stimulus package, if some of it actually does end up filtering down to the likes of you and me. We'll talk to Doug Turek about what it all means for you, all the different aspects of it, and whether you are part of a family or if you run a small business or if you're just a working individual, it will have different impacts and we'll explore those.

First, though, we've all got them - some of them are bigger than others, and some of them get a bit saggy as we get older and sometimes they give us a bit of gip. Muscles I'm talking about, and our next guest has studied them for 25 years. Dr Graham Lamb is National Health & Medical Research Council, senior principal research fellow at La Trobe Uni. Good morning, Graham.

DR LAMB: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you for joining us.

DR LAMB: Pleasure.

HILARY HARPER: Now, why did you choose to study muscles for 25 years?

DR LAMB: Well, there's a lot of basic work's just not known about muscle and we - I was just very interested in the - in the mechanisms. They're - a lot more goes on in making them be able to do their job in extreme circumstances and I'm - working with the NHMRC, we're interested in what goes wrong in many circumstances, the weakness that you get, in certain diseases what goes wrong, even in normal exercise, just trying to understand the basics.

HILARY HARPER: So, say, when you walk downhill or downstairs for half an hour and you get that trembly feeling?

DR LAMB: Well, that's a different thing. Walking downhill is a very special case which people understand where you actually cause micro damage and your muscles - that's why you feel terribly sore the next day and you actually are weak, and we - our latest work we're just trying to understand about what helps that build back up again, but that's a very particular case.

HILARY HARPER: Well, so when you - when this kind of micro damage occurs, does it just heal naturally?

DR LAMB: Yes, if you are a normal person, you are absolutely adapted to do it. That's the beauty of it, and what a lot of people should always expect, that the muscles fit what you ask them to do, and if you don't exercise them, you waste them, they waste away, and if you exercise them they build up to do precisely the job you're asking, if you're normal. And unfortunately some people have got some certain diseases, some various usually genetic diseases where there's - you have an inability to repair it, or you are very easily damaged and they have a lot of trouble, in the long run.

HILARY HARPER: We'll talk a bit more as the hour

progresses about your research and what we found out about muscles lately, but I'd like to hear from you, if you've got a question about your muscles. Perhaps you're wondering how much you should work them, perhaps you're wanting to know how to build them up, they're not big enough for you and you'd like to pump them up a little bit. 1300 222 774 is our number, or you can text us, if you like, on 1977 4774. If there's a question teasing you about your muscles, you can give us a call now - 1300 222 774.

We've had a text message saying it's 24 degrees in Cowes at the moment. That doesn't sound terribly appalling yet, but it is only, you know, 28 past 7 in the morning. I imagine it will be much warmer than that very soon.

So, Graham, how do muscles work? I know that sounds like a fairly basic question, but how much do we know about how they work?

DR LAMB: We're - the broad part is understood, that there are two proteins that what you call interdigitate, like putting your fingers into each other and they pull on each other if they get the signal to do it.

HILARY HARPER: So you've just meshed your fingers here.

DR LAMB: I've meshed my fingers together, and when they're turned on, they pull against each other, which means it contracts, it shortens. Muscles are designed to shorten, that's their job, and, as they pull on whatever they're connected to. And that's how you do all of your work. But the trick is getting it to turn on when you want, so it gets turned on by an electrical signal from your brain that goes rapidly over the muscle that gets every part of the muscle to work at the same time. It has to work in synchrony, or it's useless. You know, something pulling on one end of a - of a spring is no good. The whole thing's got to work together.

And then it actually is a - it turns on a whole signalling sequence and releases what's - an ion called calcium. It's an ion that's in your blood, and throughout all your cells, but inside your cells there's much, much, much lower concentration, and it's actually one of the things that turns on many processes. It turns on the actual muscles - makes them contract, and if things goes wrong it turns on

mechanisms to destroy a cell - all sorts of things, so it's an incredibly important ion that's very strongly regulated.

HILARY HARPER: So it's a complex machine, the muscle, it sounds like.

[7.30am]

DR LAMB: Absolutely, and every part has to work. That's of course what you've got to appreciate, that you can get fatigue or disease from any part of the whole sequence going wrong.

HILARY HARPER: Great!

DR LAMB: Well, what is amazing and beautiful, every time you look at it you think how exceptionally well it does work, and in many circumstances. You can push it hard and again and again and it keeps going until it does eventually - can reach a brick wall, and don't be surprised, your fatigue. I mean, it's going to turn off in the long run and one of the things that we - we found is that one of the major causes of muscle fatigue in the fastest strongest muscles, it used to be said, "Oh, they'll never change their cellular energy" - what's the molecule called - ATP. It doesn't drop. And that was because people took biopsies of muscle, and they ground it all up and found there was still - in fatigue muscle there was still plenty of this molecule, but of course they were a bit naive. Muscle's made up of many different muscle fibres.

Some are meant to do a little bit of work and not fatigue - they are often called the slow twitch or the red muscles and fibres - and there are ones that are meant to produce the power. They produce far more. And they are the ones you turn on when you really want to power lift or sprint. And don't be surprised that if you go and look at a mixture of it all ground up together you won't find that - what individual different sorts are doing, and what our research and others has shown is that the very fastest strongest ones do actually use all of their energy molecule and, not magically, they stop just before they run out. Now, a cell running out of its energy molecule, they'll - they'll die, right, but of course they are made to turn off before they get to that point. So that's exactly what they do. And it means that of course you're going to reach a wall. You

can't go on and on and on using more than you get. If you've got a bank account, you can't spend more than you earn. You go into your bank account and when you get down to a dollar or two left, you can't go further.

HILARY HARPER: So muscles have limits.

DR LAMB: Muscles, they're made to have limits, so they turn themselves off before they damage themselves. You live to run away another day.

HILARY HARPER: Excellent. We've got a few potential runners on the line waiting to ask you questions. 1300 222 774 is our number, and Doug has called it from Glen Waverley. Good morning, Doug.

CALLER DOUG: Good morning.

HILARY HARPER: What's your question for Graham?

CALLER DOUG: Morning, Graham. I've - I've just come out of retirement, had a sudden rush of blood to the head, and in my 50s I've started rowing again.

DR LAMB: Great.

CALLER DOUG: So my question is am I wasting my time going back into the weight room at this age? Am I going to build some muscle and some strength?

DR LAMB: Yes, you will. I mean, there is the cold hard fact that strikes us all that you do lose the ability to build up muscle as well - as easily when you're older. Particularly over about 40 or 50, you do lose some muscle fibres and that's an unavoidable part of ageing, and it's seen in all animals and people. That can't happen. But the thing is it's all a use it or lose it and you will lose it faster if you don't use it. If you use it, you will lose it a lot slower and I would say by all means keep it up, and you will build up, but maybe not as much you remember you could do when you were 20, and you've probably got to keep within your limits. You don't want to damage it so fast and so much that you're getting - you're not getting enough benefit. But, yes, absolutely. And that's the biggest thing about ageing is that people don't do the exercise. It gets a bit harder, they do less and they lose it more. And muscles are very important. If you don't

have enough bulk of your muscles, you will get sicker, you will respond worse when you do get sick. Muscle is - it does more as well as heat you. You've got to keep your muscle up and the only way you can do it is exercise.

HILARY HARPER: So the rowing sounds like a great idea, Doug.

DR LAMB: Absolutely. And, you know, just for body health, you - I think rowing's a very good exercise, because you will use many muscles. It won't be just certain muscles. And that's certainly going to help you in your - in all of your lifestyle and longevity.

CALLER DOUG: The aerobic exercise is working a treat and the fitness is coming back. I was just concerned about not being able to put as much effort on the end of the blade by not --

DR LAMB: Look, I'm getting older too. You will not be able to put quite as much as you could, but you - the more you do, you will still not do badly, and you will be looking great compared to all the other 50 year olds, and you'll do very well in the long run.

CALLER DOUG: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Doug. Peter is in East Bentleigh. Good morning, Peter.

CALLER PETER: How are you?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thanks.

CALLER PETER: I've just got an enquiry about I've got a teenage son, 14, and I've got an older one, 20. We've got a gym at home. The 20 year old goes pretty well but the 14 year old, how much should he be doing? His muscles are still growing, so how much weight should he be pumping and that? That's what I'm enquiring about.

DR LAMB: Well, look, that is not my specialty to say at a certain age what - your exercise regime. You could get a special sports physiologist to come in and they'd have to look at the particular case, but basically they are hardy - if he's not hurting himself exceptionally, a little bit of feeling a bit sore afterwards is not a bad sign, but you

should - he will respond, and he will respond extremely well at his age to doing exercise, but one of the things that I - I learned when I was studying and I've heard and know very well from later work, that one of your - one of the things that is very important in your whole cellular well-being and growth is a thing called growth hormone. It's a major hormone and there's three things that get it to be secreted, and they are exercise, eating, and sleeping. It's everything your mum told you, that's absolutely true. People learnt over thousands of years that they are - that healthy lifestyle - not just one thing in extreme, the whole range is - is what your whole body's designed to do, and at his age if he's eating, sleeping and doing lots of exercise, his muscles will respond and, you know, the more you do up to a limit they will - they'll respond extremely well. So, you know, let him decide the limit.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for that, Peter. That's interesting, because I was wondering when you use your muscles and they feel stiff the next day, should you immediately use them again and work off that stiffness?

DR LAMB: Look, I would again say that a sports physiologist with the experience of seeing it again and again would probably give you a better view than I do. I'm more working on the basic mechanisms and what goes wrong in diseases. That's more a "try it and see" and I think even for individual people, but if you find your getting worse and worse, that's a bad sign, but a little bit of feeling stiff and so on, I think you'll find with exercise your muscles will respond, but you can't expect them to respond in a day. I mean, these things take a week or two to get better. One of - one of the things that show that quite well is that walking down the hills. I mean, we said that if you walk down, you're very sore, and it takes a day before you really get that peak soreness, and that's both a switching on of the mechanism to clean up the muscles, but it also switches on the mechanisms that build up the muscles, and the striking thing is, if you do that once, you do it a week later and it won't happen.

So your muscles will purposely make themselves bigger, longer, stronger, when you've given them that exercise, and we're talking of the order of a week or two, so don't expect in two days you can go and do it. They don't respond that quickly.

HILARY HARPER: Maria has called in from Lower Templestowe. Good morning, Maria.

CALLER MARIA: Good morning. How are you?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you.

CALLER MARIA: Good. Now, my question is when I had my last ankle surgery, I was for a long time in a plaster and after that I couldn't - wasn't allowed to put my foot down. Now, when I was able to put my foot down, my muscles looked like jelly. Now, I have to have another exercise - exercise - another operation. I will be in for three to four months out of action. What can I do to prevent that muscle shrinking while I'm ill?

DR LAMB: If you - it's a very well known response that if you immobilise the limb, it will reduce in size. It's exactly the use it and lose it. And if you're immobilising it, you can't use it at all. I'd talk to your doctor about whether it is possible, even when it's in the cast, to do some tensing of it to keep it in as good a condition.

CALLER MARIA: I did that - I did that, but it didn't show any benefit.

DR LAMB: Well, I think you've got to expect that if it's - if it's in a cast, you will - it's absolutely inevitable it will get smaller. The muscle fibres are designed to exactly do that. Your body doesn't waste all that energy sitting - having the muscles if you're not using them, and it downplays them every time you're not and I'm afraid there's no - there's no magic cure to that.

CALLER MARIA: No magic cure.

DR LAMB: But you will get them back as you do more exercise. What I advise, and you really need to talk to your doctor about this, but if you know it's going to be coming, start with more. You shouldn't, as you get, you know - if you possibly can without hurting yourself, you should be keeping up exercises, the walking, so that you start in a better position before you immobilise it, and you will last a bit longer.

CALLER MARIA: Yeah, I do - I do already. I do already.

I can't do walking because my ankle is too bad, but I do other exercises to strengthen my muscles.

DR LAMB: Yes, and that is - that's very good and you really have to keep that up, but there's no other magic cure to stop them --

CALLER MARIA: Okay, okay. Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Maria.

CALLER MARIA: 'Bye.

HILARY HARPER: It's hard to hear that there's no magic cure, isn't it? Sometimes people --

DR LAMB: Yeah.

HILARY HARPER: -- are very keen to know that there is one. I guess you must come across that fairly - fairly often.

DR LAMB: Particularly with the diseases, the genetic diseases that unfortunately there's not much that can be done for a lot of the dystrophies. I mean, we're trying to understand them and what particular parts go wrong, but it's - mostly they're a genetic problem and that's - there's a lot of work being done to try and develop genetic - ways of improving it, but that's not there yet.

HILARY HARPER: Time will tell. Perhaps there will be something in the future. George is in Frankston. Hello, George.

GEORGE: Yes, good morning. I've got a cramp at the moment. I've been suffering for the last three or four weeks with cramp in my calf muscles. How can I --

DR LAMB: Well, cramp is one of the things that's extremely poorly understood, and the reason is that it's - it's something that a lot of the knowledge we have comes from animals' models. You'll try - you can do it and find that a muscle in an animal will fatigue. Cramp just happens a bit sporadically, and you can't find out if an animal's feeling pain very easily and say, "Does that hurt?" It's really - it's humans, and you find that they tell you it happened and then it's not actually happening

at that time. So it's very hard to work out what's going wrong, but there are several known causes. Basically it's - there's too much excitability to the muscle. That's what it is. It's nothing - it's not really so much inside the muscle; it's the nerve stimulation to the muscle is certainly some of the cramps. I'm not - it's almost certain that there's a range of different causes, and salt deficiency is an incredibly well known one, so I don't know if you are doing lots of exercises or if you're salt's down or something or other, but if it is, the cramps - that's quite common. Then -- I'm not going to be able to help you specifically.

HILARY HARPER: It might be worth a visit to the GP for that one, George. Thank you for calling in. And thank you to everyone else who called in. It was a bit of a crowded show this morning with all the emergency information, and we will be keeping you up-to-date on that. Dr Graham Lamb, thank you so much for coming in and telling us about muscles.

DR LAMB: Pleasure.

HILARY HARPER: Dr Graham Lamb, NHMRC, senior principal research fellow at La Trobe University, and we'll put those details up on our website after the programme. It's 17 minutes to 8.

FEMALE SPEAKER: ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

[7.42am]

HILARY HARPER: Today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria and in the Southern Riverina incorporating Corowa and Berrigan shires in New South Wales and in the Eastern Riverina incorporating Albury City and Greater Hume shires.

The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open, and you must not allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery such as angle grinders and welders is banned in the region. Tractors,

chain saws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary. For more information, call the bushfire information line on 1800 240 667 and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

A reminder, too, that the Emergency Services have said it's not a good idea to go to Gippsland today. V/Line's saying please don't go to Gippsland. Train services will be very slow today because of the heat. They may have to cancel the ones through Gippsland and the Emergency Services are warning stay away from bushland, parks, coastal strips and other fire prone areas such as the Mornington Peninsula, Great Ocean Road and the Otways, the High Country, Dandenongs, and the Yarra Ranges and also forested areas like the Macedon Ranges.

[7.44am]

After the news, which is coming up next, in AM we'll be looking at the stimulus package and how it affects you; how will that money filter down to the likes of us.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC, Melbourne.

MALE SPEAKER: Audio, video, stories, presenter blogs, weather updates.

MALE SPEAKER: Plug into abc.net.au/melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: It's a quarter to 8.

[7.45am]

[Music]

JOHN REID: Firefighters battling fire storms across three States preparing for the worst, while parts of northern and central Queensland are flood bound, and a fifth defeat in a row for Australia's one-day cricketers.

Good morning, John Reid with ABC News. Firefighters are trying to control a fire burning in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne as Victoria braces for the worst fire weather since Ash Wednesday. Jean Edwards reports.

JEAN EDWARDS: Authorities are worried today's hot and

windy conditions will fan the flames which could threaten homes. The Department of Sustainability and Environment's State duty officer, Dennis Ward, says the fire has jumped containment lines on the eastern side and people should prepare their properties for falling embers.

DENNIS WARD: The communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West, and Tonimbuk need to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased, and it has the potential to impact on those communities directly.

JEAN EDWARDS: The fire could also affect the major power lines to Melbourne, and V/Line says it's likely trains and coaches to Gippsland will be cancelled. Jean Edwards, ABC News, Melbourne.

JOHN REID: The Weather Bureau says winds could reach up to 80 km/h where the fire is burning at the Bunyip State Park. Senior forecaster, Dean Stewart, says the wind could still pose a problem, even after the cool change forecast around 7 o'clock tonight.

DEAN STEWART: Immediately behind the change the winds are likely to be quite squally. Within two or three hours of the change going through, those winds should gradually ease off, but initially, with that wind change moving through, it will present some hazards.

JOHN REID: And firefighters are trying to control a fire burning in State forest at Dargo in Victoria's east. The Department of Sustainability and Environment says the fire, covering about 30 hectares, isn't posing a threat to property at this stage. People are being asked to avoid travelling through the area.

[7.47am]

And paramedics are appealing for people to stay indoors, if they can, during today's predicted hot and windy conditions. The temperature in Melbourne is forecast to reach 44 degrees, while the north-west of the State can expect 46. The operations manager of Ambulance Victoria, Paul Holman, says call-outs doubled during last week's heat wave and it's well prepared to respond to an increase in demand today. He says last week's call-outs were high because people failed to listen to warnings.

PAUL HOLMAN: The things we were called out for in the initial stages were people that didn't heed our warnings, that went out into that heat, exercised, doing silly things, playing rounds of golf for four hours, not wearing protective clothing, and certainly not keeping hydrated.

JOHN REID: Three large bushfires are burning in New South Wales overnight and firefighters are expecting some of those to intensify in coming days. A fire near Muswellbrook in the Upper Hunter Valley is the most serious at this stage, although the front has started moving away from homes. The blaze has burnt through more than 100 hectares at Wybong, between Ridgelands and Dry Creek Roads. The Rural Fire Service has also dozens of personnel at fires near Bega in the State's far south, and Lake Macquarie on the North Coast, but no communities are in immediate danger.

And authorities are on alert in North Queensland as flood waters rise again at Ingham. The town received 100mm of rain overnight, and more falls are forecast today. The Herbert River is expected to rise almost as high as the peak experienced early in the week, after dropping yesterday. The Weather Bureau's Tony Gordon says Innisfail also copped a drenching.

TONY GORDON: Water levels are rising again and around Innisfail they're currently in moderate flood and, look, we've seen those very high rainfalls overnight and they do need a fairly phenomenal amount of rainfall to see major flooding around there.

JOHN REID: A car crash in Melbourne's CBD has left a woman fighting for her life in hospital. Police say the woman was trying to cross King Street when she was knocked down shortly before 2 o'clock this morning. The driver of the car is helping police with their enquiries.

Police have arrested a man they think is responsible for a series of armed robberies across Melbourne. The 26 year old allegedly stole cash from a convenience store in South Yarra armed with a knife late last night. Police caught him soon afterwards. He's facing 22 charges. Police believe the man is behind eight other armed robberies at stores around the city.

Key senators are continuing to question the spending

targets in the Federal Government's economic rescue plan. Tony Morgan reports from Parliament House.

DANNY MORGAN: The Government needs the support of the cross-bench Senators to get its $42 billion spending package through the Parliament. Already the Family First senator, Steve Fielding, has called for more money for the unemployed. The Greens want to make sure new public housing is energy efficient, and the Independent senator, Nick Xenophon, is wondering why rich private schools are getting millions of dollars.

SENATOR XENAPHON: The need can't be shown on any objective basis.

DANNY MORGAN: The Government has signalled it's willing to negotiate ahead of next week's Senate vote. Danny Morgan, ABC News, Canberra.

JOHN REID: ABC News, it's 10 minutes to 8. Telstra services could be disrupted as workers begin a rolling industrial campaign today. Dita Rosendorf reports.

DITA ROSENDORF: Talks between Telstra and the Communications Union have failed to reach a compromise over a collective enterprise agreement for workers. The union hopes to bring the wage talks back on track by observing overtime bans from today. For customers, this means faults won't be attended to and the installation of phone services could be delayed. On Monday workers will also hold rallies in Sydney and Melbourne as part of a series of rolling 24-hour stoppages over the coming week.

Telstra says that less than a quarter of its members belong to the union, and the industrial action will have zero customer impact. The company says its current collective agreement is fair and exceeds average national wage increases.

JOHN REID: Overseas, President Barack Obama has used the latest set of dismal job numbers to demand US Congress pass his economic stimulus plan. Washington correspondent Mark Simkin reports.

MARK SIMKIN: The United States lost nearly 600,000 jobs in January, the worst monthly result in three and a half decades. Barack Obama says the situation couldn't be more

serious, and he demanded Congress pass his trillion dollar stimulus plan.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: It is inexcusable and irresponsible for any of us to get bogged down in distraction, delay or politics as usual while millions of Americans are being put out of work.

MARK SIMKIN: Democrats hope the Bill will clear the Senate some time today, but Republicans are still demanding less government spending and more tax cuts. Mark Simkin, ABC News, Washington.

JOHN REID: The global financial crisis has caused massive losses in three of Japan's biggest companies wiping billions from key firms in the car, electronics and banking sectors. North Asia correspondent Mark Willesee reports from Tokyo the world's top selling car maker Toyota was the hardest hit.

MR WILLESEE: Toyota says it's facing a $7 billion operating loss for the financial year ending in March. That's three times worse than forecast, and the company blames a massive plunge in global demand for its cars for the first operating loss in its history. Electronics giant, Sharp, has also announced its first operating loss, forecasting a drop of half a billion dollars into the red, and the bad news has also spread to Japan's financial sector, with the country's biggest bank, Mitsubishi UFJ, saying it expects to post a net loss of $700 million. Mark Willesee, ABC News, Tokyo.

JOHN REID: Analysts say News Corporation's latest earnings results demonstrate the reaction of consumers to the economic downturn. News Corp's posted a $9.8 billion loss for the last quarter after a big slump in advertising revenue and asset write-downs, but income from its cable TV business, which doesn't rely on advertising, has risen. The head of Asset Management and Equity Trustees, Shaun Manuell, says people are opting for cheap forms of entertainment as they try to save money.

SHAUN MANUELL: Cable television's doing very well. All the segments that are relying on sort of the subscription-based services performed well. It was where they're relying on advertising in both television and news and traditional newsprint where they are struggling.

JOHN REID: Figures released overnight in Britain show the number of companies filing for bankruptcy has jumped by 50 per cent. Europe correspondent, Emma Alberici.

EMMA ALBERICI: The number of bankruptcies last year soared to the highest level since records began in 1960. More than 350 people a day are now becoming insolvent. The total number of businesses going bust, which covers administrations and liquidations, rose by more than 50 per cent as increasing numbers of companies struggle to access finance or secure insurance. 1,200 companies entered into administration between October and December last year, a 125 per cent increase on the final quarter of 2007. The numbers were worse than expected, but experts say the figures will rise in the coming year. Emma Alberici, ABC News, London.

JOHN REID: The United Nations has halted its all aid shipments into Gaza after Hamas, which controls the territory, seized tons of relief supplies. As the BBC's Aleem Maqbool reports from Gaza City, it's the second incident this week.

ALEEM MAQBOOL: In the latest incident, the United Nations says ten truck loads of rice and flour were taken shortly after they crossed into Gaza. Earlier in the week it says thousands of blankets were confiscated at gunpoint. Hamas has issued a statement saying the goods were taken by mistake and that they will be returned, but recently it has expressed anger at the fact that aid agencies don't coordinate with Hamas and, as previously said, it wants all financial donations to be distributed through its administration.

JOHN REID: The United States has criticised the release of the disgraced Pakistani nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadir Khan, after five years of house arrest, calling the decision extremely regrettable and unfortunate. Dr Khan, seen by many as the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, was detained in 2004 when he admitted selling nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea, and Libya. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, says she's very much concerned by Dr Khan's release, but Dr Khan says he doesn't care what the US thinks.

ABC News, it's 5 minutes to 8. The European Commission

President, Jose Manuel Barroso, has used high level talks in Moscow to raise concerns about human rights violations in Russia, including recent murders. The Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict that crippled supplies to Europe in January has also been discussed. Moscow correspondent, Scott Bevan reports.

SCOTT BEVAN: For the first time since the gas supply crisis Jose Manuel Barroso has met with Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The leaders say they discussed energy security and future major gas pipeline projects. Prime Minister Putin has also asked the EU to keep observers on the ground in Ukraine until the end of March to monitor gas supplies. Mr Barroso said he also raised rule of law issues with Dmitry Medvedev, because Europeans are concerned about the recent killings of journalists and human rights activists in Russia. Scott Bevan, ABC News, Moscow.

JOHN REID: The Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has issued an emergency decree to prevent a woman, who's been in a coma for 17 years, from having her feeding tubes disconnected. The move came after the father of the woman won a protracted court battle, giving him the right to instruct an Italian hospital to allow her to die.
Mr Berlusconi says he has a responsibility to try and save the woman's life.

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI (interpreted): From my personal view answering my conscience, I would feel responsible for an omission of care to a person whose life is in danger. In this case then there is a need for urgent government intervention, because this morning they began the non provision of food and water to the person.

JOHN REID: The Italian President, Giorgio Napolitano, has refused to sign the decree saying it's unconstitutional.

A Danish study has found that taking fertility drugs does not increase a woman's risk of developing ovarian cancer. A study of more than 54,000 women referred to fertility clinics between 1963 and 1998 showed no overall increased risk of ovarian cancer for any IVF drug. But the researchers say they will have to monitor all the women until they are older to be sure of the findings, which appear in the British Medical Journal. Now, the sport. Here's James Coventry.

JAMES COVENTRY: Australia's poor form in one-day cricket has continued, with a six wicket loss to New Zealand in Game 2 of the Chappell-Hadley series at the MCG. The Black Caps reached the victory target of 226 with seven balls to spare to take a 2-nil lead in the series. Australia's stand-in captain, Michael Clarke, says his side's total of 5 for 225 wasn't competitive.

MICHAEL CLARKE: You know, the reality is we didn't score enough runs - we were 20 or 30 short, and we didn't have too much luck in the field. I thought the boys tried really hard. Like I say, we've just got to get our heads ready for Sydney.

JAMES COVENTRY: Queensland Roar has defeated the Central Coast Mariners 2-nil in Gosford in the first leg of the minor semi-final in soccer's A League. Mich Nicholls opened the scoring in the 27th minute, and in form striker, Sergio van Dyke scored from a penalty kick in the 54th minute.

Queensland coach, Frank Farina, told Fox Sports it's a good result, but his team still needs to play well at home in the second leg.

FRANK FARINA: You know, the job's not done, so hopefully in a week's time we can finish it off up at Suncorp.

JAMES COVENTRY: Adelaide United hosts Melbourne Victory in the first leg of the major semi tonight, and Red's coach, Aurelio Vidmar, expects the officials to be kept busy.

AURIELO VIDMAR: I don't know who the referee is, but certainly it needs a very strong one, because these games are always quite fiery.

JAMES COVENTRY: Wollongong and Townsville have had upset victories in the National Basketball League. The Hawks beat the third-placed New Zealand Breakers 103-98 in Wollongong, while the Crocodiles defeated the League leading South Dragons 101-98 in Townsville.

There have also been some upset results in the WNBL. The AIS defeated Dandenong, 79-74 in Canberra, and Logan defeated Adelaide 75-70 in Brisbane. Australia's Fed Cup

tennis team plays New Zealand in today's final of the Asia Oceania Group 1 play off in Perth.

And Australian golfer, Nikki Campbell, leads her compatriot Kristie Smith by one stroke heading into today's third round of the Ladies' Masters on the Gold Coast.

JOHN REID: Now, the main points again: firefighters battling fire storms across three States are bracing for the worst, with temperatures soaring into the mid 40s, and breakouts of current blazes fanned by strong winds, and parts of northern and central Queensland flood bound.

To the weather, and the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire State. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State: very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west later. And for Melbourne: dry and mostly sunny, with areas of raised dust, a cooler squally south-west to southerly change late afternoon, a top of 44. Tomorrow: windy with a shower, 23; light showers Monday, 21; Tuesday, light showers and 20; 25 at the moment. It's 8 o'clock.

[8am]

[Music]

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Good morning, this is Saturday AM. I'm Elizabeth Jackson. On the programme today US senators frantically debate whether or not to pass President Barack Obama's massive economic stimulus plan; a former high ranking New South Wales policeman warns that organised crime in Australia is virtually unstoppable, and from droughts to flooding rains - while the south swelters, residents in North Queensland are fleeing floods.

FEMALE SPEAKER: There's ladies in there that live up the street from me. One of them's 92 years of age. Now, I don't think she'll ever get over this, and I'm only 72, and I tell you what, it's going to take me a while to get over. I told my children I'm selling the house and I'm going.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Those stories coming up shortly, but first: hospitals, ambulances and firefighters are on standby this weekend as Australia's southern States get set to be scorched. South Australia and Victoria have already experienced heat waves, but now areas of New South Wales are expecting temperatures to soar above 40 degrees. Fires are burning in New South Wales and Victoria and we'll have a look at the extreme fire conditions in a moment, but first our reporter Michael Vincent takes a look at what lies ahead this weekend.

MICHAEL VINCENT: In the far west of New South Wales the small town of Ivanhoe is said to break a record it definitely wished did not exist. The Bureau of Meteorology's Agata Imielska.

AGATA IMIELSKA: This equals the longest run of temperatures in Ivanhoe, with the next two days expected to reach over 40 degrees, which will make it a new record of 14 conservative days over 40 degrees.

MALE SPEAKER: It's pretty stressful for everything and everybody. I mean, the wildlife, the birds, the animals - there's no kick in anything.

MICHAEL VINCENT: Ray Longfellow is the mayor of the Central Darling Shire. He also runs the post office in Ivanhoe. He says without air-conditioning the town's 350 residents would struggle.

MALE SPEAKER: I would say quite openly that it'd be a catastrophe, absolutely, because of the - we have quite a few elderly people here within the community, more than the average community of this size, so, yes, I'd say it'd be a complete catastrophe.

MICHAEL VINCENT: And when it's 47 degrees in the shade, the manager of the Ivanhoe RSL, Laurel Blackburn, says even taking a shower isn't refreshing.

LAUREL BLACKBURN: No, cold water in our shower just doesn't happen. It's quite warm, actually.

MICHAEL VINCENT: I suppose the most enjoyable place then would be the cool room at the - in the restaurant.

LAUREL BLACKBURN: Oh, yes. Yes, when we go to do

something in the cool room, we stay in there for as long as possible.

MICHAEL VINCENT: In Sydney a cool room will also come in handy to the organisers of an international nine-a-side Rugby League tournament to store all the ice they're using. The tournament's organiser, Taz Bateri (phonetic), says they've tried to prepare for the heat wave as best they can.

TAZ BATERI: We've got medical - you know, doctors - full-time doctors on board, we've got mist fans, we've got soaker hoses, we've got ice bars, we've got a thousand bags of ice stored in a cool room at Cabramatta Leagues Club. There's a number of hydration stations around the field and in the players' area.

MICHAEL VINCENT: If worst comes to worst, will you play between 12 and 2 during the midday?

TAZ BATERI: No, obviously we would be crazy if we did, but we'll monitor the thing as we go and there's also an opportunity maybe to shorten the games.

MICHAEL VINCENT: That tournament is just one major event the ambulance service is keeping its eye on for cases of heat stroke this weekend. Hospitals are also making their preparations. The Sydney West Area Health Service, which covers a population of 1.2 million people, has been busy contacting nursing homes as well as boosting its own supplies of fluids. The health service's CEO, Professor Steven Boyages.

PROFESSOR BOYAGES: We're clearly making certain that we have a full complement of staff. We have what we call counter disaster units in place to be prepared for any contingency, particularly things like bushfires that may sort of impact on our facilities such as electricity, water supply, and other sort of situations. So we're putting those contingencies into place. We're also putting contingencies into place just in case power isn't available to some of our facilities because of stress on the - on the electricity grid.

MICHAEL VINCENT: And that's one bright note for this weekend. The national electricity manager NEMMCO is confident that as long as transmission lines don't fail

power supplies will be able to meet demand in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Michael Vincent with that report.

[8.04am]

Victoria is facing what could be the worst bushfire risk in its history today. Of most concern is a fire burning in a State park threatening several towns about 80 kilometres east of Melbourne. Samantha Donovan reports.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: As firefighting aircraft flew overhead, residents of the small town of Labertouche gathered in their local hall to hear what's ahead of them today. They were given a clear message by the Country Fire Authority's Brian Grist.

BRIAN GRIST: If you're going, go early. Make your plan that you may not get a big red truck or help - assistance to your fire, because we might not have not have enough vehicles to go around.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: The blaze in the Bunyip State Park was originally started five days ago by lightning strikes. It was brought under control, but it's believed it was then restarted by arsonists. More than 150 hectares have now been burnt out. Firefighters have been working hard overnight to strengthen containment lines, but with Victoria set to have its hottest ever February day, incident controller Mark Riley told locals they're in for a tough battle.

MARK RILEY: There's that horrible cocktail of low humidity, high temperatures, but to top it all off, strong winds - strong northerly winds, north/north-westerly winds, and the winds are gusting on top of that, so it's a horrible day for fire fighting. The flame heights would be - would be extremely high. The rate of spread of a fire - the forward rate of spread of a fire would be - would be very rapid, faster than any of us could run and, to top it off, there's spotting of course.

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: At least 29 homes were destroyed by bushfires in this region last week. Residents of Labertouche and surrounding areas were divided on whether to stay and defend their homes, or leave and hope for the

best.

MALE SPEAKER: Yeah, got all me water in the tanks filled up. We'll be right, got a place to put all the animals, watered all my trees, house is all watered safe, Yeah, stick with it.

MALE SPEAKER: Can't stay in the house with a baby screaming trying to go outside and fight the fire. It's not possible, so we'll leave.

FEMALE SPEAKER: We'll be leaving, mainly because we have house insurance - that's what we pay our insurance for, and too big a risk. We live in a timber house, we're surrounded by paddocks and trees. There are six people in the family. There's no way we can stay and fight, keep an eye on the dogs and the cats and, you know, it's just your safety really over everything else.

[8.06am]

SAMANTHA DONOVAN: Victoria isn't the only State on high bushfire alert today. In South Australia the Country Fire Service is warning that scorching 40-plus temperatures and forecast strong winds could lead to the most extreme fire risk in years. And the Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, Shane Fitzsimmons, told AM that only the north-east corner of New South Wales will be spared the very high to extreme fire risk.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: We have some 40 fires burning across New South Wales. Our focus is to make sure they don't - they don't escape containment lines and become a problem and, obviously, any new fires we're going to be watching very closely as well.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: That's Shane Fitzsimmons, the Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service ending that report from Samantha Donovan.

In what's proving to be a weekend of weather extremes, North Queensland is being drenched by the second round of severe weather in less than a week. It's expected there'll be flash flooding across much of the region this weekend, with Townsville and Bowen likely to experience the worst of it, but the heaviest rains are again falling in Ingham. From North Queensland, Nicole Butler reports.

NICOLE BUTLER: The flood-ravaged town of Ingham watched with relief when waters started to recede on Thursday. Resident Lorna Pollack says the worst flooding in 30 years has been traumatic for locals.

LORNA POLLACK: There's ladies in there that live up the street from me. One of them's 92 years of age. Now, I don't think she'll ever get over this. I mean, I'm only 72 and, I tell you what, it's going to take me a while to get over. I told my children I'm selling the house and I'm going.

NICOLE BUTLER: The clean-up began in earnest yesterday and motorists were allowed to drive into Ingham for the first time in days, but by lunchtime more torrential rain was falling, and drivers were again being turned back. Some found themselves at the Rolling Stone Hotel just south of Ingham, along with stranded travellers and truckies who've been stuck at the pub for days. Chester Riley's been trying to return home after a Christmas holiday in New South Wales and Victoria.

CHESTER RILEY: I've just been down to Bermagui to visit me family and I've been stuck here for about six days trying to get back home. They reckon it's going to be a couple of days now before we can get through if we don't have any more rain.

NICOLE BUTLER: Mr Riley says being stranded is expensive.

CHESTER RILEY: It does add up over a few days. Once you have a feed and a couple of drinks, you know, you're up around $120 a day - yeah, it gets a bit much.

NICOLE BUTLER: Truck driver, Kevin DeVries, says the Ingham floods are hurting his hip pocket, too.

KEVIN DEVRIES: Yeah, definitely, being an interstate truck driver, we get paid by the kilometre, not by the hour, so while I'm sitting here, yeah, making no money, yeah.

NICOLE BUTLER: And having to pay for a hotel room?

KEVIN DEVRIES: No, I'm living in the truck at the moment.

NICOLE BUTLER: John Broomham manages the Rolling Stone Beach caravan park. He's been at the pub because his business has also come to a screeching halt.

JOHN BROOMHAM: With the weather and the blocked roads, we are losing customers, for sure.

NICOLE BUTLER: The Weather Bureau's predicting king tides, more rain and more flash flooding in the region this weekend. Christopher Berra has a pineapple and sugarcane farm just south of flooded Ingham. He's anxiously watching the weather.

CHRISTOPHER BERRA: The water's good, but just a bit of sun'd be nice, because nothing's growing. Like the watertable's full, the creeks are full, everything's nice and happy now, but we just need some sun to make some stuff grow, because at the moment we're like a month away or more from even getting into the paddock. We've got to sit here and wait and just watch it rain.

NICOLE BUTLER: The Cane Growers' Association says if heavy rain continues it could slow crop growth, especially if fertilisers are washed away. Scientists are worried about where those fertilisers could end up. It's believed some sediment, nutrients and toxic pesticides have already been washed into the Great Barrier Reef.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Nicole Butler reporting from North Queensland.

A former high ranking policeman says there's too much political interference in law enforcement. Clive Small won fame as the police officer who locked up backpacker killer Ivan Milat. The now retired crime fighter rose in the ranks to become an Assistant Police Commissioner in New South Wales. Now he's written a book, which is a stinging critique of the way organised crime is tackled in Australia. Clive Small told Saturday AM Simon Santow the growth of organised crime seems unstoppable.

CLIVE SMALL: Over the past 40 years or so organised crime has grown substantially and changed substantially. It's like an organisation that changes constantly with the times and I think that we have a serious problem in Australia with organised crime, and something more needs to be done about it.

SIMON SANTOW: When you say it's grown substantially, has that been in spite of the resources that have been directed at stopping its growth?

CLIVE SMALL: At different times there's been short-term bursts of effort and energy put in to tackling the problem, but generally speaking the resources haven't been sufficient and - and organised crime has certainly outgrown any effort to combat it and beaten those efforts.

SIMON SANTOW: It's often said that there's a problem in coordination, that you've got all the States and Territories with their police forces, and then you've got the Federal Police and the Crime Commission on top of that. Do you think that all the layers work well together?

CLIVE SMALL: Look, I think there's significant room for improvement. If you look at the Federal Police, for example, their role in the issue of organised crime is, in a sense, quite minimal when you look at its - the constitutional arrangements that exist in Australia. They're responsible for the interdiction of drugs as they're imported into the country, along with Commonwealth agencies, but they're not responsible for the distribution of drugs in Australia. Now, if you're going to take out networks, you need to look at the whole picture and I think that's where there's significant opportunity for improvement.

SIMON SANTOW: When you talk about networks, I think in your book you go into the influence or the rise of the Calabrian Mafia from Italy.

CLIVE SMALL: Well, I think of all the groups that we've had in Australia, they are probably the ones that have been most durable over the past 40 years, or even longer. Following the Woodward Commission, where you would have thought they might have been severely disrupted, what happened, it was a temporary disruption, they regrouped, and they've continued to grow since that time.

The other part of it is that people named in the Woodward Commission as being members of this group, as being members of national drug trafficking groups and involved in money laundering, seemed to have significant political sway, and I think that's - should be a concern

for all members of this country.

SIMON SANTOW: Why do you think that group has been able to get away with it? Has it been just simply money and influence?

CLIVE SMALL: I think there are a number of reasons for it, and I think Justice Moffat in his book A Quarter to Midnight really summed it up when he said there was constant political wrangling and point scoring on matters of organised crime and corruption.

SIMON SANTOW: And in your extensive police career, did you ever come across political interference in what you were trying to do?

CLIVE SMALL: It's not so much political interference in, "Don't do this", or an overt political interference; rather, it's a political apathy and priorities that are set in other occasions. If you acknowledge the existence of groups like the Calabrian Mafia, then you have to do something about it. Now, the way you avoid having to do something about it, or you have to do very little about it is simply by denying its existence.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Former New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner, Clive Small, speaking to AM's Simon Santow.

The list of demands on the Federal Government to improve its $42 billion stimulus package is growing by the day. With the Opposition blocking the plan, the Government needs to win the support of seven cross-bench senators. The Greens are questioning the size of the package and whether the $950 cash bonuses are the best way to boost the economy.

Greens leader, Bob Brown, told Alexandra Kirk it's an unsatisfactory package.

SENATOR BROWN: The first thing, it's taken the Government three days to point to a line in the appendix which says that people on Newstart - that's unemployed people - may be able to qualify if they do - if they undertake further training. This is the only group that's going to have a qualification or a requirement put upon them before they get the $950.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: So do you think at this point unemployed people are being treated fairly?

[8.15am]

SENATOR BROWN: I have yet to be convinced about that. What's the word "may" mean? The only people who may qualify, and then there's conditions, are unemployed people, and I'm talking here about people who are losing their jobs through no fault of their own and who are in sometimes quite disastrous economic circumstances. It may be that the qualification tucked there in the appendix makes it well nigh impossible for unemployed people to access this benefit. I don't know. We've got time to find out and we'll certainly be doing that between now and Thursday, and it does worry the Greens a lot that liquid assets of such people, people who have put away some savings while they did have a job, have to be whittled away by family expenditure down to the point of $2,500 before you can qualify for unemployment benefits.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: In your view then, what should happen to the liquid assets test?

SENATOR BROWN: Well, minimum, it should revert back to 5,000, which was there before the Howard government knocked it in half. I think actually it should be more generous than that. I think that where people have got some life savings that suddenly find themselves without a job because of circumstances way beyond their control, it's a bit tough that they have to use all those savings before they get some assistance to tide them over until they get another job.

ALEXANDRA KIRK: Family First senator, Steve Fielding, wants a better deal for the unemployed suggesting that $4 billion be set aside for a scheme to fund local government and charities undertaking community projects to employ the 100,000 people expected to lose their jobs because of the global financial crisis. Is he on the right track? Do you share those concerns?

SENATOR BROWN: I don't think the Senate should put itself in the guise of being the Government. We're there to improve this package, but not take a sledge hammer to it. I'd be a bit dubious about picking out an item and saying

to the Government, "Here's a $4 billion item you need to include or exclude." I think we can see good changes to be made to this package, but have to be a little careful about ransoming the package with the Government.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: That's the Green's leader, Bob Brown, speaking to AM's Alexandra Kirk in Canberra.

In the United States senators are frantically debating President Barack Obama's massive stimulus plan. The Democrats are hopeful they can get the trillion dollar package of public works and tax cuts through the Chamber today, but they don't yet have the numbers. Adding to this sense of urgency, new unemployment figures now suggest America's economic problems are getting even worse.
I spoke to our Washington correspondent Mark Simkin a short time ago, and asked him just how bad the January jobs figures were.

MARK SIMKIN: Extremely bad, Elizabeth. As one economist put it, the economy is falling into oblivion. Another said this is a horror show that we're watching. Basically employers axed 600,000 jobs in January. That's the biggest monthly cull in about three and a half decades. In the last 12 months three and a half million jobs have been cut here in the United States, and that's put the unemployment rate up to its highest level in 16 years. Now, the figures are worse than expected. Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, tried to put them in context. Here's how he described the figures.

ROBERT GIBBS: Last month the economy lost 598,000 jobs. That is the equivalent of losing every job in the State of Maine. In the past two months the economy the lost 1.2 million jobs. That's basically like losing every job in Pittsburgh or in Cleveland. In the past three months the economy has lost 1.8 million jobs, as I said. That's the equivalent of losing every job in Connecticut or South Carolina. And in the past four months the economy's lost 2.2 million jobs, which is basically losing every job in the State of Louisiana.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Robert Gibbs, White House press secretary, speaking a short time ago. Mark, I assume Barack Obama wasted no time in using those unemployment figures to push Congress to pass his massive stimulus Bill.

MARK SIMKIN: He wasted no time, and there's been a pretty dramatic change in the President's tone. Instead of talking about bipartisanship and hoping that he could get a substantial number of Republicans on board, he's got a lot sharper, he's clearly becoming impatient, becoming frustrated. The outreach is being replaced by outrage, if you like and, as you say, he seized on these job figures, he demanded Congressional action, and he really tried to personalise the cost of inaction. Here's part of what Barack Obama had to say.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: The situation could not be more serious. These numbers demand action. It is inexcusable and irresponsible for any of us to get bogged down in distraction, delay or politics as usual while millions of Americans are being put out of work. Now is the time for Congress to act. Now, this is not some abstract debate. Somewhere in America a small business has shut its doors. Somewhere in America a family's said goodbye to their home. Somewhere in America a young parent has lost their livelihood and they don't know what's going to take its place. These Americans are counting on us, all of us in Washington. We have to remember that we're here to work for them, and if we drag our feet and fail to act, this crisis could turn into a catastrophe.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: US President, Barack Obama. Mark, where are things at in the Senate now? Is it likely that they'll pass the Bill today?

MARK SIMKIN: Well, the senior Democrats say they are hopeful they will get to a vote tonight. As of the moment though the Democrats do not have the votes to get this through. It is a lot of passionate debate on the floor of the Senate, a lot of frantic negotiations behind closed doors between moderates from both sides. They're basically trying to - very similar to Australia. The Republicans, the Opposition as it were, are saying there's too much spending, not enough tax cuts. They're trying to find ways of cutting down the price tag for this Bill, which is way over $1 trillion at the moment.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Our Washington correspondent, Mark Simkin, speaking from Washington.

The French President has triggered a diplomatic row with the United Kingdom after he made disparaging remarks

about Britain's fiscal stimulus package. Nicolas Sarkozy told a national television audience that the British Prime Minister's tax cuts have absolutely not worked, and he's described them as a mistake. Stephanie Kennedy reports from London.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: The British Prime Minister was lauded for his handling of the economic crisis with his quick response to the credit crunch. He's repeatedly said that the world is following his example by introducing fiscal stimulus packages to kick start their economies. Ahead of Christmas Britain cut the VAT by 2 per cent to encourage spending. Like Britain, France is funding big infrastructure projects, but it's not going down the track of tax cuts. The French President has faced a barrage of criticism over his handling of the economy, including a week of nation-wide protests and strikes. In a 90-minute interview carried simultaneously on three French television channels Nicolas Sarkozy defended his actions and he vowed that he would not repeat Britain's economic mistakes.

PRESIDENT SARKOZY (interpreted): The British chose to boost the economy through cutting VAT by 2 per cent, but we can clearly see this has made absolutely no progress at all.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: The Conservatives seized on President Sarkozy's comments, arguing that the criticism undermines the Government's claims that other countries are following the UK's lead over the economy. The Business and Enterprise Minister, Pat McFadden, defended the tax cuts.

PAT McFADDEN: I don't believe that the VAT cut has - has not worked. This is something that's going to be in place for the rest of the year. Now, I don't deny for a moment that times are tough in the economy, but I think governments do have to be active, and in terms of international comparisons, I think many governments around the world are taking a fiscal stimulus, and that is part of the response.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: In a bid to head off a cross-channel diplomatic rift, the French President's aides telephoned Downing Street to explain that the remarks were not meant as a critique of Gordon Brown's policies, and were targetted at a domestic audience, but France is not the only country to question Britain's economic stimulus plans.

Germany has described the UK's response as crass and breathtaking. It's clear that in the lead-up to April's G20 summit in London both France and Germany have a very different view about how to stimulate the world's flagging economies. In London, this is Stephanie Kennedy reporting for Saturday AM.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: It knew the smash was going to be bad, but now the world's biggest car maker, and Japan's largest company, Toyota has revealed its losses will be at least three times worse than it first thought. In fact, the company's annual operating loss could pass the $7 billion mark. Our North Asia correspondent, Mark Willesee, reports from Tokyo.

MARK WILLESEE: When Toyota recently sped past General Motors to become the world's top selling car maker, there were no celebrations in Tokyo. That's because the only reason the Japanese auto manufacturer took the title was because the US car giant's sales were falling faster than its own. Only now is the damage caused by the global financial crisis being revealed, and for Toyota it's more than just a scratch or a dent; it's a near write-off. The company knew it was facing the first operating loss in its proud 70-year history, but now Toyota says the loss will be three times that initial forecast at $7 billion, and 6 billion of that write-off came in just the third quarter to December.

The car maker blames the rapid surge of the yen against the US dollar and the Euro and a stunning plunge in demand as consumers around the world snap shut their wallets and purses. Toyota's sales in the United States collapsed by a third in January alone.

"This time we had no choice but to make the adjustment in our final result," says Toyota vice-president, Mitsuo Kinoshita. "The situation in our main markets in North America, Europe and Japan became even more severe, and the sales in this total market declined. We had to report a sales loss for the entire fiscal year," he says.

The company had already announced it was cutting 3,000 temporary workers and shutting its Japanese production lines for 11 days this month and next. Just hours before announcing its gloomy forecast Toyota had its credit rating from Moody's Investor Services cut from the top triple A

ranking to double A1. Toyota's vice-president is remaining optimistic despite experiencing one of the company's blackest days.

"If one thinks this recession will be bottomless, I think it is not quite the case," says Mitsuo Kinoshita. "These tough times will continue for a while, but I expect US President Barack Obama's financial package to gradually start showing its effect."

But Toyota isn't the only Japanese giant staring down its first loss. Electronics maker, Sharp, has announced it's expecting the first operating loss in the company's history - more than half a billion dollars. Sharp now plans to shed 1,500 contract jobs, and its executives have agreed to accept pay cuts and to forget about bonuses.

And now the rot seems to have spread to Japan's banking sector, with the country's biggest bank, Mitsubishi UFJ, reporting a net loss of more than $700 million, and that's just for the first nine months of the financial year. The figures are certain to get uglier as Japan heads for its deepest recession since the Second World War and now even the country's biggest company, Toyota, has found itself bogged in the global financial mire. This is Mark Willesee in Tokyo for Saturday AM.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Conservationists in India are trying to rescue hundreds of bears kept in captivity by animal trainers. The bears have a rope inserted through a wound in their nose and are forced to dance in roadside shows across India. Our South Asia correspondent Sally Sara reports.

MALE SPEAKER: Don't worry, mate, we'll get you out of here. Don't you worry.

SALLY SARA: On a roadside not far from the Taj Mahal a giant sloth bear is forced to dance for a group of onlookers. Members of International Animal Rescue inspect the bear, which has a rope threaded through its nose and most of its teeth ripped out, but the trainer insists the animal is happy.

MALE SPEAKER: No problem, no problem. Happy bear happy.

MALE SPEAKER: He's not happy?

MALE SPEAKER: A happy bear.

MALE SPEAKER: How is happy?

MALE SPEAKER: Raju - name Raju.

MALE SPEAKER: Raju. Where's his teeth then? No teeth? .

SALLY SARA: The trainer forces the bear to shake hands, pretend to play guitar, and disco dance on its hind legs. Dancing bears have been a form of roadside entertainment in India for hundreds of years. The bear trainers are members of the nomadic Kalandar tribe. Geeta Seshamani is cofounder of Wildlife SOS. The group started rescuing the bears back in 2002.

GEETA SESHAMANI: We were dealing at that time with almost 1,800 to 2,000 bears, which were being danced and held in 13 States of India.

SALLY SARA: Ms Seshamani says most of the bears are poached as cubs and their muzzles are pierced with a hot iron rod. A rope is then inserted through the wound.

GEETA SESHAMANI: Extremely painful, because the wound is never allowed to dry up. The Kalandar keeps the muzzle of the bear continuously tender, painful and raw.

SALLY SARA: But now members of the Kalandar tribe are being encouraged to join the conservation effort. They're paid to give up their dancing bears and work at the rescue centre. Mohammad Rizwan Kalandar is one of them. He says he learned how to train bears from his forefathers. His grandfather was a bear trainer, so he became one too.

Wildlife SOS has set up a rescue centre for the sloth bears just outside the city of Agra. Dr Illay Raja is preparing to dart one of the bears for surgery. It takes two men to carry the bear on a stretcher. Most of the animals have dental problems because their teeth have been removed by their trainers. Biologist, Baiju Raj, says many are also underweight when they arrive.

BAIJU RAJ: They were not fed properly, because the humans want to control them.

SALLY SARA: The former dancing bears have been in captivity too long to be returned to the wild. Some remain aggressive after so many years of abuse. But Geeta Seshamani says most are easy to handle.

GEETA SESHAMANI: I think they're wonderful creatures. They have the curiosity of cats, they have the agility of monkeys.

SALLY SARA: Wildlife SOS estimates there are still up to 120 dancing bears in India. They hope to rescue the remaining animals by 2010. This is Sally Sara in Agra for Saturday AM.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: And that's the programme for today. I'm Elizabeth Jackson. Keep cool, or if you're up north, keep dry. Have a terrific weekend.

[Music]

[8.30am]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC, Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information. .

HILARY HARPER: Half past 8 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria and today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria and in the Southern Riverina and the Eastern Riverina in New South Wales. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early.

If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open, and you mustn't allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery such as angle grinders and welders is banned in the region, and tractors, chainsaws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary. For more information, you can ring the bushfire information line, 1800 240 667 and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

Heading for a top of 44 in Melbourne and in the high 40s further north in the State.

[8.31am]

It's going to be a scorcher. There is a fire burning in the Bunyip State Park, and for an update on that fire, which seems to have jumped containment lines, Stuart Ord joins us. He's a spokesperson for the DSE. Good morning, Stuart.

STUART ORD: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: So what's the status of that fire in the Bunyip State Park now?

STUART ORD: Hilary, you are correct, the sections of the fire have jumped, unfortunately, our containment lines overnight, so our firefighting resources are moving back a little bit. The - the flame heights are such that we can't do what we call direct attack right on the edge of the fire, so our firefighting resources will move back. We're starting to think now about the protection of the small communities that are potentially ahead of this fire, so we'll have a look at that - places like Tonimbuk, Labertouche, Jindivick, Tarago - these are small communities that are ahead of where we predict the fire might go if it's not contained within the area that it's at the moment. So it is going to be a very difficult day - strong winds, high temperatures, we know that, low humidities - everything conducive to a pretty difficult firefighting situation.

HILARY HARPER: Well, you mentioned the height of the flames. How high are they at the moment?

STUART ORD: Well, in some places the resources in there have told us that they've been somewhere between 5 and 10 metres. Now, that's pretty difficult. You can't fight a fire, you can't have firefighters on the edge of that sort of a fire. So we either try and attack it from the air, and even today the conditions are going to be pretty difficult for our aircraft to get up, especially later on in the day. It will be smoky, it will be very, very hot so the aircraft can't lift as much water, and be very turbulent. So it is a difficult firefighting situation. So our key consideration is going to be protecting people and assets, so houses, sheds, and people.

Just on that, Hilary, if I can just appeal to people, we've

had reports come in of some people taking trail bikes up into the Bunyip and starting to unload their trail bikes thinking they're going for a nice trail bike ride around that area today. The park is closed, and we're - we're asking people stay out of the area. It is most important that if you've got no reason to be up in that area to stay out of the way.

HILARY HARPER: So obviously you'll need the roads clear for the emergency services and there may be closures later in the day. What about people in those communities around the area who are obviously looking with some trepidation upon the situation, what should they be doing now?

STUART ORD: They should have already made up their mind, Hilary, about whether they intend staying, if this fire reaches them - and we're predicting they will at least see embers and ember attack and some spotting, so they can - they've got to understand that this will happen, things will get pretty dark during the day, and they should have made up their mind whether they feel well enough protected around - they've done enough work around their buildings and around their farms and around their properties, or whether they should go now. Now is the time to go if you've made that decision.

HILARY HARPER: There's also a fire up at Dargo. What's the situation with that?

STUART ORD: Yeah, that's about a 30 hectare fire, Hilary. It's in pretty difficult bush country about 35 kilometres north-west of Dargo. The fire's still spreading. The crew - we have crews up there and, once again, they'll be doing what they can on that fire to limit the spread of that fire, but it's certainly - it's not contained to any extent.

The other issue we've got, we've had a lightning band go through the Otways, so we're just keeping an eye on that. Hopefully, nothing will come up from that. It was a dry lightning storm that came through, in other words, no rain with it, no moisture with it, so we'll do what we can, and jump on anything that happens down there.

HILARY HARPER: And just finally, Stuart, I understand there are fires happening in New South Wales as well, so does that limit our ability to draw on support from other

States if things do get really difficult?

STUART ORD: Yes, it will. Yes, it will. They've got problems themselves, so obviously we're keeping our resources in Victoria today, given it's one of the worst days for many, many years since the 1980s. So, yes, I guess at this stage it's each State to themselves to handle their problems and then, as the days go on, we review that and send resources interstate, if it's appropriate at the time.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, thank you very much for that update Stuart, and take care today.

STUART ORD: Okay, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Stuart Ord, spokesperson for the DSE, and we will be crossing to more fire information after the 9 o'clock news. We'll be keeping you updated throughout the morning and into the afternoon with the latest on the situation in the Bunyip State Park and any other hot spots around the State, and just a reminder that Victoria's Emergency Services are banding together to warn that it's really not a good day to travel in particularly bushland areas, parks areas, coastal strips and mountainous areas, but if you can defer all unnecessary travel today, that would be helpful. V/Line is strongly advising against travelling to Gippsland. Train services may have to be cancelled today, and train services around the State are going to be about half an hour slower due to heat speed restrictions, but if you can generally stay away from places like the Mornington Peninsula, Great Ocean Road and the Otways, the High Country, Dandenongs and the Yarra Ranges and the Macedon Ranges, that would probably be a very wise decision today.

[8.36am]

24 minutes to 9 on 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

DR CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney. I'm chief health officer of Victoria just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions. The main ways of preventing heat-related illness would be to stay cool and have plenty of water, try to reduce physical activity as much as possible, and you really need to look out for the frail elderly people living on their own. Those are the people

who are most at risk.

MALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

MALE SPEAKER: Call now on 1300 222 774, or text 19774774. Hilary Harper on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

HILARY HARPER: 23 minutes to 9. Suzy says on the text message that it's already windy in Ballarat, 197744774 if you'd like to send us a weather report from your patch of the State. A quick weather update, too. It's going to be very hot - a surprise - with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until Sunday. It will hit Melbourne around 5 this afternoon. Areas of raised dust will be apparent. There'll be isolated light showers over the south-west and near the coast during the morning and also in the south near the change and the maximum fire danger is extreme. We'll be keeping you up-to-date with the situation there as it unfolds.

But also unfolding on the national political landscape, you will have seen in the news this week news of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's economic stimulus package - $42 billion all up - and apparently some of it is actually going to trickle down to ground level to you and me.

What will it all mean and how should we spend the bits that we are going to get our little mits on? Dr Doug Turek is the manager and principal adviser of Professional Wealth and perhaps he can help us. Good morning, Doug.

DR TUREK: Good morning, Hilary. Good morning listeners in some of the 8.8 million households who are in line to receive a benefit from the stimulus package.

HILARY HARPER: So who misses out?

DR TUREK: Well, I think it - there's a number of people who miss out. I guess it's - one of the bonuses is for taxpayers, and so if you arranged your finances such that you didn't pay any dollar of tax last year, which might be some people who earn less than say $11,000 a year working, they might not receive anything. Unfortunately, in this round, retirees, people on the aged pension aren't being

promised any moneys, a number of self-funded retirees or fully or part funded retirees won't be receiving any allowances here unless they get caught up in some of the other conditions. And, you know, I feel tremendous sympathy for them, because they've gone through a very difficult time where they've seen their earnings rates on cash and bonds collapse and they've seen their capital decimated by the share market.

HILARY HARPER: Well, it does seem unfair, and particularly also if you - if you haven't earned enough to pay tax, then it seems unfair that you should miss out on the $950 that the earners are getting.

DR TUREK: Well, that's right, it's very difficult and, you know, when you're trying to get money into the economy quickly and efficiently, the Government relies on its - the ways that it can pay, and so it's paying money through Centrelink channels and paying money now this time differently to taxpayers on record, but there will be people who miss out, and it is, I guess, unfair in that regard.

HILARY HARPER: Well, give us a call 1300 222 774 if you're wondering exactly what this massive package is going to mean for your particular situation. Say if you've got a family, one or two children, one in school, what's that going to mean for you, and what's the best way to manage it. Should we spend up big immediately and just let it all go, or are there better ways to manage it, particularly in an atmosphere of falling interest rates and other economic issues. 1300 222 774. And you can benefit from Doug Turek's advice. So, Doug, $42 billion, obviously not all of it's going to come in the form of handy cash payments - some of it is going into the greater economy landscape. What's happening to it?

DR TUREK: Yeah. Well, there - first of all, there's five different $950 payments, and these are estimated to go to about 8.8 million households, and one of the largest is a payment of 950 per taxpayer, so you might - in a family this might be two working, a couple, and that's for those who are earning $80,000 or less, and there's a little bit - a reduced amount for those earning up to about $100,000, and the taxpayer means you have to have paid at least $1 of tax, which means some seniors who are working and enjoy Seniors Australia tax offset who might earn 20 or $30,000

unfortunately will probably miss out. Those people who are earning - doing part-time jobs that are just underneath - say $10,000 of income, they will miss out.

Another 950 payment is for families who are receiving the family tax benefit part A. Now, people might not know what all these benefits are, but it's a benefit that's directed mainly to people who have a single income earner who earns less than about 150,000, but there are situations where families can have a second earner who earns a little bit of income, and they'll qualify, and that's a per family bonus.

Then there is $950 for each child in a family who's receiving the family tax benefit part B, which is another allowance provided and paid through by Centrelink, which is where your household income is, say, somewhere between - under 108,000 or under 122,000 depending on if you have two or more children.

HILARY HARPER: (Indistinct).

DR TUREK: So some of these things get very complicated.

HILARY HARPER: Suddenly, when you have children, you have to have a degree in bureaucracy.

DR TUREK: Yeah. Well, and then you can - you can be a student, and there's about - anyone who's receiving one of about six different type of allowances will receive a $950 benefit, so this could be people on Youth Allowance and Newstart and so forth.

HILARY HARPER: That could be extremely handy if you're earning - if your income is on youth allowance levels. It's pretty low

DR TUREK: Indeed, and then you have - some articles in the papers have already said these will go to iPods and other things, which maybe is what the intent is for.

HILARY HARPER: Maybe.

DR TUREK: And there's a small amount of farmers who are receiving existing hardship allowances, but I believe there's only about 20,000 in that category.

HILARY HARPER: Nationally?

DR TUREK: Yes.

HILARY HARPER: Wow.

DR TUREK: Yes.

HILARY HARPER: Well, we've heard this morning that farmers are going to be quite heavily hit by the hot weather, so I can see some Victorian farmers going through a bid of hardship in the coming months.

DR TUREK: I think people are also aware there's a little bit of money for insulating uninsulating [sic] homes, and I did some research and I found the Insulation Council of Australia and New Zealand report that said 75 per cent of Victorian homes have insulation in their ceiling already, and I think most homes in Victoria may have had it since about 1988 built in when built new, so we might not find that many homes are going to benefit in that regard.

HILARY HARPER: Well, and after 9 o'clock we'll be looking at insulation in some depth, and exploring both the rebate situation and also how you go about choosing the right insulation for you.

DR TUREK: Okay.

HILARY HARPER: So if your insulation needs replacing after the last 20 years, listen after 9.

DR TUREK: There's also a little bit of money to convert electric hot water to solar or heat pump, but you can't get that if you're also getting the 1500. There's also a bucket load of initiatives that are very much building related - building the education revolution, which is building school halls and community halls and maintenance, a few other - social and defence housing is the other big ticket item. So if you're in that industry, if you're a small business owner or you're a contractor or you're an employee, you'll probably find that the intent there is to fill back the pipeline of big ticket projects that might be drying up over the next few months.

HILARY HARPER: So if you're a small business owner but not necessarily in the construction or housing industries,

is there anything in this package that's going to help you?

DR TUREK: The only thing else I see is an allowance to - for capital items that you might buy that are more than $1,000. You get an additional deduction for that, which means you'll save 30 per cent tax - 30 per cent of that, because it's a tax deduction, so it's quite modest. Some have argued that the small business segment is our largest employer nationally and it would be good to see them do more. Some argue against payroll tax, which is a disincentive to hire people, so I think this is just - this is now of course the second stimulus. We had a stimulus of 10 billion in December, which did help our aged pensioners, and now we have a second stimulus of 42 billion. We probably will have more. It's interesting to put this in perspective, because we have a hard time with big numbers. What does 52 billion mean?

[8.45am]

The last time we had a lot of debt accumulated through sort of excess spending, it was retired by selling assets, and I counted up, but I think we generated $95 billion by selling everything, including Telstra, Commonwealth Bank, Power Core, Loy Yang A, Qantas, CSL, et cetera. So there was a lot of family silver sold to sort of retire debt again, so, you know, we have to make sure this money's spent wisely, because it will create a legacy.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, you don't want to send that silver to the global economic pawn shop only never to be able to reclaim it. 1300 222 774 is our number. Karen has sent a text message saying: I think your guest may have reversed the details for family tax benefit A and B. But I guess the main idea there is that there will be different - different payments for the different tax benefits, and it will reward you to go and hunt up which one is going to apply to you.

DR TUREK: And what will happen is Centrelink - if you are receiving those benefits, Centrelink will send you that money, and if you're receiving fortnightly benefits, you'll get that in the next few months. If you receive it in a lump sum, you'll get it at the end of the year. So that happens automatically if you're receiving those benefits and the same thing for the taxpayer bonus. The tax office will send that to you in April, or unless you wait

until June to file your tax return.

HILARY HARPER: Well, I think a few people I know suddenly went, "Oh, must put my tax in if it's dependent on the tax return. Don't want to miss out." Christina's called in from the city. Good morning, Christina.

CALLER CHRISTINA: Hi, yeah. I heard the guest talking about if you didn't pay tax that you won't be getting the $950. I was just curious about that, because I'm actually on a disability pension. I did get the $1,400, which I did invest in an air-conditioner thankfully, but I just assumed that because I was on Centrelink benefits that I would get the $950.

DR TUREK: Well, I guess, Christina, it depends on which - I think the benefits that are being promised are to families receiving the family tax benefit, which - part A and part B. That wouldn't be you, would it?

CALLER CHRISTINA: No. I'm single on a disability pension.

DR TUREK: Yeah, and you wouldn't have earned any taxable income that requires you --

CALLER CHRISTINA: Not last year I didn't --

DR TUREK: -- to pay.

CALLER CHRISTINA: -- no.

DR TUREK: Yes. So I don't think in this round you will benefit.

CALLER CHRISTINA: Oh, okay. All right.

DR TUREK: So unfortunately you were able to buy the air-conditioner. This time it's going to be hard to pay to run it.

CALLER CHRISTINA: Yes, exactly.

DR TUREK: Good luck, Christina.

CALLER CHRISTINA: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Christina.

CALLER CHRISTINA: 'Bye.

HILARY HARPER: Jack is in Donvale. Hello, Jack.

CALLER JACK: Hello, good morning. Yes, I'm a retiree just living off a rental property. Would I be eligible for the 900, or --

DR TUREK: Jack, do you --

CALLER JACK: I do pay tax.

DR TUREK: You do pay tax, and that's from rental income that you generate, for instance?

CALLER JACK: That's correct, yes.

DR TUREK: And you - well, I believe if you've paid more than $1 of tax in the 2007/2008 period, then you would receive the 950 benefit. Everyone can check the specific details here by looking at fact sheets that are on the treasury website. You can even do www.budget.gov.au and there there's a one-page fact sheet that goes into the specific details of each and every scheme if we're not able to answer anyone's queries now.

HILARY HARPER: budget.gov.au.

CALLER JACK: Okay, thank you.

DR TUREK: Good luck, Jack.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Jack. Okay, budget.gov.au. We'll pop that up on our website.

DR TUREK: It's up there with Facebook I think as the No. 1 site.

HILARY HARPER: Really, yeah, it's going to record a lot of hits in the next couple of weeks. Text message 2: I'm working as a temporary resident here. I work as an IT engineer. Am I eligible for the bonus?

DR TUREK: I believe it's available for Australian residents. Now, let me check - I'll have to check the

exact specific, because that's a tax resident or a resident. If you are paying tax in Australia it may be possible.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, okay. So perhaps check your tax status.

DR TUREK: "The bonus will be available to Australian resident taxpayers."

HILARY HARPER: There you go.

DR TUREK: And you can be a resident - if you're working as a temporary resident, that perhaps is you then.

HILARY HARPER: Interesting. Matthew is in Gippsland. Hi, Matthew.

CALLER MATTHEW: How you going?

HILARY HARPER: Good. You're not near the fires, are you, Matthew?

CALLER MATTHEW: No - about an hour's drive away, so we're safe.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, excellent.

CALLER MATTHEW: Now, there's conflicting reports about this main income earner family. My wife probably made around 12 grand last year as a relief teacher, so we did pay tax, she did get the low income --

DR TUREK: Offset.

CALLER MATTHEW: -- offset back, but she did end up still paying a little bit of tax.

DR TUREK: Yes.

CALLER MATTHEW: She'll obviously get the 850, is it, whatever - 950 for a taxpayer.

DR TUREK: Yes.

CALLER MATTHEW: But will she then - will we then qualify as a one main income earning family as well?

DR TUREK: How much do you earn?

CALLER MATTHEW: Below 80.

DR TUREK: Well --

CALLER MATTHEW: It's on the 07/08 income, isn't it?

DR TUREK: It is. And you have a family.

CALLER MATTHEW: So (indistinct) --

DR TUREK: And children?

CALLER MATTHEW: One child, not at school, so --

DR TUREK: Do you receive any benefits from Centrelink?

CALLER MATTHEW: We get A and B.

DR TUREK: Well, indeed then you qualify therefore for family tax B, so that's 950 for the household.

CALLER MATTHEW: Okay.

DR TUREK: And then you would get 950 per child, so there's another 950.

CALLER MATTHEW: I thought that was dependent if they were returning to school.

DR TUREK: That's right, they have to be school age children.

CALLER MATTHEW: Well, she's not school age.

DR TUREK: Here we go, we'll find that one.

CALLER MATTHEW: She's not school age, so we won't be receiving that one, will we?

DR TUREK: Between 4 and 18 - aged 4 and 18 I believe.

CALLER MATTHEW: No, she's under 4.

DR TUREK: Okay, so what are we up to - three for you?

CALLER MATTHEW: Okay. So --

HILARY HARPER: Pretty good.

CALLER MATTHEW: So the main income earning clause, that is if you're receiving both A and B?

DR TUREK: No, no, the tax - it's called the working - tax bonus for working Australians has nothing to do with Centrelink entitlement family status. It just means if you paid a dollar of tax and your income was less than 80,000.

CALLER MATTHEW: Yeah, but I was referring to the clause where it says if there's one main income in the family.

DR TUREK: I don't think that applies to the taxpayer bonus.

CALLER MATTHEW: No, but my query was there's a clause there you'll get 950 per family if there's one main income in the family.

DR TUREK: Yeah, I think you're referring to the second element, which is the - if you receive the family tax benefit part A.

CALLER MATTHEW: Okay.

DR TUREK: I might be getting my As and Bs mixed up, you get another 950, so it's possible you get a 950, your wife gets a 950, and the family gets a 950.

CALLER MATTHEW: Okay.

HILARY HARPER: Well, congratulations, Matthew.

DR TUREK: But unfortunately your child is not school age, so you don't get it for them.

CALLER MATTHEW: No, that's okay. I was just wondering what the qualifications were for the family bonus.

DR TUREK: Okay.

CALLER MATTHEW: For the main income earning family

section.

DR TUREK: Yes. I believe you - that is something you'll receive.

CALLER MATTHEW: Okay. Thank you for that.

DR TUREK: And it's interesting to --

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Matthew.

DR TUREK: -- look - step back. Because the global financial crisis is horrible and the news is horrible, but there are some winners at the moment in this event. I mean, you could be a family in Matthew's situation where you will receive these type of benefits. You may have received another benefit back in December. Your mortgage may now be dropped 2, 3 per cent in interest, which means you may have 5 to $10,000 more principal that you can repay, which may in fact see you reduce the life to the mortgage about one to two years, depending on how long interest rates go down.

You also are buying your petrol at the pump about a third less. You probably - if you're a long way from retirement, perversely you're benefiting by buying shares in BHP and the ANZ Bank and Woolworths for perhaps half off what they were available for before. I guess if you're in a secure role, if you're feeling secure, then this is a good opportunity for you, and it's a significant windfall, so we have to be careful not to get worried away --

HILARY HARPER: That's true.

DR TUREK: -- with the very negative news, that is, if you would, scaring us from spending and feel comfortable, but it doesn't take away from the fact that there are two big losers in this current situation - those people who have or will lose their job, and also the under employed - a lot of self-employed people will be finding the income they earn is far less, and they're not going to get counted in statistics, and then secondly, as we talked about before, those who are relying on income and capital to fund their retirement, which is being really hard hit.

HILARY HARPER: Yep, because dropping interest rates are no fun for that situation.

DR TUREK: Indeed.

HILARY HARPER: And of course all this legislation has yet to pass through the Senate, so we'll be having to keep tabs on that.

DR TUREK: It's a good point, and it comes back to, you know, value for money - what was it one of the politicians said - it's 42 billion but we only have 42 hours to decide.

HILARY HARPER: Tick tock. 7 minutes to 9 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. More of your calls in just a moment.

MALE SPEAKER: Are you an original unsigned artist that's sick of hearing this?

[Clapping and coughing]

MALE SPEAKER: Well, here's your chance to step things up. 774 ABC Melbourne and DIG digital radio are giving independent unsigned artists the chance to perform at this year's Apollo Bay music festival.

MALE SPEAKER: Send us an original song that includes the words Apollo Bay, ABC or DIG.

MALE SPEAKER: Go to abc.net.au/melbourne and you could find yourself sharing the bill with some of the best international artists. Proudly supported by 774 ABC Melbourne and DIG digital radio.

HILARY HARPER: 7 minutes to 9. We're talking to Dr Doug Turek from Professional Wealth about the windfall from the Federal Government and how and when you should spend it, and just a reminder that the information we're providing is general in nature. You shouldn't consider it as personal advice and you will need to seek some independent help before you make any investment decisions. Doug, we've had a text message saying: how does it come through, this money? Does it just end up in your bank, or do you get a cheque - what?

MALE SPEAKER: Magic, isn't it?

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, it's great.

DR TUREK: Again, it depends. If the taxpayer - working Australian taxpayer bonus, and you don't have to be working of course, you just have to be paying tax, that will be sent to you by the Australian Tax Office. If you received - if you register with them your electronic banking details, it will magically appear in your bank apparently around April. Otherwise it will be sent to you in a cheque. You've got till June 30 this year to file your tax return for last year, preferably I believe with a tax agent, otherwise you may suffer a late penalty, so that money would come a little bit later.

For the family tax benefit linked benefits, they will come directly from Centrelink and they will be paid to you I think in a lump sum in the next few weeks, although if there is delay in the Senate that might take longer, and I think some people who receive an annual bonus will see that at the end of the year and again I think people receiving money - student allowances will come directly to them as well.

HILARY HARPER: We've also had a - we've had quite a few queries about, you know, what if I haven't put in my tax return for more years than I care to mention, or particularly last year's tax return. Presumably, you will need to put in a tax return for that working - workers' payment.

DR TUREK: For the tax bonus working Australians?

HILARY HARPER: That's it.

DR TUREK: Yes, you need to file a tax return and you need to pay tax. So this is where you get in a situation you may only earn about $10,000 for a part-time job, you didn't file a tax return because you weren't going to pay any tax, or you didn't want to recover any tax paid by your employer, by filing a tax return you're not going to change your situation here.

HILARY HARPER: Okay. Graham is in Macedon. Good morning, Graham. .

CALLER GRAHAM: Good morning, Graham. Good morning, Doug.

DR TUREK: Hi, Graham.

CALLER GRAHAM: I'm just enquiring, I'm on the blind pension, I'm self employed, I pay my taxes. What's the situation?

DR TUREK: Graham, how much do you earn?

CALLER GRAHAM: As in tax - well, it varies, because I'm - because I'm self employed.

DR TUREK: Yes. How much did you earn last tax year?

CALLER GRAHAM: Last tax year was about 30 grand.

DR TUREK: Okay. Well, I believe that you would be eligible for the 950 taxpayer bonus.

CALLER GRAHAM: Yep.

DR TUREK: Did you get any refund last year electronically, or did they send you a cheque in the mail?

CALLER GRAHAM: No.

DR TUREK: Or you haven't done your tax return yet.

CALLER GRAHAM: I didn't get any refund.

DR TUREK: Sorry?

CALLER GRAHAM: No, I didn't get any refund.

DR TUREK: Okay.

CALLER GRAHAM: Yep.

DR TUREK: Did you file a tax return?

CALLER GRAHAM: Oh, yes.

DR TUREK: Okay. Well, you'll either get something - a cheque in the mail, or you'll get an electronic deposit I believe.

CALLER GRAHAM: Okay.

DR TUREK: You're not a - there's no other members of your

family?

CALLER GRAHAM: No.

DR TUREK: Okay.

CALLER GRAHAM: No, my wife's not earning at the moment.

DR TUREK: And, Graham, you received about was it $1,300 last December as well?

CALLER GRAHAM: Yes - yep.

DR TUREK: Okay. Well, this is the second piece of benefit. And are you doing the economy the right thing by spending it, or are you saving it? What are you doing with it?

CALLER GRAHAM: Well --

DR TUREK: Put you on the spot.

CALLER GRAHAM: It depends on which way you look at it, doesn't it? It depends on which way you look at it. But, well, you know, I hope that - well, I hope that we're doing the right thing by the economy.

DR TUREK: Yeah. It's a challenge and this is one of the debates. $950 to some people is $950 in the mortgage and that's $950 on the government credit card, so it's just been a transfer of debt from one person to another, but it's very difficult to quickly get the money in the right places.

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah, sure.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks very much for that Graham,

CALLER GRAHAM: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: And good luck with it. There's some happy people coming out of this, it sounds like. Allan's in Mildura. Hi, Allan.

CALLER ALLAN: Oh, g'day, how are you going? .

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you.

CALLER ALLAN: I've got a friend of mine who's a student. He's - he's on a pension, but he's gone back to learn how to use computers and things. He's just started going back. How does that work out for him?

DR TUREK: Hmm - well, we don't know exactly his circumstances. Did he work last year or --

CALLER ALLAN: No, he's just basically - I think he just decided that he wants to be retrained and he's finding that by learning about computers he might be - he might be actually helpful.

DR TUREK: Do you know if he's getting any benefits from that already? Because there are a laundry list of things like Austudy, ABSTUDY, that help funding training. Is he receiving - in receipt of any of those?

CALLER ALLAN: Yeah, I think there's a thing called a PS - PES. It's sort of a thing that people on, say, disability pensions get. They get a sort of a return to learn - you know, money from - extra money as well as his pension. I'm just wondering - but because he's classified as a student - well, he is now, because he's been back to school for about a week now - will that - will that - will that fit into the criteria?

DR TUREK: It's very - it's difficult for me to say, Allan. I'm just looking at right now the treasurer's fact sheet, and it's a long list of things. If you receive the youth allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY, veteran children's education scheme benefit, military rehabilitation benefit, family tax benefit B - I don't know if I see yet the scheme that you're speaking of. I don't know if it's too recent and, therefore, I can't answer that, I'm sorry.

CALLER ALLAN: Yeah, well, it appears that it's sort of a thing that you get. Like, because - because you're on the disability pension, you get this - this funding - extra funding through Centrelink.

HILARY HARPER: Allan, that sounds like something that we might have to do a bit more research on and, sadly, we're running out of time this morning, so thank you very much for shuffling through all these papers with us, Doug.

DR TUREK: Look, I'm very thankful. I'm sorry we can't answer all - everyone's questions, but there are other resources you can go to.

HILARY HARPER: Exactly, budget.gov.au. After the 9 o'clock news, we'll be looking at the insulation that the Government's giving away; how can you get the most out of it.

(Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: You're listening to 774, ABC Melbourne. Broadcasting online at abc.net.au/melbourne and on your radio 774 ABC Melbourne. .

HILARY HARPER: 9 o'clock. Time for ABC News.

[9am]

JOHN REID: ABC News. Good morning, I'm John Reid.

Fire authorities say a fire in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne could spread quickly in today's forecast hot and windy conditions. The blaze, which has burnt through about 150 hectares, has jumped containment lines. Authorities say the fire could pose a threat to the nearby communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West, and Tonimbuk. Residents in those areas are being told to prepare their properties for falling embers. The Department of Sustainability and Environment's spokesman, Stuart Ord, says fire crews are facing difficult conditions.

STUART ORD: Because of the flame heights at the moment - and this is really unusual fire conditions we've got - the flame height's already, at this time of the morning, at 5 to 10 metres. That says that we can't put our firefighters right on the fire edge like we normally would try and do. We've got to back off and try and set up some control lines further back.

JOHN REID: The Weather Bureau says strong winds are set to buffet Victoria as the temperature climbs into the 40s. Senior forecaster, Dean Stewart, says the winds will still be squally when the forecast cool change moves through around 7 o'clock tonight.

DEAN STEWART: Over Port Phillip and Western Port, as the

wind change moves up this afternoon, we could see wind squalls around the 90 km/h mark. I think over the fire side at Bunyip, perhaps of the order of 80 km/h are possible. That's probably the upper end of things, but very windy conditions are expected today.

[9.01am]

JOHN REID: Meanwhile, dozens of fires are already burning around New South Wales. The Rural Fire Service is particularly concerned about fires in Bega Valley, Muswellbrook, and the Shoalhaven and Tumut. The Country Fire Service says that South Australia faces the worst bushfire threat in years today, with 40-plus temperatures and strong wind gusts forecast.

Residents at Ingham in North Queensland are again watching flood waters rise around their homes. Kerin Binney (phonetic) reports.

KERIN BINNEY: After a small reprieve, there's been another night of torrential rain in Ingham. More than 100mm fell overnight. The town's been flooded for six days, and water levels are again on the rise. They're expected to peak this morning at about 12 metres, just below the level reached earlier this week. Lisa Martin from Emergency Management Queensland says Ingham's again isolated.

LISA MARTIN: Some of the major - main roads into town are cut off by flood waters.

KERIN BINNEY: The Weather Bureau's Tony Audin (phonetic) says the rain will continue.

WEATHER BUREAU SPOKESPERSON: Not overly good news for the people between, say, Innisfail and Townsville. We're expecting heavy rainfall to continue with the monsoon trough in probably areas between Cairns and extending down to Mackay later in the day.

JOHN REID: Flood waters are expected to stay high in Ingham for several more days.

A woman's been critically injured in a car crash in the city. Police say the woman was hit while she was trying to cross King Street shortly before 2 o'clock this morning.

One of the senators who'll decide the fate of the Federal Government's $42 billion economic stimulus plan says he isn't convinced the infrastructure spending is properly targetted. The Government needs the support of all seven cross-bench senators to pass the package. The senators have left Canberra for the weekend but will continue their inquiry into the plan next week. The treasurer, Wayne Swan, is warning the senators they need to act quickly, but has indicated a willingness to consider their ideas and concerns. The Independent senator, Nick Xenophon, says there may be a better way of spending the money.

SENATOR XENAPHON: When you have a number of leading commentators saying that we should be looking at fixing up the Murray-Darling Basin, for instance, spending the money on fundamental infrastructure that will improve productive capacity in the economy, that's the sort of thing that needs to be considered.

JOHN REID: Australia's poor form in one-day cricket has continued with a six wicket loss to New Zealand in the second match of the series at the MCG. The Black Caps lead the series 2-0 after achieving the victory target of 226, with seven balls to spare. Earlier, Australia made 5 for 225. Clarke says it wasn't a competitive score by his team.

MICHAEL CLARKE: You know, the reality is we didn't score enough runs, we were 20 or 30 short, and we didn't have too much luck in the field. I thought the boys tried really hard. Like I say, we've just to got our heads ready for Sydney.

JOHN REID: Now to the weather: And the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire State. There's also a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory, and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State: Very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays: Light winds tending northerly and increasing to 25 to 35 knots this morning before tending north-westerly earlier this afternoon, ahead of a 25 to 35 knot south-westerly change late afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with the change.

And for Melbourne: Dry and mostly sunny with areas of raised dust. The wind turning north to north-westerly and increasing to 55 km/h this morning, a cooler squally south-west to southerly change this afternoon. A top of 44. Tomorrow, windy with a shower or two, 23; and Monday light showers, 21. In the city, up 7 degrees to 33 degrees

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network, bushfire information.

HILARY HARPER: 5 past 9 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. A text message saying the winds are very strong in the Macedon Ranges and getting stronger. Hilary Harper with you until 11 today.

Today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria and in the Southern Riverina in New South Wales and the Eastern Riverina. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open and you must not allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery such as angle grinders and welders is banned in the region. Tractors, chainsaws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary.

For more information, ring the bushfire information line. That number's 1800 240 667, and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[9.06am]

We have been hearing throughout the morning about the fire in the Bunyip State Park, which has jumped the containment lines that the CFA and DSE put in place overnight, so that's burning 5 kilometres north of Tonimbuk near

Pakenham. It's burning in a south-easterly direction and it's estimated to be greater than 160 hectares in size. Communities in Labertouche, Jindivick West, and Tonimbuk need to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased and has the potential to impact directly.

There are quite a few communities also likely to be impacted throughout the day by smoke and embers, and also possibly fire. So if you're living in Jindivick, Drouin, Drouin West, Longwarry, Longwarry North, Neerim, Neerim South, Noojee, Bunyip, Shady Creek or Rosworth, you'll need to be aware that that fire activity might increase during the day and you'll need to be aware of ember attack and patrol your property for that.

The fire, as I said, has broken containment lines and is spotting in multiple areas, so you will see a lot of smoke and embers and, if you can, you should stay off the roads and leave them clear for the emergency services. And remember you can call the bushfire information line at any point on 1800 240 667.

Emergency Services are warning to avoid all unnecessarily - unnecessary travel today. So that's anywhere in the State, but particularly fire-prone areas such as bushland, parks, coastal strips and mountainous regions like the High Country, the Mornington Peninsula, the Great Ocean Road, the Yarra Ranges, the Macedon Ranges and also be aware that there's fire risks in outer metropolitan parks and reserves.

V/Line is warning, too, that they may need to cancel services to Gippsland. They're asking people please to defer travelling to Gippsland - don't travel there unless you absolutely have to - and that train services today will be slowing. You'll need to leave at least half an hour extra due to heat - heat-related slowdowns.

[9.07am]

A weather update in just a moment, but also just a reminder, too, that the communities that went through the Delburn fires last week in Gippsland are going to be really struggling to get back on their feet. There is a relief fund that you can contribute to. The Gippsland emergency relief fund provides immediate support for people affected by the fires, and 774 is supporting this fund. It's a

non-profit charity that's been helping the community for over two decades, and if you'd like to lend your support or make a donation, you can go to the website of the Gippsland emergency relief fund: relieffund.org.au, and that way you know that every cent that you're donating is going directly to the people who were affected by those Delburn fires last week.

It's 8 minutes past 9, high time to cross to the Weather Bureau. The CFA and DSE are having a briefing at the moment, but we will talk to them with the latest information at 9.30. Phil King is on duty at the Weather Bureau. Good morning, Phil.

PHIL KING: Morning. Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: So, it's hot, we're hearing. How hot is it going to get?

PHIL KING: It's going to get very hot. Most places in the State are expected to get above 43 - around 44, 45, even 46 degrees today. The temperature is already getting up - Mildura 36, in the Melbourne area 33 - it just jumped 7, 8 degrees in the last hour, hour and a half. That was - that come down with the northerly winds. Once the northerly winds picked up, and they're starting to gust along the ranges and in the Melbourne area to nearly 100 km/h, then the temperature really picked up all of a sudden.

The change does - has made an appearance on the far south-west coast. Port Fairy in the last half an hour has just gone around to the south-west and their temperature there is 22; also Portland, 22 degrees there, and they've got a light southerly through there. So that's the beginning of the change - just lying in the far south-west, but its progress today is going to be very slow across the State. It's going to take a long time to move through, and that's because of those strong squally northerly winds. It'll probably still be mid afternoon, it'll probably just be getting through - say, around 5 o'clock today it'll probably be just getting through Horsham, approaching Ballarat, and starting to come through the Melbourne area, probably through the bay at 5 o'clock, and then by the end of the day it'll probably just be approaching, say, Echuca, Shepparton, and starting to get into the Ranges, and then it'd be through around East Gippsland up to say about

Orbost, so it's going to take a long time for this change to come through during the day and that's why, most places today, temperatures well in excess of 40 degrees and into the low 40s. So Mildura, 46; Echuca, 45; Melbourne, 44; Seymour, 43 - most places up into the low 40s today.

HILARY HARPER: What's the current temperature in Melbourne and some of the places around the State, Phil?

PHIL KING: So Melbourne's just jumped to 33 degrees in the last hour, hour and a half. It was 25 a while ago. Mildura's 36, up through Shepparton 33, so a lot of - most places are around 30, or the low 30s, and the fire - fire danger ratings are already into the extreme level in quite a few parts of the State. Because it's such dry conditions, humidity is quite low, and those strong squally northerly winds, we're seeing extreme fire danger already this morning.

HILARY HARPER: And as we're hearing, it's a total fire ban across the State and up into parts of New South Wales.

PHIL KING: Mmm.

HILARY HARPER: What about if you're out on the bays or the coastal waters, any warnings in place?

PHIL KING: It is quite - it will be quite dangerous today. As I mentioned, we're already getting really gusty squalls in the northerly, so one minute the winds are quite light and the next minute they're gusting up to 100 km/h or 40 to 50 knots for the bays. And when this change comes through, we're seeing squalls of around 40 to 50 knots, so later this after - this - late afternoon, this evening, when the change moves through, it's quite possible we'll see squalls of 50 knots, so it is quite dangerous conditions. One minute it's fairly light and then the next minute it's very strong and squally.

HILARY HARPER: So no relief until quite late in the evening. Anything else we should be aware of, Phil?

PHIL KING: Well, for today, just - not much in the way of precipitation either - very isolated shower activity. We had some storms down through the - overnight and early this morning through the south-west, so there's a slight risk of thunderstorms about, too, but they're not going to bring

anything in the useful precipitation. In fact, they may cause us more problems, because of lightning strikes.

But going into Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, the rest of the week, a significant change in the weather - much cooler conditions spreading through, and they are set to stay with us all week. We'll see the winds generally coming from the south for the remainder of the week and those cooler conditions moving through. In the north, tomorrow it'll still be pretty hot up around Albury-Wodonga, because the change is going to take quite a long time to get through there. It's probably not going to move through there until - until late morning on Sunday, but through southern areas for Melbourne dropping down to 23 on Sunday and then Monday 21 and staying around the 20 mark through the south of the State and the mid 20s through the - through the north of the State. Mildura has had - has had 12 days or 14 days of temperatures above 40 degrees. Finally, they're set to go below 40 degrees and by Monday they'll be down to around 28 degrees.

HILARY HARPER: They won't know what hit them on Monday. 28 degrees - it's like a cold snap.

PHIL KING: They'll be looking forward to it, yes.

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you very much for that, Phil.

PHIL KING: You're welcome.

HILARY HARPER: Phil King, the senior forecaster at the Weather Bureau at 14 past 9. And between 11 and 12 today, instead of hearing highlights from Red Symons' breakfast programme, you'll be hearing some more in-depth programming about the fire situation and just keeping you up-to-date on the heat levels around the State and what you can do to stay safe in that extreme heat. And I'll be with you until 12 covering all those issues.

First, though, in just a moment we'll be taking your calls about insulation - the Government's handing it over. Hand over fist they're handing out money and also batts. We're having a batt-led recovery. If you'd like to know about what benefits it can have for your house and how you can best use it, 1300 222 774.

MALE SPEAKER: Joe Hockey, good morning.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Jon Faine.

MALE SPEAKER: They said to us the huge implications of the Bill's today.

MALE SPEAKER: Much like the way you treated the Labor Party over, for instance, the Northern Territory intervention.

MALE SPEAKER: It's not an unreasonable comment from you.

MALE SPEAKER: Fran Bailey, good morning.

FEMALE SPEAKER: John, look, I really do support a stimulus package.

MALE SPEAKER: You disagree with Malcolm Turnbull, your own parliamentary leader?

FEMALE SPEAKER: You know, there's always a degree of agreement and disagreement. It's very healthy to have very forthright debate in our Party room.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Jon Faine from 8.30am each week day on 774 ABC Melbourne.

MALE SPEAKER: Call now on 1300 222 774, or text 1977 4774. Hilary Harper.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On 774 ABC Melbourne, and ABC Victoria.

[9.15am]

HILARY HARPER: It's a quarter past 9 and I'm joined by Paul Petroni (phonetic), who is the project manager Built Environment with Sustainability Victoria, because we're looking at insulation and how helpful it is and how you can get your mitts on the rebates. Good morning, Paul.

PAUL PETRONI: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for coming in this morning.

PAUL PETRONI: Pleasure.

HILARY HARPER: So I guess, you know, it's an exciting

piece of news that the Federal Government is now adding to the existing State rebates and saying we're going to hand out free insulation to some households.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, definitely a great opportunity for householders to maximise the benefits there.

HILARY HARPER: Have people been taking up the rebates that are already available in Victoria?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, to my knowledge the State rebate has been quite successful at this stage.

PAUL PETRONI: So I was hearing that apparently there's a high percentage of houses in Victoria that already have insulation. Is that because we just build them that way, or because people have been taking up the rebate?

PAUL PETRONI: Well, basically, houses built post 1991 would generally have insulation based on the regulations and standards of buildings at the time. Buildings that were built post 2005 will actually meet the 5-star standards, so they're performing very well in terms of the insulation levels.

HILARY HARPER: So what does insulation do for you? I mean, what kinds of energy savings and temperature reduction can you get? I imagine it'd be on people's minds today.

PAUL PETRONI: Okay, for sure. Basically the insulation works in two ways - it works in winter and summer in two different ways. In wintertime it basically maintains a good temperature, so if you have a heater running it will basically maintain that internal temperature for longer, and in the days like today, insulation works in the opposite where it restricts the amount of heat flow coming into the building. And the benefits are quite amazing, actually. If you've got a well-insulated home, you're looking at about a 40 per cent saving through the year in heating and cooling, so it's quite a high percentage there.

HILARY HARPER: Is that for, say, if you've got electric heating and cooling, or is it across the board, gas or electric?

PAUL PETRONI: It all varies. Each system will be very

different, but approximately 40 per cent saving.

HILARY HARPER: That's huge.

PAUL PETRONI: It is quite big. I mean, the average home is probably spending $1,200 to $1,400 a year on total energy bills, so if you take 40 per cent of that, or take the heating component out of that, it's probably about $200 to $300 you could save with good insulation.

HILARY HARPER: That was another question. How long does insulation last? Like, how long is it going to take before it starts paying for itself?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, we've done some studies and it's around about six years for good insulation, so it's looking at a very thick batt in the roof and some good insulation of the walls also.

HILARY HARPER: That's interesting. We had someone text in earlier saying, well, you know, I had this insulation installed in 1988.

PAUL PETRONI: Okay.

HILARY HARPER: I think maybe it's time to replace that now.

PAUL PETRONI: Well, it's probably worth checking that out. We sort of recommend if the insulation's thinner than, say, 50ml, it's probably worth topping that up and insulation comes in - in, I suppose, a measurement of R value, and if you've got about less than 50ml, it'd be worth topping that up with, say, 1.5, and that would do a good job then.

HILARY HARPER: Okay. What do those R values refer to?

PAUL PETRONI: R value refers to the restriction of heat flow through a material, so it - basically the higher the R value, the better the insulation. And we're sort of recommending - we're definitely recommending R3.5 for ceilings and around about R2 or R1.5 for walls.

HILARY HARPER: Okay. Well, we'll take your calls, 1300 222 774, about how you get the most out of the insulation for your particular situation, your particular

house. We've got text messages coming in already: I've got a new house that was built in late 2006. There are fibreglass batts in the roof but none in the eaves or the alfresco area. That's from Julie. Is that usual?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, definitely. It's an area that doesn't need to be insulated - because it's - if you imagine the house is a building envelope, it's what's contained in that, so it's where your plaster walls meet your plaster ceilings is what you really want to contain.

HILARY HARPER: That makes sense, yeah. I suppose what are you keeping in under the eaves -- barbecue smoke, that's it.

PAUL PETRONI: Pretty much, yeah.

HILARY HARPER: Steve is in Knoxfield. Hello, Steve.

CALLER STEVE: Good morning, Hilary. Good morning, Bill. Look --

PAUL PETRONI: How are you, Steve.

CALLER STEVE: How are you? Look, I'm just ringing with regards to, I guess, expiry dates. My house was built in about 1964 and, look, there's definitely insulation up there. I've got no idea of its - its state at the moment, but is there an expiry date on it, do we need to replace it at some stage? Yeah.

PAUL PETRONI: Well, it's worth going up in the ceiling and having a close look and inspection up there.
I mentioned a little bit earlier that if the insulation is less than 50ml thick, it's probably worth topping that up with, say, an R1.5 batt, but if your insulation's around about - above 50ml, it should be suitable. But
I definitely recommend topping it up if it's low.

CALLER STEVE: You just top up on top of your existing; you don't need to replace the existing insulation up there?

PAUL PETRONI: If it's in reasonable condition, definitely top up, but if it's looking a bit old and tattered, I'd probably replace that.

CALLER STEVE: So it does break down over time?

PAUL PETRONI: Depending on the material, yeah.

CALLER STEVE: Okay. All right. Thanks very much.

PAUL PETRONI: No worries.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Steve. If someone is in Steve's position, do they need to get someone qualified to go up in the roof - an insulation specialist?

PAUL PETRONI: It'd definitely help. They can give you a good recommendation on what's required, and they also follow the health and safety issues as well, so if you're a little bit worried about climbing on a ladder and crawling into your roof space, definitely I'd sought [sic] some expert help.

HILARY HARPER: Are there any health and safety issues particular to old insulation materials as well? Can you have some dodgy substances? .

PAUL PETRONI: Not too sure about that one. Yeah, I mean there are issues with dust, and if you have allergies and so forth, it's probably worth getting an expert in there to clean it up for you as well.

HILARY HARPER: But they didn't used to make insulation out of asbestos or anything.

PAUL PETRONI: Not - no.

HILARY HARPER: Excellent, good to know. June is in Parkdale. Hello, June.

CALLER JUNE: Good morning to you, Hilary. Good morning, Bill. Query: I have an old house built in the '40s, but I believe there were some changes made. When I purchased the house in 2000, I found that the front part of the house, which is the older part of the house, has a concrete roof, and then the back extension has got a skillion roof. Now, I know that - well, I've been told that there is no insulation in the roof. Obviously it wouldn't be the skillion roof. Is that - do I - am I eligible for this grant, or whatever it is that's involved, you know?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, the grant is basically based on if

you have no insulation in your roof currently, the rebate is available, and there's a target insulation level R3.5 for the ceiling, so if there's an opportunity to install that, definitely go for it. And I suppose the next step would be to speak to a supplier and an installer and ask for their recommendation what best suits, and also if you have access to the internet --

CALLER JUNE: No, I don't.

PAUL PETRONI: -- it would be worth - okay. Well, you can actually call our hot line as well. It's 1300 366 195

CALLER JUNE: 1300 --

PAUL PETRONI: 366 195. And they'll be able to give you all the information you require. We've also got an eligibility check list on our website, and the people on our phone lines will take you through that and see what best suits for you.

CALLER JUNE: Good. And skillion roofs, is that true that you can't put the lining into it?

PAUL PETRONI: You can, but it means that you will --

CALLER JUNE: Have to have the whole roof taken off?

PAUL PETRONI: Not the whole roof, but you can actually take off segments of the plasterboard underneath, or segments of the roof on top. So it is a bit of a challenge

CALLER JUNE: No, well, I don't really use a lot - that half of the house a lot, so --

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, if you can zone your house out where you're only heating and cooling a small space, it's probably worth insulating that one first.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for that, June.

CALLER JUNE: Thank you kindly.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you

CALLER JUNE: 'Bye.

HILARY HARPER: It's 23 past 9. We've had a few text messages about the heat mounting. It's 37 degrees in Hurstbridge and blowing a gale. That's from Colin. And someone else has said that it's their daughter's 21st birthday today and it's the husband's job to put on a gorilla suit and cook the barbecue which just sounds like a crazy idea, frankly - a good day to have already had insulation installed. We're talking to Paul Petroni (phonetic), project manager Built Environment with Sustainability Victoria about insulation. So, Paul, do you need to get a qualified person to install your insulation, or can you just waltz up into the roof and do it yourself?

PAUL PETRONI: If you're wanting to apply through the rebate, you will need an installed qualified person, but it is - I mean, I've done - I've installed insulation myself, so it's - it's - if you're willing to get up in the roof space and don't mind a few cobwebs and so forth, it's not too bad.

HILARY HARPER: And maybe a face mask and some knee pads from the hardware shop.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, definitely probably worth wearing a face mask and some gloves and so forth.

HILARY HARPER: It can get so disgusting up - particularly if you've got an old house, there's, you know, decades-old rat poo.

PAUL PETRONI: My house is actually 100 years old and I actually installed insulation in the ceiling and walls and it was quite a mission, for sure.

HILARY HARPER: I bet. How long did it take you?

PAUL PETRONI: With my father and my brother, about a couple of days actually. We did the walls as well, so that was a bit of a challenge.

HILARY HARPER: Not so bad. Now, we've had a text message about are there issues with downlights - you know, if you've got downlights in your ceiling, can there be issues with insulation around that?

PAUL PETRONI: Definitely. Yeah, look, the regulations state that you should have at least 200 to 250ml away from

the actual opening of the downlight or the downlight itself. So, I mean, one of the causes of house fires is that issue of having insulation too close to the downlights, because they actually do heat up quite a lot.

HILARY HARPER: So not only do you now have hot lights in your house but there's an uninsulated patch around that hot light.

PAUL PETRONI: Well, that's right, yeah. That's actually a source of heat loss. There are products out there on the market which actually can reduce that heat loss by - they basically contain the actual downlight and you can actually place the insulation a lot closer to the downlight, so minimising your heat loss or heat gain through that way.

HILARY HARPER: Okay. So there are options, that's good to know. Francine is in Nunawading. Hello, Francine.

CALLER FRANCINE: Oh, good morning to you both. I'm in a rented home and it doesn't have insulation. Would - because the owner's not putting it in, is it possible for this house to be insulated under this Federal scheme?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, there is opportunities there. One of the - one of the line items there is that renters can - landlords can get the rebate for insulation, so it'd be worth keeping an eye on the website for that one and influencing your landlord that way.

CALLER FRANCINE: Wonderful. So as long as the landlord earns under the amount?

PAUL PETRONI: I don't - actually, yeah, the Federal rebates aren't means tested, so --

CALLER FRANCINE: Oh, that sounds really good. Thanks.

HILARY HARPER: So it just sounds like you need to have a chat to your landlord and show him or her the benefits of the rebate their, Francine.

CALLER FRANCINE: Exactly. Thank you very much. Bye.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you. I was worried about the renters, because I thought, okay, it's for owner/occupiers of houses, this new Federal Government rebate. That seems

a bit harsh.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, that's right, but it's - I mean, there are so many properties out there that are uninsulated and the rental market has to suffer, so --

HILARY HARPER: If you were a renter and you lived in one of those old weatherboard houses, and it was like a tin box in summer, would it be worth you doing the insulation yourself, even though you don't get the rebate, just for the energy savings and the comfort?

PAUL PETRONI: It's a very good question actually. Renters - I've rented before and I've looked at all sorts of measures to actually try and keep myself cool in the summertime and warmer in the winter. I use simple measures like curtains and covering windows and those portable little sausages that you can use that you put under your door.

HILARY HARPER: The door snake.

PAUL PETRONI: The door snake, sorry, that's right, yeah. But, yeah, as a renter, I mentioned earlier that it's a six-year payback on insulation, so if you're staying there more than six years, maybe it's worth it, but, I mean, with these rebates, influence your landlord, see what you can do there.

HILARY HARPER: Yep, cultivate that relationship. Neville is in Pakenham. Hi, Neville - sorry, Pakenham Upper.

CALLER NEVILLE: Hello - Pakenham Upper, yes.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely.

CALLER NEVILLE: Thanks for taking the call. I have a house built in the early '80s that has a flat roof with clip-lock on it, and there's no insulation other than sarking under the clip-lock. So the only way to get insulation into the roof would be to take the roof off.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

CALLER NEVILLE: Now, I've been thinking of replacing the clip-lock anyway, because it's very highly rusted and needs replacing, and it would make a lot of sense to put the

insulation in at the same time.

PAUL PETRONI: Definitely.

CALLER NEVILLE: But what I'm wondering is how do I structure that work in order to claim the rebate, in that part of the work is really replacing the clip-lock and part of it is putting the insulation in.

PAUL PETRONI: That's right.

CALLER NEVILLE: Would the - would I be able to get a contractor perhaps to put in two quotations - one for - well, one for the insulation work and one for the clip-lock replacement?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, look, that's fine, but the rebate itself will only cover the installed cost of insulation.

CALLER NEVILLE: Yeah, I understand that.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, so it wouldn't cover any of the cost of the actual clip-lock.

CALLER NEVILLE: No, I - that's fair enough. It just needs replacing anyway, but, okay, that sounds like the way to go. Just one other query on the downlights, you were saying that they can be enclosed to get over the problem of overheating.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

CALLER NEVILLE: We have the compact fluorescent globes in all of the downlights, which they're quite cool and I wonder if that gets around that problem.

PAUL PETRONI: To my understanding, it's still considered a potential fire hazard, and, yeah, you'd need to check - double-check that with the installer, but to my understanding you would still need to maintain that space around the actual lights.

CALLER NEVILLE: Right.

HILARY HARPER: But at least you're saying some heat and some energy, Neville.

CALLER NEVILLE: Indeed.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for your call.

CALLER NEVILLE: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: 'Bye. Russell is in Carrum. Hello, Russell.

CALLER RUSSELL: Morning. I've just got a theory on the insulation. Once you put it in, you're then going to trap the heat into the house, which then appears to me that you're then going to require air-conditioning.

PAUL PETRONI: That's very true - not on the air-conditioning part, but you do trap the heat in if you have a lot of insulation. What you actually need to do is purge that hot air out of the building and there's, you know, exhaust fans, open some windows, get the cross-flow ventilation to actually purge that building through the night.

[9.30am]

I use my house as an example. It was a 35 degree day outside. It maintained about 30 degrees inside - 28. By about - that was about 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock in the evening. By about 12 o'clock my house was down to about 22, 20. So by purging the building of that hot air, you do cool it down quite well.

HILARY HARPER: It's a good question, though, Colin, and it's one that I know a lot of people are asking. Thank you for asking it on air.

CALLER RUSSELL: Thank you.

HILARY HARPER: That's something that I think taxes a lot of people's minds, that idea that, okay, am I going to just be making this hot box just stay hot for weeks and weeks, and I suppose it depends on what kind of house you've got, too, doesn't it - brick or weatherboard or --

PAUL PETRONI: That's right, yeah. Look, if you've got a lot of mass or bricks in your house, they tend to absorb that heat and release it over time. If you've got a weatherboard home, it will - it's a lot leakier, I suppose,

and it will cool down a lot quicker. But if we have these days of, you know, 40 degrees of three days in a row, they're days when your house will be a hot box, and certain measures need to take place maybe - go see a movie, get out of the house for a little bit.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, wet sheets over the windows, for example. Sarah is in Bendigo. Hi, Sarah.

CALLER SARAH: Hi.

HILARY HARPER: How hot is it in Bendigo at the moment?

CALLER SARAH: Well, my house is 26. It's not too bad actually. It's more the ants - the ants are driving us all nuts.

HILARY HARPER: Oh. Have they all come inside to escape the heat?

CALLER SARAH: Oh, absolutely, and find food and water and shift their babies, because they think a storm's coming and anyway --

HILARY HARPER: Great. So you're an ant nesting place now.

CALLER SARAH: Absolutely. My question is we've got a really old Victorian house and we've been able to insulate most of it, but there are two bedrooms upstairs that our children sleep in and we have seaweed insulation from the original time it was built, and the only way we can insulate is by taking off the roof from those two rooms. Now, that's fine, but how would we go about - would we be eligible for the rebate just for the insulation?

PAUL PETRONI: Good question. My understanding of how the rebates are running is that - and this is the State rebate - if you haven't actually got insulation there to begin with, then you are eligible. I'm not sure how that will work with the Federal rebate. The details of that are still unknown at this stage, but definitely keep an eye on the websites for that one, or hot lines to phone through.

HILARY HARPER: But under the current situation, Sarah can get some rebate for just putting that insulation in as such?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

HILARY HARPER: That's good news.

CALLER SARAH: Great. And can I just - we've got those halogen downlights in our kitchen, and more - the biggest worry for us is not so much the insulation, but we've had to put perspex covers over them and not - tape up the light switch and not use it, because we've found that we've got rats nesting around the box, and we had rat droppings dropping on to our kitchen benches, and we just thought imagine how many other kitchens are putting up with the same stuff that we are. So until we find a sealed way of having downlights, we've just turned them off.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah. That is --

HILARY HARPER: Perhaps a cautionary tale, Sarah. Thank you for that. I'm sure there are many other people in that situation, too. I was going to ask Paul, because Sarah brought up the seaweed, and we've had several text messages saying we've got seaweed insulation, or how is seaweed insulation. Is that an old material?

PAUL PETRONI: It's only a material that I've seen once, and I've never actually used the material. I'm not sure of its properties. I imagine insulation works where you've got air gaps, so the more air gaps and the less dense the material is, the better the insulation levels. But, yeah, I'm not too sure of the properties of seaweed.

HILARY HARPER: I've never of it before. It sounds like having Nori sheets up in your roof.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, I mean, it's a natural product and if the manufacturers say that it's got really good R values, it might be a good product to use.

HILARY HARPER: In a couple of moments we'll come back to you, Paul, and talk about some of the qualities of different kinds of insulation, but we do need to cross to the CFA now.

[9.34am]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your

emergency services network, bushfire information.

HILARY HARPER: 26 minutes to 10. There is a fire burning at the Bunyip State Park and to tell us about how it's going, John Haynes joins us. He's the deputy chief officer with the CFA. Good morning, John.

JOHN HAYNES: Good morning, Hilary, how are you going?

HILARY HARPER: I'm well, thank you. Now, the Bunyip fire jumped containment lines overnight. How's it going now?

JOHN HAYNES: Yes, still burning freely at the moment in the bush. We're trying to attack it with helicopters while we can, and we're also staging some of our ground troops from 8 o'clock this morning, so we've got five strike teams ready to go for asset protection if it comes out of the - out of the - out of the bush.

HILARY HARPER: We're hearing reports that the flames are already, in occasions, up to 5 or 10 metres tall. Is that still the case?

JOHN HAYNES: That was at 3 o'clock this morning, and just today, with the weather conditions, as we warned yesterday, it's going to be erratic fire behavior. So anything we've seen before what you think a fire will, you know, act normally's not going to happen today. So at 3 o'clock in the morning, to have 10-metre flame heights, in the heat of the day it's going to be pretty intense.

HILARY HARPER: So that's fairly scary for the communities nearby. Are there any particular areas under threat at the moment?

JOHN HAYNES: We're still talking about Tonimbuk, Labertouche, and Jindivick West at this stage. It's still heading in a south-easterly direction, and just looking at the weather map for the rest of the State, there's already strong northerlies right through the west, so they'll - they'll start to be on the Bunyip fire in the next few hours probably.

HILARY HARPER: There's another fire, too, in Delburn. How's that going?

JOHN HAYNES: Delburn was the one from last week.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, that's last week, yep

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, so that's - that's contained and we've still got some tankers there just patrolling to make sure that nothing flares up.

HILARY HARPER: That would be a scary situation, I guess, to have a fire reignite after you thought it was contained.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, yeah, it would be, and we're pretty confident with that one. A lot of work's been put in the last week on that, so that should be okay. We had a whole belt of lightning go through the south-west about 6 o'clock this morning from - if you roughly know Casterton in the west right down through to Warrnambool, and we've had a fire light up just on the other side of the South Australian border, which we've contained with the South Australian CFS, so that just showed up when it got a little bit windy and we jumped on it and put it out.

HILARY HARPER: Excellent news. And the fire at Dargo, too, that's still a going concern?

HILARY HARPER: The Dargo one is actually burning in the old 2006 burn, so there's less fuel there, but the fuel is actually new regrowth, so it's probably two- to three-year-old trees, and there's a lot of dead material there. So that'll - that'll burn pretty hot with the winds today, too.

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you very much for that, John, and we'll touch in with you again in the next hour

JOHN HAYNES: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: John Haynes, deputy chief officer with the CFA and, as he said, the communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West and Tonimbuk need to be on high alert today for ember attack and smoke, and possibly fire as well, and of course you can call the bushfire information line at any time, 1800 240 667, for help with putting your fire plan together or for advice about the current situation of the fires.

[9.38am]

22 minutes to 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

We're talking insulation, how to keep the heat down, with Paul Petroni, who's the project manager Built Environment with Sustainability Victoria, and we're taking quite a few calls on different elements of insulation. But, Paul, I'm wondering what are - what are some of the modern day materials. We were talking about seaweed a few moments ago. What gets used more now?

PAUL PETRONI: Well, I suppose in Melbourne, because we're a heating climate, we tend to use a lot of bulk insulation, so your batts or your blankets. And they come in a few material types. You've got your polyester batts, and your fibreglass batts that are generally used out there in the market.

HILARY HARPER: Is there any difference between them in terms of quality?

PAUL PETRONI: Quality-wise, I suppose it's - it really comes down to the R value of the product, and the higher the R value, the better the product is, I'd say.

HILARY HARPER: So you're going to make a decision based on your situation - cost and your R value that you need for your house.

PAUL PETRONI: That's right.

HILARY HARPER: That makes sense. Anthony is in Hazelwood. Hello, Anthony.

CALLER ANTHONY: Hi, gang, how are youse?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you.

CALLER ANTHONY: The - we've got a - I suppose the house would be over 30 years old, brick veneer, flat roof, tin, not a very high pitch, but inside we've got pitched ceilings and non pitched ceilings. So I'm figuring we're going to have to come through the roof if we're going to insulate - no insulation whatsoever.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

CALLER ANTHONY: Yeah. I'm trying to work out, we've got

downlights in certain rooms, we've got ceiling fans, no air-conditioning - trying to work out what's the best insulation to put in - on bottled gas.

PAUL PETRONI: Okay, I understand. I'd say the best thing to do is try and get insulation in the roof. That's definitely where you're going to make most of your savings. We - we lose about 30 per cent of our winter heating through the roof and we gain about 30 per cent of - on days like today, the heat that flows through is quite a lot, so definitely --

CALLER ANTHONY: Do I use batts, or do I use that silver sheeting stuff or --

PAUL PETRONI: You can use a combination of the two. Batts is definitely recommended for Melbourne, because that works. What reflective foil does is it just reflects radiant heat, whereas the bulk insulation will reduce the heat flow to the building or the house.

CALLER ANTHONY: Okay.

PAUL PETRONI: So bulk insulation, definitely, yeah.

CALLER ANTHONY: Okay. Just a hint for you: with those 40 degree days, we've got a lounge room which faces north unfortunately, 11 metres long, no - like just maybe a 2-foot eave and full floor-to-ceiling windows. What we did last week, we had a heavy duty silver tarp --

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

CALLER ANTHONY: -- ran full length, ground to - full length of the whole lot and our house was about 13 degrees, 14 degrees cooler inside.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, excellent.

HILARY HARPER: Fantastic. Thanks for that, Anthony.

CALLER ANTHONY: See you, guys.

HILARY HARPER: Cheers. We've also had a text message from Glenda in Stawell saying: especially for renters, I have shade cloth covering the outside of the windows which cop the early morning and late afternoon sun and it

makes a huge difference. Well, I imagine it would.

PAUL PETRONI: It would actually, yeah. Windows are our weakest point in the building, so having shading to the north and west sides on days like today is so important.

HILARY HARPER: An awning, for example.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, yeah - some sort of shading device. Shade cloth, it works, it's effective as well.

HILARY HARPER: What do you think about a lot of the new houses that are being built with the design features say like no eaves, floor-to-ceiling windows, those kind of clerestory windows up in the ceiling?

PAUL PETRONI: Look, if - yeah, the new houses, like I've noticed a lot of them don't have eaves these days and a lot of heat gain would come through those windows, and also loss in the wintertime when you're heating. So, I mean a lot of the houses now do come with glazing that has reflective surfaces on it and so forth. But, yeah, it's - I've seen some good houses and I've seen some houses that need a bit of work, actually.

HILARY HARPER: So maybe it's worth having a bit of a chat to your designer or architect or builder --

PAUL PETRONI: Definitely.

HILARY HARPER: -- in the early stages.

PAUL PETRONI: And it's actually worth checking out our website again, resourcesmart.vic.gov.au. There's a whole heap of information there for renovators, new home buyers, and so forth, to help them through the process of getting the right thing for their house.

HILARY HARPER: resourcesmart.vic.gov.au, we'll pop that up on our website after the programme, too - abc.net.au/melbourne. Maybe another call I think. John is in Bendigo. Hi, John.

CALLER JOHN: Hello, yeah. Just a question for Paul, if I can, please. I'm an absolute advocate for insulation after having had a rumpus room built on our house and we previously had no insulation. We insulated the ceiling for

the whole house and it made a massive difference. But my question relates to retro fitting insulation in the walls --

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, good question

CALLER JOHN: -- for a brick veneer house.

PAUL PETRONI: I've - I was fortunate to go through a renovation, so I was able to - well, I had to take off the old larden plaster, and squeeze in some batts into the stud frame. So you're saying it's a brick veneer wall?

CALLER JOHN: That's correct.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah. I have spoken to some DYI-ers out there who have actually cut some linear slots in their plasterboard and fed insulation through that way.

HILARY HARPER: What, so you just - you put a slice down the bottom, feed the batt up through the wall and then fill it in?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, yeah. So it's a little bit of a messy one, there's a little bit of extra work with the plaster and repainting, but I know if you've got - there are some companies out there that do - you can drill small holes and they actually pump in a form of insulation that way.

HILARY HARPER: Like a foam?

PAUL PETRONI: A foam, that's right, yeah. But they generally do that on the external walls with weatherboard homes, so it's a little bit challenging and I think each way you go you're going to have to somehow cut through the plasterboard.

HILARY HARPER: Is it worth it, though? Do you get those same benefits as from roof insulation?

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah. It's - I mean definitely roof is the first point I'd start off, whereas the walls you're looking at around about a 15 - an additional 15 per cent saving perhaps.

HILARY HARPER: So I hope that's helpful, John.

CALLER JOHN: Yes, thanks very much.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for your call

CALLER JOHN: Cheers.

HILARY HARPER: There's a huge amount of interest in insulation out there, I can see. Perhaps we'll have to revisit this topic at some point in the future on the programme, but thank you very much for coming in today, Paul.

PAUL PETRONI: Pleasure, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Have you got any more insulation work left to do on your place?

PAUL PETRONI: Well, I'm halfway through it, so I definitely notice the difference between the uninsulated and the insulated part. It's around about 7 degrees hotter on a day like today in that uninsulated part, so it's quite uncomfortable.

HILARY HARPER: Yep, we've got the same. I think the insulation stops halfway through one room and the cat's always right over the other side of that room in the corner.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah, clever cat.

HILARY HARPER: Yep. Thank you very much. Paul Petroni (phonetic), project manager, Built Environment with Sustainability Victoria, and that website was resourcesmart.vic.gov.au. There's also a phone number, which I think I've got correct - 1300 366 195.

PAUL PETRONI: That's right.

HILARY HARPER: And that's Sustainability Victoria.

PAUL PETRONI: Yeah.

[9.45am]

HILARY HARPER: Fantastic. So you can call and get some advice on insulation and there are new rebates coming

through from the Federal Government. The details will presumably be made a bit clearer at some point in the near future. You're listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

DR CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney. I'm chief health officer of Victoria just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions. If you have to work outdoors, protect yourself from the sun, wear lightweight loose-fitting clothing, cover exposed skin, use sun screen, and wear a hat. And if you're feeling really hot, take a cool shower or bath.

MALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[Song played - REM, The End of the World]

HILARY HARPER: It's 12 minutes to 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. That's REM, The End of the World. It might feel a little bit like the end of the world, but it's not really. We'll be bringing you updates on the fire situation - the fire at the Bunyip State Park, and also how we're faring in the State with the heat. It's going to be 44 degrees in Melbourne, 46 in Mildura. Perhaps you'd like to text me and tell me exactly how hot it is where you are - maybe it's hotter than you expected at this time of the morning - 1977 4774 - and we've had a request on the text message: do you happen to know what time the weather change is due?

Well, it's going to move very, very, very slowly across the State. Apparently it's hit Portland already, but it's going to take hours to get through - about 5pm in Melbourne we're hearing from the Weather Bureau, but much later in the evening if you're in the north-east of the State or up along the Murray, so I'm afraid you're just in for a very hot day for a very long time. However, there's much to discuss when the weather gets very hot and one of those topics is gardening. Is it all over for gardening in Melbourne? Are we hitting a new non gardening or different gardening era? Andrew Laidlaw has some ideas on that. He's a gardener and landscape architect with the Royal Botanic Gardens. Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Now, you've got a vision, haven't you, Andrew, for the new era?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Would you call it a vision? I think we have --

HILARY HARPER: An apocalyptic vision

ANDREW LAIDLAW: It's almost apocalyptic. We have passed a threshold, I think, which is - really means we can no longer go back. I mean, what we've had - believe it or not, the last week's been almost refreshing compared to the week before, but to then get served up something like today - now at least it's only a day - if we got two or three days again like we had, it would seriously put most of our plants that have already been scorched in really trouble - would really put them in a point where they probably won't come back.

HILARY HARPER: We're hearing that week of really hot weather dried out the State and now it's just a tinder box State --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Absolutely.

HILARY HARPER: -- for fires, but obviously the plants are just suffering, too, heat upon heat.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: The plants have never suffered like I've seen in the Botanic Gardens they are - you know, we've got scorching and leaf drop like I have never seen and people will have noticed, but things like agapanthus, some of the agaves, some of the cacti even, have scorched severely. They'll survive, they will come back.

HILARY HARPER: Agapanthus.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Agapanthus, believe it or not, though, some of the agapanthus, the heat was so hot and particularly if they were near roads or some reflected heat, the cellular structure has just collapsed completely, so really what we'll have to do is not touch them now, but we'll basically have to cut them right back. Either you can choose to do this in two times - very early autumn, particularly we've had a little bit of late summer rain or a little early autumn rain, or again we'll get another good growth burst in September. So the other time to cut these

things back is in August. That's the sort of clumpers. With our shrubs that have scorched, a lot of our camellias have scorched, you don't touch them now. Really, you've got to just put up with it and a lot of them will actually naturally fall - a lot of the leaves will naturally fall, but we could probably give them a light prune again towards very early autumn, and particularly if we've had a bit of rain, and we'll hopefully get a burst of growth and that will actually improve them.

But my point is, and I suppose it's been heading this way, but to have that week we've had, we've really got to start looking very seriously at a different range of plants, a different pallet of plants. There's no point - we are going to get this weather from now on, and whether it's one week or two weeks, but we have to start planning for it, so I think gardening has changed for ever from a week ago.

HILARY HARPER: So, Andrew, I feel like you've crossed a line. You've gone from: well, we should use fewer of these, you know, non native plants to that's it, the time has passed.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I think the time has passed. I think - and the nursery industry are on to it, but I think they're going to have to really get on to it and anybody that's still thinking magnolias, birch, azaleas - I'm just reeling them off the top of my head - some of the michelias are good for Melbourne. Get over it. You've got your head in the sand. Because, look, if you've got a wet spot in your garden and you're in Mount Macedon or in the Dandenongs, then I think fine, magnolias, even possibly the odd rhododendron, but not in Melbourne where we're living and dealing with these conditions. It's just not good sense. It's crazy.

HILARY HARPER: You mentioned hydrangeas before, and I just grew up with thinking that hydrangeas were practically a weed, they just grew anywhere, but, no, you're saying.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I read - I was coming home last night and I read an ad on the back of a truck and it was, you know, hydrangeas that keep on keeping on through summer and it was the New Blue and it was - but it's just a thing of the past and we'll laugh at those ads in - around Melbourne in maybe 10 years, because unless you've got the micro climate

to support it, and I'm not saying they're gone from everywhere, but they're just not going to be our mainstays at all in gardening. And we've really got to move on pretty quickly I think.

HILARY HARPER: Well, and let's hear what you think - 1300 222 774. Do you want some advice about how to manage that beloved plant that's looking very, very crispy at the moment, or are you wondering whether this is the line that you cross as well. Is it time to ditch that hydrangea or rhododendron? You can ask Andrew, 1300 222 774. And Teresa's already on the line from Fairfield. Hi, Teresa. .

CALLER TERESA: Good morning, Hilary. Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Hi, Teresa.

CALLER TERESA: Around this area, Northcote, Fairfield, we've got plane trees in the streets, and they've all dropped their leaves. We've got thick drifts of dead leaves - it's like autumn, and I don't know whether this has ever happened before, but are those trees going to survive?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Look, the plane trees I think will survive. What we're seeing here is a shedding of their leaves, because they just couldn't cope, but they will actually come forth again - maybe not until spring of course, because these trees will go into a very autumnal feeling, and I was actually just coming through around the Yarra River and a lot of the elms are doing the same thing, so plane trees are notoriously tough, but they've had to drop their leaves as a response to the weather and I think they will - the plane trees will survive and come back. I've had people call me about olive trees defoliating and we had brachychitons, which are the bottle trees, defoliating in the botanic gardens, so it's a shedding of the leaf just to get through. It's like, you know, you can't keep everything going, so the plant has to respond, but those trees, I think, will do okay.

CALLER TERESA: That's good. It's very interesting to drive around and see which trees --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I know.

CALLER TERESA: -- are surviving and which trees aren't. And of course all the eucalypts in all the parks and gardens are doing perfectly fine, thank you.

HILARY HARPER: Indeed.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And, Teresa, that touches on a really important point and that's the positive thing that you can take out of this, and it is what is surviving, and let's look at it seriously, because they're the things that are going to take us forward. I was just in my garden last night and looking at this grass, this wonderful big miscanthus grass, and I haven't watered that all summer - it gets a little bit of shade in the afternoon - just doing its thing beautifully. So there are plenty of things still out there to choose from, but there's also plenty that are - have had it.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Teresa. And it really does change the streetscape and the landscape, doesn't it? We're going to have to get used to a new landscape.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Just out here, actually.

HILARY HARPER: Or, rather, the old landscape just being replaced.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's right, that's right, it's a change. But just out in front of the building here, all the planes have defoliated, and with a gust of wind coming in there this morning it was desolate with all these brown leaves flowing around the place. It could have been the middle of winter.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, yes.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Yet I was in my car with the air-conditioner on, but when I got out there, there was this incredible blast of heat and you just - it's a shock.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, yeah, it's an amazing thing, isn't it? I think we're going to have to be getting used to these conditions instead of just reeling and going, "Oh, I don't know how we can survive."

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's right.

HILARY HARPER: Rhonda's in Frankston. Hi, Rhonda.

CALLER RHONDA: How are you both? Nice to talk with you.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Hi, Rhonda.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you.

CALLER RHONDA: I've got a suggestion. During that really - I'm sorry if I have a bad buzz on my phone, there's a problem with my service provider whom I won't mention.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's okay, Rhonda.

CALLER RHONDA: I managed to save pretty much all of my plants through that recent spell of deadly heat, including all my stags and elks and tree ferns and such.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Well done.

CALLER RHONDA: And my clivias and that, simply by throwing sheets over them.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And did you throw those sheets - did you prepare this early in the morning, or did you just go out there and sort of - so the sheets were just draped over the plants, or did you actually have them --

CALLER RHONDA: No, I had - sorry - I had used it when I was in the country to save recently planted things from frost, but I thought the same thing should apply, and I basically just threw them over, pegged them with just ordinary old clothes pegs to things.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Yes.

CALLER RHONDA: In some instances I put up a few of those octopus straps to hold things down a bit, too, and to weight down things because of wind, which would be applicable today - basically just my gardening implements, forks and spades and things, around the edge of the sheets and I saved pretty much everything. Other things that weren't were definitely scorched and looked very sad, but I've saved hundreds and hundreds of dollars worth just by using old sheets and towels and things, lacy tablecloths.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Good on you, Rhonda.

CALLER RHONDA: They'll wash, they'll wash.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Now, Rhonda, with the clivias, for example, which really like being in the shade --

CALLER RHONDA: Yes.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: -- were these plants under shade and you were still protecting them, or were they sort of getting a little bit of an afternoon sun blast, or --

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah, they were getting a bit of an afternoon sun blast, so I just threw it over. Now, I watered with all my sort of waste water last night everything I could sort of muster, so with the sheets over, that's virtually holding the moisture in the ground through today.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Well, look, that's excellent, Rhonda, and it's a great effort to be able to do that. Again, I don't think we can do that all the time, and a lot of gardeners aren't perhaps prepared to do it, but if you've got those special things, if they're legacies to you, or if they've got some emotional attachment, or if they've cost you a lot of money, then they're worth saving, but ultimately I think it's - they're the plants - although clivias are very tough, but any blast of sun will scorch clivias.

HILARY HARPER: So are you saying, Andrew, that you think it's a good idea just not to buy those plants and plant them?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's what I'm suggesting.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Or are you thinking that you should just stop watering them now, give up on them, make them go away?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Really good question, Hilary, because what I think we need to do is we really need to protect our big trees in our gardens. So if it means sacrificing some of the smaller things that we're ultimately going to change with this new gardening, then I think it's okay and, as tough as it may sound, I think we've got to keep the water

into the big trees, because the big trees are so important in so many ways and they modify our environment around our house. They're so important. So if we lose those, I don't know what to do.

HILARY HARPER: And they lock in carbon, too.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: They lock up carbon. It's very important that we save those, so if it means letting go that camellia, and poor camellias, they've been so tough really but some of those other things, then I think we have to stop - stop doing - stop watering those, because they're not going to come with us next year.

HILARY HARPER: Yep.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I'd love it if the Government would give us a rebate for planting a new type of garden.

HILARY HARPER: Wouldn't that be good, yeah.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's right. Buy your plants Australian grown.

HILARY HARPER: That would boost the economy. Yep, get a landscape gardener, help the nursery industry.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Absolutely.

HILARY HARPER: If only we ran the world, Andrew, I've said it before, it'd be much better. But, yes, perhaps time to harden the heart towards the poor camellias - stifles a sob. Coming up to news time. After the news we'll take more of your calls on 1300 222 774, and we'll lighten the mood a little with some funny stories about your pets.

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: Hi, Tony Delroy, the 774 ABC Melbourne website, abc.net.au/melbourne, your place to find out about presenters, news, programs, and what's going on in the city today. abc.net.au/melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: News time. It's 10 o'clock.

[10am]

[Music]

JOHN REID: ABC News. Good morning, I'm John Reid. Strong winds and searing heat are testing firefighters trying to control a blaze in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne. The fire, which has burnt more than 160 hectares, has broken containment lines. Authorities are worried the fire could threaten the nearby communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West and Tonimbuk. Residents in those areas are being warned to watch for embers. The Department of Sustainability and Environment spokesman, Stuart Ord, says people need to decide now whether to stay or go.

STUART ORD: People need to understand that this fire is a particularly serious one. The flame heights will be something that they will not be able to stand themselves and - and have a bit of a go at. Depending on how strong these winds get, and the Weather Bureau's predicting anywhere between 50 and 80 km/h, the fire during the day will tend to move pretty quickly.

JOHN REID: The Weather Bureau says wind gusts could reach up to 90 km/h in some parts of the State. Senior forecaster, Phil King, says the fire danger is extreme

PHIL KING: The fire danger ratings are already into the extreme level in quite a few parts of the State. Because it's such dry conditions, humidity's quite low, and those strong squally northerly winds, we're seeing extreme danger already this morning.

JOHN REID: The Bunyip fire could also pose a threat to major power lines to Melbourne. The spokesman for the national electricity manager, NEMMCO, Paul Bird, says the fire's within kilometres of transmission lines.

PAUL BIRD: At this early stage, they're not close enough to impact on those power lines flowing through to Melbourne, but should the fires go very close to those lines, or even underneath those lines, then clearly they could affect the performance of the power lines and - and potentially reduce the amount of power that Melbourne can gain from the Latrobe Valley.

[10.02am]

JOHN REID: In other news, the Bruce Highway is cut in several places around Ingham in North Queensland. Flood waters are again rising in the town after another night of torrential rain. The Herbert River is expected to peak above 12m this morning. Further north, the highway's reopened at Innisfail after falls of up to 350mm flooded the road.

It's been revealed an unqualified aircraft engineer has been undertaking specialist maintenance work on Qantas planes for up to two years. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority has ordered Qantas to investigate the employee's work and ordered all qualifications of its licensed engineers. It's the second licensed aircraft maintenance engineer caught with fraudulent qualifications in the past year, and the latest in a series of embarrassing incidents for the airline. Steve Purvinas from the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association says CASA should have prevented this latest incident.

STEVE PURVINAS: What concerns us the most is the fact that CASA are supposed to be the people who have oversight of this whole record-keeping process, and they haven't taken the appropriate steps after the first incident to make sure it didn't happen again. We believe CASA is inactive. I mean, you have an organisation that's supposed to be there to regulate.

JOHN REID: A spokeswoman for Qantas says the engineer's been sacked and no flight safety issues have been identified.

The US President, Barack Obama, says new dismal jobless figures in America are further evidence of the need for Congress to pass its economic stimulus package. US unemployment surged in January, as nearly 600,000 workers lost their jobs. The numbers are so high that those who have lost their jobs are now having trouble getting telephone calls through to the government agencies designed to help them. Ruth Biliatere (phonetic), who works in the New York State Department of Labor, says it's difficult dealing with the volume of claimants come through.

FEMALE SPEAKER: We are seeing a large increase in the number of calls. In fact, we're seeing three times more

calls this year than the same time one year ago.

JOHN REID: In cricket Australia's had a fifth consecutive one-day defeat with a six wicket loss to New Zealand at the MCG. Set 226 to win, the Black Caps reached the target with seven balls to spare, to take a 2-0 nil in the five-match series. Earlier, Australia scored 5 for 225, with acting captain Michael Clarke making 98.

Now to the weather, and the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire State. There's also a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State: very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays: light winds tending northerly and increasing 25 to 35 knots this morning before tending north-westerly early this afternoon ahead of a 25 to 35 knot south-westerly change late afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible.

And for Melbourne: dry and mostly sunny with areas of raised dust. Winds tending north to north-westerly and increasing to 55 km/h this morning. A squally south-westerly change late this afternoon. A top of 44. Windy with showers tomorrow, a top of 23; light showers Monday, 21. The city now, 36.

MALE SPEAKER: Call now on 1300 222 774, or text 19 774 774. Hilary Harper on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

HILARY HARPER: Five past 10. Your calls in just a moment on 1300 222 774, what plants are going to take you through this latest burst of heat and the ongoing heat conditions that we're going to be experiencing through our summers to come, and into the new era of gardening, the low water or no water use gardening. You can find out from Andrew Laidlaw.

[10.05am]

You will have been hearing, though, our updates on the fire situation at the Bunyip State Park. It's threatening a few communities there, and it's looking like a horror day for fire fighting and a really hot and difficult day for the communities there, as well as the firefighters. Steve Omerod is the ABC News chopper pilot and he's just back from flying over the Bunyip fires. Good morning, Steve.

STEVE OMEROD: Hi, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: What did it look like from the air?

STEVE OMEROD: Well, at the moment it doesn't look too bad. The fire has been burning yesterday, overnight and today, and fortuitously in that area the wind hasn't quite got up. The wind east of the Dandenongs is nowhere near as strong as the inner city area at the moment, which is very gusty and very turbulent. They've got three fire bombing helicopters trying to put out the fire and at this stage it's mainly confined to the grass underneath the canopy, in other words, it's just in the low levels - it hasn't got up into the canopy yet - and they're desperately trying to get on top of it before it gets any worse or before the wind does get up and make it harder to put out.

Now, at this stage I wouldn't say that there is any serious concern about threatening any communities, because they are addressing it quite - quite well, but if they can't completely put it out before the wind strength increases and the temperature increases, then it may become a bit of a problem.

HILARY HARPER: So, Steve, you're saying that there are water bombing aircraft there and obviously media aircraft as well. Do you have problems with visibility and with taking up the air space there?

STEVE OMEROD: No, not at all. The amount of smoke that's being produced by the burning grass is not that extensive at all, and a lot of that smoke is just wafting out of the canopy, so visibility is not a problem at all. Ironically, the visibility problem's being caused at the moment by dust that's being blown in from the north, so in the Melbourne area it is only about 9 kilometres forward visibility due to the dust, not due to the smoke. On the eastern side of the Dandenong Range there's nowhere near that amount of dust, and the smoke is not really causing a problem at all.

HILARY HARPER: So, Steve, how do the conditions today compare to some of the other fires that you've seen or some of the other fire danger days that you've had to fly around on.

STEVE OMEROD: Well, it depends how far you want to go back. If you go back to the Ash Wednesday days, quite different. We're nowhere near Ash Wednesday yet, but the potential to get there is there at the moment. Whilst the DSE are concerned about this particular fire that we're discussing, there is already a fire starting up to the nor/nor-west of Dargo. Now, that's up in the State forest area, and it's impossible to get to with ground crews to try and control. Now, at the moment it hasn't spread very far, but given the wind conditions and the temperature, that could quite easily turn into a large fire front, which would be almost impossible to stop, even with the resources we have available.

HILARY HARPER: So that's in an area that was affected by fire quite severely a year or so ago. Has there been growth in that time such that it's a threat again now?

STEVE OMEROD: Yes, the fires that you're talking to two years ago did burn out a lot of that area, but they didn't burn all of it out, so this is an area that was previously not burnt, but in the two years that's happened since then, of course a lot of that foliage has grown back and a lot of the grass has grown back. It's now been killed off with the couple of hot days we had last week, so it's now brown, and like very vulnerable tinder to catch fire. So once the fire starts, with a bit of wind it will move very quickly and be very difficult to control.

HILARY HARPER: Well, Steve, thank you so much for giving us your perspective on the fires today.

STEVE OMEROD: No problems, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Steve Omerod, ABC News chopper pilot, giving us his vision of what the Bunyip fires and the Dargo fires look like and have in store for us today.

[10.10am]

It's 10 past 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

We're talking gardening and in a moment we'll look at some plants that you can adopt that are going to be better for the current conditions and the future conditions than some of the plants that you may have been cosseting in your garden up until now. But first there's a garden open as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme this weekend, which we will be chatting to the owner of. Sharon Harris is the designer of the Reet(?) Garden, which is in Eaglemont. Good morning, Sharris [sic].

SHARON HARRIS: Hi, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Sorry, Sharon. I knew I'd mess up that sentence somewhere, and that's the point where it happened. What's the temperature out in Eaglemont at the moment?

SHARON HARRIS: Oh, it's actually got very hot. I was actually up at 5.30 and just in the last couple of hours it's just increased, you know, significantly, so it actually is quite hot, it is a bit blowy at the moment, but the garden actually - some parts are in full sun but a lot of it is actually in shade.

HILARY HARPER: And how are the trees faring in the latest bout of heat?

SHARON HARRIS: Well, the owners actually are wonderful. They're great custodians for the trees and we actually have been really trying to - we have water tanks and other parts of the garden have suffered but we've been concentrating on watering trees that are probably 80 years old, so they're actually looking quite good. I mean obviously everything got affected last week, so there has been some leaf drop, because the air temperature was just so extreme.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Hi, Sharon, it's Andrew here.

SHARON HARRIS: Hi, Andrew.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: It's a bit of a bummer to have your garden open probably the week after the worst gardening week ever I think on record, but Eaglemont is such a beautiful old gardening area, and of course people like Edna Walling and Walter Burley Griffin have been involved in those areas. Has this garden got some history to it, or can you tell us a little bit about how it's happened?

SHARON HARRIS: No history that we have documented, but the trees themselves - I mean, there's a wonderful copper beech, a tri-coloured beech actually that struggled last summer.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I bet you did.

SHARON HARRIS: And we've have been concentrating on that, and a beautiful cedar and a very large liquid amber, so just in terms of giving a sense of history to the garden, I mean the trees have obviously been here for a long time.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And you've designed the garden yourself just, what, over the last 10 years, or how long have you been involved with the garden?

SHARON HARRIS: I've actually known the clients probably for 15, 16 years, and it's been gradual in the first few years, because the new house was built on the site, but we've actually changed the garden a lot in the last couple of years, because of the - obviously the less rainfall and, you know, just looking at doing things that are much more water wise. So, no, worked very closely with the owners of the garden and, yeah, it's been wonderful.

HILARY HARPER: How much water is available, Sharon? Is there a water source on site?

SHARON HARRIS: We have 25,000 litres and water's brought in, because we definitely want to keep the trees, and we - as with everyone, we're hoping that we are going to get some rain soon, but a lot of the garden has been turned over to dry - like drought tolerant plants, so there's a real sort of balance between watering things that require water and, you know, watering - not watering things and just letting them cope with the conditions.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And is it - can you give us a sense around the style of the garden, Sharon? Is it a contemporary house with a fairly contemporary garden, or --

SHARON HARRIS: It's a contemporary house. I mean, the house is about 9 years old, and - but the style of the garden? Oh, woodland garden - there's a really distinct sort of American kind of woodland feel, if that gives any kind of indication, and we actually have a dry garden that we've actually mulched with scree, with broken-up slate and

granitic sand and different range and size of pebbles and that's actually - we've created a succulent garden that's extended out from what we call the meadow garden and there's a lot of grasses and, yeah, really interesting.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Okay. What will people - what's doing well there at the moment? The grasses should be looking beautiful.

SHARON HARRIS: They are. Yes, we actually have a grass that gets to 3 metres high, miscanthus gigantea.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Fantastic plant.

SHARON HARRIS: Yeah. So we've got --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And that's doing all right in the heat?

SHARON HARRIS: It is actually. I mean, as you probably realise, Andrew, miscanthus need a little bit more water --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: A little bit.

SHARON HARRIS: -- than some of the other grasses. But we're really good at mulching, and really good at deep watering when we can water, so basically a lot of mulching has occurred over the last couple of years actually and it's really built up the health of the soil, so it means that it's a lot - when we do water, water actually penetrates the root zone.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And that's such a key in what people have to start to prepare their own gardens for, so that when the rain comes, or when they're doing their watering, it is actually penetrating.

SHARON HARRIS: Oh, no, that's a really big thing. I mean, I think a lot of gardeners now - one of the frustrations is that the soil's hydrophobic, and it just repels the water and so the mulch actually - the scree garden is really fantastic, because as you would probably know, just the actual stone itself retains so much moisture underneath.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Absolutely.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you very much for that Sharon, and

I hope that the opening this weekend is good, despite the heat.

SHARON HARRIS: Thanks very much, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Good luck.

[10.15am]

HILARY HARPER: Sharon Harris, who's the designer, not the owner - my mistake - of the Reet(?) Garden, which is at 9 Summit Drive in Eaglemont. There's also another garden open today, Wendimee(?) at 99 Wangan Street, Macleod, a formal garden where parterres of immaculate box hedges, gravel paths and standard roses are shaded by weeping trees and softened with bowers of roses, which just sounds lovely.

Now, I have to apologise, because a bit earlier this morning I - we got carried away doing fire information, and omitted our open garden information at one point, but you can find everything you need to know about the gardens open this weekend on our website abc.net.au/melbourne at the "competitions and events" tab under the main banner on the front page, and both those gardens are open both days this weekend. Sadly, though, the Royal Botanic Gardens in Cranbourne is closed today, including the Australian garden, because of the extreme weather forecast, and Andrew, that makes sense to me.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: It does, and I mean managing large spaces with this sort of wind and fire potential, it just - they have to make those decisions.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, we've got some people who've been waiting very patiently on line --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: They have.

HILARY HARPER: -- for tips. Jenny is in Kew. Hi, Jenny.

CALLER JENNY: Hi.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Hi, Jenny.

CALLER JENNY: Hi. I've just been away for a fortnight and come back to the garden of death, and I wondered with salvias, should I cut those back?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: You can cut them back, but not yet, Jenny. I think we've got to just, unfortunately, wait for another month.

CALLER JENNY: Yes.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And really - I know they can look so awful salvias, because they --

CALLER JENNY: Yes, they do.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: -- just absolutely drop their leaves, but short of a little trim of some dead flowers, I wouldn't be cutting them back at all at the moment.

CALLER JENNY: Oh, right.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: So, look, they'll shed a few leaves, but we've just got to wait, because if you actually cut back now, we could really - we could actually get a little bit of regrowth and then that's just going to get burnt off again. So I prefer to keep the pruning away for at least one more month.

CALLER JENNY: Oh, good, well thank you very much for that.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Good luck, Jenny.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Jenny.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I hope it's not too - too terrible.

HILARY HARPER: And we've just had some information that the "competitions and events" page goes to last week's gardens this week. I'm sorry about that. But what you can do is you can go to the "competitions and events" page on the website and click on the Australian Open Gardens Scheme link, and that will take you to their website, which has all the up-to-date information. My apologies.

17 minutes past 10. Andrew is in Woodend. Good morning, Andrew.

CALLER ANDREW: Good morning to you. Good morning viewers.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Hi, Andrew.

CALLER ANDREW: Hi, Andrew, how are you doing?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Good.

CALLER ANDREW: My comment is this: my parents were great gardeners from Europe, and they brought with them their ideas of Africa and England and places like that and all those sorts of plants, and I was brought up with that, and when I moved out on my own and started reaching out at what I was interested in, I took a turn quite recently towards Australian natives, and I found that my garden suffered nothing at all from the hot spell.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And, look, it's a great reminder, Andrew, because they have just stood tall in these conditions. I mean, most natives have actually just, you know, really held themselves brilliantly over the last couple of weeks, so it makes a lot of sense to use them

CALLER ANDREW: And the other thing - one of the strategies that I use that I would like to pass on to you and to other folks is I picked it up in a little book - I've no idea what the book was now - it was something I got from the library. I've got 21 trees in my front yard - mature gums and --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: That's impressive.

CALLER ANDREW: -- what you'd call a woodland park at the back. I'm on 11 acres.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Okay.

CALLER ANDREW: And it's sort of undulating and the way it's - it's - it's set out is there's avenues of gum trees and what I've done is I've put understory through that appropriate to the area for the most part. Obviously I've got some --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: So that's using indigenous plants.

CALLER ANDREW: Well I've used - in the back half I've used indigenous plants that are local to the area, and then in the front of the house in an area we've got all sorts of Australian natives from all over the place with the overriding requirement that they are - that they are - can survive without too much water, because we're on - whilst we've got a bore, we're loath to use it - we prefer to use what we get off the roof.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Sure.

HILARY HARPER: That sounds like a good plan, Andrew, and a really good vision for the future. Thank you for that.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: And, look, I have to say on the end of Andrew's comments I was going to talk about native plants, because, you know, if we are moving anywhere, I think it's got to be with a lot of our native plants in mind, because they can just look so great anyway. So I would like to think that our next gardening trend is working with native plants and some of our really tough cacti succulent plants where we can match them and work with them together, and bring the best out in both words, but it will, you know, be absolutely drought tolerant and cope with the sort of weather we've had.

HILARY HARPER: So do you have any plant suggestions off the top of your head for, say, shrubs and trees that you might want to put in your garden?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Well, look, trees in particular, I think you can't go past - a tree I love at the moment is a thing called aloe bainesii or barberae and it's just a wonderful very tough - but it's an open tree so it's not a shade tree, but I think that aloe bainesii is a tree for the future. We've got quite a few of them in the gardens. I'd say there's another plant called chorisia insignis or the silk floss tree, and it's a wonderful tree for Melbourne. It's not so good when it gets frosted, so it's more Melbourne, but again, it's very quick growing, it's tough, it gives a shade - wonderful tough tree. Good old crepe myrtles keep doing it. I mean - and then you go into a lot of the acacias - there's some wonderful small wattles which we can look at - acacia cognata, acacia bormanii - you know, there's an endless number of trees.

On the shrub layer, again one thing that still surprises me

is the hibiscus - hibiscus rosa sinensus - it's just continually flowering, big green glossy leaf - a wonderful plant.

I could keep talking about different shrubs. There's the yuccas, which some people don't like but I just love them - they keep doing their thing and there's a lot of those. There's a thing we call the false yucca, again just a great plant. The little old statis, which is a limonium, and it has that paper-type flower - again just keeps doing it thing. So these are things that we've got to look towards.

HILARY HARPER: And I think we'll be going through these lists of plants quite a lot in the future, too.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: We will, and, look, I haven't even started on the ground cover - grevilleas, and I mean there's just an enormous pallet of plants out there that make a lot of sense.

HILARY HARPER: We've had a suggestion by a text message that if you're worried about your street trees, maybe get involved as a street and put a bucket of grey water each on -- you know, adopt-a-tree system.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Absolutely. Because, really, again, as I said, it's the trees we've got to hang on to.

HILARY HARPER: Yep. Well, we're getting text messages just now about the temperature - 41 already in Tocumwal, Kilcunda, Robinvale - you know, at 10 o'clock in the morning, it's pretty scary. So if this is the way of the future, our planting is obviously going to change. Before we let you go, Andrew, I'm just wondering how the botanic gardens is coping. What's in the future for the botanic gardens?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Sure. Well, again, the message for everybody is to be prepared for when the water comes, so make sure that your soil isn't hydrophobic, as Sharon mentioned, and we can do that through putting wetting agents on, but be a bit careful about those. Use an organic one, and it won't affect the microbes in the soil. Make sure your mulch is not too deep. We need mulch but we don't - you know, you need 20ml of rain before you actually get penetration, so don't prune yet, make sure you get consistent long watering in wherever you can, and that's

really important, and it was interesting but stone mulch is also worth considering, because it doesn't actually prevent water getting through. What happens with a lot of our fine mulches is they crust up and they actually can prevent water getting through, so that's another thing to think about, and we're doing all these sorts of things in the botanic gardens, but it really comes back to just making sure good gardening maintenance is in place to get us through the next month.

HILARY HARPER: Are there plants that you're going to have just kiss goodbye?

ANDREW LAIDLAW: I think we're having to make some serious decisions. Already in the botanic gardens we're putting planning in place - we're not going to be removing any of our big beautiful trees or any of our plants that are part of our living collections, and we have a Chinese collection, a lot of sort of moisture-loving plants down there. Well, we're looking after those, but in a lot of the planting between those we're actually - any of the replanting we're doing is basically looking at a suite of plants that requires very little water, so you'll notice in the botanic gardens, where we're doing a lot of new planting, you'll be seeing a new range of plants coming in, and you should have already noticed that, so that's what we're starting to do and we'll continue to do, so --

HILARY HARPER: And that could be an opportunity to learn about some species that you might be able to use as well.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: It's a great opportunity, and we're looking to plants from the Mediterranean, or these countries that actually match our climate, so, you know, that's what we have to do.

HILARY HARPER: Fantastic. Well, thank you for joining us today, Andrew, and we will discuss these issues in the future, I'm sure.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Andrew Laidlaw.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: Happy gardening for everyone. I just say you go out early, you come in, you stay inside and then you go out in the evening, because it's depressing out there

from a gardener's perspective.

HILARY HARPER: I think at 41 degrees --

ANDREW LAIDLAW: So good luck.

HILARY HARPER: -- in Robinvale, you've probably done your dash already this morning for gardening.

ANDREW LAIDLAW: All gardeners sit tight. It'll get better.

HILARY HARPER: Andrew Laidlaw, gardener and landscape architect with the Royal Botanic Gardens. And in Cranbourne the Royal Botanic Gardens are closed today because of the heat. And for all you people who are interested in bowls, all the metropolitan bowls competitions are off today as well, because it's not a day really for going out and standing on a green in the heat.

25 past 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. You'll remember that there were fires in Gippsland last week, and they severely affected a few communities down there. John Mitchell is the president of the Gippsland emergency relief fund. Good morning, John.

JOHN MITCHELL: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: How are those communities going down around Delburn?

JOHN MITCHELL: Well, look, they're in the recovery phase, Hilary. You know, some of them have been, you know, significantly impacted or devastated, I guess you could say. We've got 30 homes that have actually been totally destroyed, and four - all but four of those are principal places of residence, so there's 26 families totally displaced, and we've also - we think there are about 400 properties which have been impacted, you know, in I guess varying degrees. So that makeup is basically 30 to 40 commercial farms and then the balance of that is residential and rural-residential undertakings, and including a dairy's been lost and, you know, there's lots of out shedding and fences and, you know, watering facilities, tanks, all of that.

HILARY HARPER: So obviously that has an impact for the

people who have lost their particular properties, but it does have flow-on effects for the community, too, doesn't it?

JOHN MITCHELL: Oh, look, absolutely. And the local recovery effort this week has been focused on, you know, getting the basics back like water supplies, there's a lot of contaminated water supply particularly - particularly those with tank services, and there's electricity and gas and debris removal - you know, all of those things. So there's a lot of people sort of, you know, busting their boilers, if you like, trying to return, you know, the community back together.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely, and there's a good deal of support across the State, too, because we all know what it's like to be in a situation where you're not sure how your community is going to be rebuilt. What kind of rebuilding plans are needed there and what kind of support do people need?

JOHN MITCHELL: Well, the immediate - the Gippsland emergency relief fund, our focus is to actually provide immediate cash grants to families to enable them to get on and, you know, buy clothes or, you know, re-establish some of the whitegoods or pay - pay temporary accommodation expenses - all of those things. So - and our fund's designed to provide that within - within days of an event and that gives them a little bit of time before insurance refunds and other possible forms of financial assistance from government comes through.

Already this week we've handed out cheques in excess of 50 in number and so we've - we're certainly well over $100,000 in handing out funds, and we've got another - every day we're getting lists of assessments which are well coordinated with Department of Primary Industries, Human Services and the local council, so we've got a good degree of integrity in that assessment system and we'll be sending some more cheques out on Monday.

HILARY HARPER: And those are the kind of things that make such a huge difference, don't they, in those first days and weeks after you've lost your - your house and your chattels.

JOHN MITCHELL: Oh, look, I think that's right, Hilary.

I think if people took time to perhaps stand in the person's shoes - like, there's elderly, there's young, you know, there's - there's single parents who have lost their - lost their place of residence and they've really got nothing else, so where do you start? It'd be a fairly bewildering and daunting exercise, and - and I think, though, that a lot of people are saying that in addition to the cash, which people like us are able to hand out to them, there's a big healing process for those to know that perfect strangers and others are actually letting them know they're there and they're supporting them in - you know, with cash donations or with offers of accommodation or fodder, agistment, all those things. So it - it is an important part I think of the healing and recovery process for those people to know that they're not alone.

HILARY HARPER: So that website's relieffund.org.au - "relief fund" all one word.

JOHN MITCHELL: That's right.

HILARY HARPER: So that's a secure website where people can make cash donations as well as finding out about other ways to support the communities?

JOHN MITCHELL: Yes, it is, Hilary, and people can also go to any branch of the National Australia Bank and make a deposit, and all donations to our fund are tax deductible, and there's not one cent of the money we receive is actually taken for administration. And people can also post cheques to the Gippsland emergency relief fund at post office box 508, Traralgon, 3844.

HILARY HARPER: So that's post office box 508, Traralgon, 3844.

JOHN MITCHELL: That's it.

HILARY HARPER: And we'll pop that information up on our website after the programme too at abc.net.au/melbourne. Thank you for joining us, John.

JOHN MITCHELL: Thank you, Hilary. Thank you for your support.

HILARY HARPER: No problems. John Mitchell, the president of the Gippsland emergency relief fund, and all the money

that you donate goes directly to the communities affected by the Delburn fires - relieffund.org.au.

[10.30am]

It's half past 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

HILARY HARPER: Today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria, and in the Southern Riverina and the Eastern Riverina in New South Wales. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, you need to leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open and you mustn't allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery like angle grinders and welders is banned in the region. Tractors, chainsaws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary. For more information ring the bushfire information line on 1800 240 667, and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[10.31am]

The fire that's burning in the Bunyip State Park is about 5 kilometres north of Tonimbuk, near Pakenham. It's over 160 hectares in size and it broke containment lines overnight. The fire is not currently posing a threat, but the communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West and Tonimbuk need to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased, and has the potential to impact directly on those communities.

Other communities might be impacted throughout the day by smoke, embers and possible fire and those communities include Jindivick, Drouin, Drouin West, Longwarry, Longwarry North, Neerim, Neerim South, Noojee, Bunyip, Shady Creek and Rosworth. And you can check the CFA or DSE websites for more information, or you can call the bushfire information line 1800 240 667.

V/Line is advising against any travel to Gippsland today, and saying that train services will be up to half an hour

slower due to the heat, and also emergency services are warning to avoid all unnecessary travel, particularly if you're planning to go to bushland, parks, coastal strips, mountainous areas or other fire prone areas. So quite a few issues to be aware of today.

[10.32am]

It's 28 minutes to 11.

MALE SPEAKER: Libbi Gorr.

FEMALE SPEAKER: The massive $115 billion that has been slashed from government revenues over the next four years by the global financial crisis. Lindsay Tanner, are you okay?

MALE SPEAKER: I'm okay, Libbi, good afternoon.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Each week day from 3pm.

FEMALE SPEAKER: So what is the answer? How much will the temporary deficit be? Give me the scoop.

MALE SPEAKER: Look we'll be - I can't give you figures publicly yet.

MALE SPEAKER: Libbi Gorr.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On 774 ABC Melbourne.

MALE SPEAKER: 100 per cent pure footy in 2009.

HILARY HARPER: It's 27 minutes to 11 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. After 11 usually you would hear Red's Saturday, but today we'll be sticking with fire coverage and bringing you some updates on the heat situation as well, and how you can help wildlife. If you're noticing that wildlife are stressed by the heat or endangered by the fire, we'll be telling you how you can help.

First, though, Dr Hugh Wirth joins us, Victorian president of the RSPCA and former national president of the RSPCA and veterinarian. Good morning, Hugh. .

DR HUGH WIRTH: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: So it's very hot, we know that.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It already is, so all those dogs should be back home now, if you did take them for an early morning walk - certainly no more walks until the cool change comes.

HILARY HARPER: And multiple dishes of water?

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, with ice blocks in, if possible, because cool, clean drinkable water is what keeps animals going, just like us. In actual fact, whatever we feel about the day is exactly what your pet cat and pet dog are feeling, so the way you treat yourself with plenty of fluids, shade, cooling is exactly what your animals need. Don't lock your animals in the house if you're not going to be there, because if there's problems, you won't be there to help. If your dog is looking distressed, hose it down with cold water. If your cat's distressed, well, it'd be a bit difficult hosing it, but you can certainly bathe it.

HILARY HARPER: I spoke to a friend yesterday who said that their cat is very large and very fluffy.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yep.

HILARY HARPER: And inexplicably likes being watered with a watering can in the garden, so they just take her outside, and she lies there and they water her with a watering can.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, you can bath cats, you know, and I've demonstrated that often enough, even in public parks.

HILARY HARPER: Really?

DR HUGH WIRTH: But if you do it properly - don't upset a cat.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, they can be nasty if they're upset.

DR HUGH WIRTH: One day I'll show you how to wash your cat.

HILARY HARPER: Great. Brian and I will both be ecstatic at the prospect. Brian's actually a bit odd with water - he likes to sit in the bath and drink the leftover water on the floor of the bath, so then --

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's typical cat.

HILARY HARPER: I know, but he doesn't seem to understand that then his backside is completely wet, so you'll pick him up and there'll be damp dripping cat. It's very weird.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, dear oh dear.

HILARY HARPER: I know. Well, we thought we could have some light relief today, because there has been a lot of big hard heavy news later - you know, financial crisis, fires, heat. I thought it's time to remember those really funny times that your pet gives you - those funny stories that everyone pretty much tells about their pets. I was talking to a friend in the office, and she was saying that her dog, when she takes him on walks, he's usually very well behaved, but every so often he will just suddenly scoot off down someone's driveway, and the other day he scooted off down someone's driveway, she heard a large splash and some more splashing, and then he came out completely wet and he'd had a dip in their pool, and then come back --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, good on him, but he was probably a water dog at any rate.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yes, definitely, it sounds like.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, we've all got myriads of tales. I've had 16 dogs in my lifetime - I'm on No. 15 and 16 at the moment - and 12 cats.

HILARY HARPER: So there will be some funny stories in there.

DR HUGH WIRTH: All sorts of funny stories, but from a veterinary point of view, of course, most of the funniness occurs because you're interacting with humans, and the pet is the meat in the sandwich --

HILARY HARPER: Exactly.

DR HUGH WIRTH: -- if you could say it that way, and there are many veterinary students of course who choose medicine, but they want to use their skills on animals rather than humans, because they find humans difficult. Well, of

course, you've only got to go into practice to realise that that's not what really happens; you've got to be skilled at dealing with humans in all shapes and forms, and in actual fact they never teach you how to do that.

HILARY HARPER: No. Yes, humans are complex and difficult, but it's not as if pets are completely simple, too. Our Labrador used to bring home other people's garbage bins, so you'd go out into the backyard and you'd hear this kind of scrape, scrape, and it was when garbage bins had the metal clips on the side, and it would have the metal clip in its mouth and look so shame faced, but it was bringing you this gift.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, that's typical Labrador, because they have a voracious appetite, and he was probably thinking if I can just get into this bin --

HILARY HARPER: This is food storage.

DR HUGH WIRTH: -- there will be food, food, food.

HILARY HARPER: Well, I'd like you to tell me your funniest, or possibly most embarrassing, animal story. 1300 222 774 is our number.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That'll be a lot of fun.

HILARY HARPER: Yes. Or you can send us a text message on 1977 4774, but I think, you know, give us a call because we'd love to hear you tell your story on 1300 222 774. We've also had a text message about chooks: I hose down my chooks in extreme heat and keep patches of ground wet in the shade for them to sit. Is that all okay?

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, you've got to remember that chooks are running a temperature of 40 degrees, for a starter.

HILARY HARPER: So that's natural.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's their natural body temperature - much hotter. So they're not going to be as distressed as your dog or cat, who only works at 38 degrees. You know, the 2 degrees is a hell of a difference. So the big thing about chooks of course is shade that they can retire to, and water - more particularly water.

HILARY HARPER: We've also had a text message: can Dr Wirth comment on the Victorian Polo Association running its horses in the heat at Werribee. I haven't had any confirmation of that, but that's what our correspondent says is happening.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, we've had a big victory since last week when I was jumping up and down about horses racing in 40 degree heat. If you're going to race a horse or use a horse in an athletic way, they've got to be trained in the climate; they've got to be trained in either a very hot climate, say 40, 41 degrees, or in a very humid climate. Now, obviously in this latitude we don't experience that too often. This week, particularly today, I see all the racing is off, and so it should be. 40 degrees is just too hot for horses when they're not used to it. I don't care whether it's polo, racing, trotting or otherwise. So that was our little victory and I'm very pleased that people who were expressing concern about the jockeys have finally linked up that the fact is that you can't have a race without a jockey sitting on a horse.

HILARY HARPER: Well, and another event that's been cancelled today, and perhaps very wisely, is the Classic Guineas Dog Show, which was to be in Skye.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, yes, that's got to happen, that's got to happen.

HILARY HARPER: Yep. That's been cancelled and the junior handler classes too - very good.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It's a misfortune for those who were looking forward to that sort of event, but even a cancelled dog show is good for the humans as well.

HILARY HARPER: Exactly. We've been given a number you can ring, too, if you are enquiring about refunds, and the number is 9788 2500 and that's for the Classic Guineas Dog Show.

DR HUGH WIRTH: But all the racing's on tomorrow when it's going to be a cool day, and that's fine.

HILARY HARPER: I know, it's going to be blissful tomorrow compared to today, isn't it? 20 degrees lower.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Blissful.

HILARY HARPER: It will be amazing. Paula says: last year I relieved my hot cat by draping a wet tea towel over him under the ceiling fan. I can't imagine that.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's how you deal with wildlife as well as cats - wrap them up in a wet towel until they recover. You've got to get that core temperature down.

HILARY HARPER: We'll be talking to some people soon about --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, good.

HILARY HARPER: -- how to help wildlife in the heat. Between 11 and 12 we'll be looking at --

DR HUGH WIRTH: That will be terrific.

HILARY HARPER: -- the heat and the fires.

DR HUGH WIRTH: We're seeing a heap of possums and a heap of birds out at the RSPCA, but people could help those animals quickly by just simply doing that. Cold water does wonderful things for hot animals.

HILARY HARPER: There's an email doing the rounds around the ABC of a koala - a small koala that came up on to someone's back verandah and they put out a bucket of water and it sat in it, and it looks for all the world like an extremely hairy toddler just sitting there with its little paws on either side.

DR HUGH WIRTH: When, it was frying.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah. Well, and we had emails saying this can't be real because, you know, usually koalas get the moisture they need from the leaves, but --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, not on a 41-plus degree day.

HILARY HARPER: Exactly. And the photo was verified by our rural reporters, too.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Of course.

HILARY HARPER: And it was clearly drinking the water.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It was clearly drinking water, and that means it was distressed, and it's got enough intelligence - unfortunately, when these possums, birds, koalas come down on to the ground to get water, you've got the predator problem, and most of the predators of course are dogs.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, Ryan's called from Point Cook and we want your funny stories on 1300 222 774. Good morning, Ryan.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Hi, Ryan.

CALLER RYAN: Yes, good morning, Hilary. Good morning to the good doctor. I had a Labrador that I taught to climb a tree.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Good grief.

CALLER RYAN: Well, it is the things you do as a kid. Basically, visualise a river gum. Now, some time in its past life it had been struck by lightning and the tree had fallen over to a 45 degree angle and had lost sort of the main part of the tree. It had subsequently restruck for growth, so you had the old trunk sticking up about, say, 10 foot off the ground at a 45 degree angle and the new growth coming out of it. Now, the birds decided that the old trunk was a good place to put their nest and my Lab - I got it from the RSPCA - must have been trained as a gun dog or something, because she had this thing about birds. It would ignore cats - cats weren't a problem, but it would hunt a bird until the end of its existence, and it found this nest --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, I can't say I approve of that.

CALLER RYAN: Well, I mean, I'm just stating a fact. I mean, I didn't do the training, but, you know, that's what - that's what this dog had this hate thing for, so I found this nest. The dog found this nest. So I thought well, you know, I mean it's not going to touch the birds but it seemed to be deliberately distressed by it because it couldn't get at this nest. So I thought, look, I basically coaxed it up the tree. Once it was up the tree, it was quite happy, which was kind of odd, but anyway --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, there was a big driver there for your Labrador -- that was predation. And I'm not sure I approve. But any rate, thanks for sharing that with us Ryan.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Ryan. 1300 222 774. We've had a couple of text messages. My proud cat brought home a mouse attached to a mouse trap.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Dear, oh dear.

HILARY HARPER: That's funny.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's the trouble with cats, they do bring their prey home.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, even if it's someone else's prey first.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, and they line it up. I had one cat that used to do that. It was very distressing - all these bodies lined up on the back door mat.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, in neat rows. Adelle says: my cat Monty once brought home a baby ringtail possum - oh, that's no good - which escaped from his mouth and climbed up on to his back riding him around the patio like a jockey. Monty was mortified.

DR HUGH WIRTH: I'm sure; I'm positive. I'd say that was the revenge of the ringtail.

HILARY HARPER: Yes. Well, it's wonderful when you see cats who, I don't know, accidentally fall off something, and they just look so embarrassed and they give themselves a couple of quick licks just to make sure, you know, that everything's fine.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Everything's right, because they always end up on their four feet.

HILARY HARPER: Hugh, I was walking home to the car from - in North Melbourne recently and I saw a cat fall off a 2-storey building. It was terribly shocking. I thought I would be, you know, scraping this cat off the road and taking it to Lord Smith at midnight, but the cat landed on

its feet, and it made a terrible howl but then it went under a car and I was kneeling down under this car at 10 o'clock at night trying to see if the cat was okay and I couldn't get it out from under the car, but I felt all its legs, and it seemed to be fine.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, that's because it's got a righting mechanism in its vestibular apparatus in the balancing mechanism in other words, so it always ends up --

HILARY HARPER: But this was just huge.

DR HUGH WIRTH: -- on its feet.

HILARY HARPER: It was like 15 or 20 feet fall.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Not all cats are as lucky as that, but they are very good at this.

HILARY HARPER: That's a relief, because I was terribly worried. You know, should I be --

DR HUGH WIRTH: It's a wonder you didn't attract attention of the Victoria police wanting to know what madam was doing under a car trying to stroke a cat.

HILARY HARPER: Madam was coming back from a party and was fairly well dressed and perhaps above suspicion, but also - I mean, I did nearly get run over because a car turned the corner while I was prone on the ground trying to coax this cat out.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh dear.

HILARY HARPER: But, yeah, it was a shocking thing to see.

DR HUGH WIRTH: I think that's funny in itself.

HILARY HARPER: It was pretty amusing.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Hilary rescuing cats.

HILARY HARPER: Not the first time. But several people wondering if certain events are still on today in the heat - is the music night at the zoo tonight still on. Well, I guess zoo animals, the staff have cooling mechanisms.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, well, they're in there - they're in their usual pens with all the --

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, they can't be --

DR HUGH WIRTH: - all the facilities required to keep them cool.

HILARY HARPER: Lloyd has called from North Fitzroy. Good morning, Lloyd.

CALLER LLOYD: Hi.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Hi, Lloyd. .

CALLER LLOYD: My nan's cat used to like sometimes bring home presents and stuff for us, but it started off as fruit and flowers at the front door.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, it's like a boyfriend.

CALLER LLOYD: And sometimes there were stacks of flowers, but then it started off bringing home like underpants and socks and things off washing lines.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh dear, that's embarrassing.

CALLER LLOYD: And teddy bears and all different stuff.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, how to be friendly with your neighbours that sounds like to me.

CALLER LLOYD: Yes.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It's very common with dogs of course, Lloyd, where they are sometimes retrievers and they bring in somebody else's newspaper.

HILARY HARPER: I've never heard of it with cats, though.

DR HUGH WIRTH: But not with cats so much.

HILARY HARPER: What did your nan do, Lloyd?

CALLER LLOYD: Well, she - first she was like oh, thank you and stuff, but then after years she got really sick of

it, cleaning up all the flowers off the door.

[10.45am]

HILARY HARPER: And trying to give the teddy bears back. Oh, that's sad.

DR HUGH WIRTH: The wrong thing for nan to have done was to praise the cat.

CALLER LLOYD: Oh.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That just encourages the cat's activity.

CALLER LLOYD: Oh, okay.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's a good story, Lloyd. Thank you for that.

CALLER LLOYD: Yep, okay, bye.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks, Lloyd, bye. Actually, my partner's old cat, sadly no longer with us, used to go outside and get leaves and chomp them in its mouth, and bring them in and put them in the living room and then go outside and get another leaf and he would come backwards and forwards until he made a little pile of leaves in the living room.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's his little present to you.

HILARY HARPER: I don't know what it was, yeah, he seemed quite proud of it. But also if you caught him with the leaf in his mouth, he would look embarrassed.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Good Lord.

HILARY HARPER: Weird. I don't know. 1300 222 774.

DR HUGH WIRTH: What's Brian doing then?

HILARY HARPER: Brian hasn't done anything terribly amusing lately. He's still got a bit of a biting problem, so we're trying to be not amused by him at the moment.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's exactly right.

HILARY HARPER: We say no very sternly and put him down, but I'm not sure that it's working. Perhaps Brian's brain isn't quite as it should be.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Or you're not tough enough.

HILARY HARPER: Possibly, possibly. Though we discovered, after several weeks of, you know, "Hilary, I think you may be overfeeding Brian. He is a bit porky, he's got that little fat flap," we discovered that actually it was the partner who was filling the food bowl up a little too high.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Is that right?

HILARY HARPER: Yes. I was being very stern and flinty. .

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, the instructions are on the packet, you know.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, I know, but it was a problem I think of two people feeding one cat at different times of the day and failing to communicate adequately, so it's been sorted now.

DR HUGH WIRTH: 4.5 kilos is the average cat size.

HILARY HARPER: I think he's under 3. He's still quite a kitten.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, yes.

HILARY HARPER: But he's going to be a very large animal.

DR HUGH WIRTH: But he's well on the way.

HILARY HARPER: Mmm. .

DR HUGH WIRTH: To being a fat cat.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, not if I have anything to do with it. Val's called from Heyfield. Hi, Val.

CALLER VAL: How are you both.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Morning, Val.

HILARY HARPER: Good, thank you. .

CALLER VAL: Good morning. I had a Lab cross and she used to bring some incredible things home, but the best was a cow.

DR HUGH WIRTH: A cow!

HILARY HARPER: A cow!

CALLER VAL: She - I looked out the bedroom window and I thought: oh, there's a cow coming across the road and there's my dog herding it across the road, and she come into our yard with it, and I thought what am I going to do with the cow? So I chased it out, and a bit later on I heard my neighbour sing out, "Quick, quick."

DR HUGH WIRTH: You do have a neighbour who owned the cow?

CALLER VAL: No, no, it come from off a farm. Anyway, she's saying, "Keith, quick, quick, there's a cow in our yard." And I'm hiding behind the fence pretending I don't know anything.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, dear oh dear.

HILARY HARPER: That poor cow must have been so confused. You want me, you don't want me.

DR HUGH WIRTH: You didn't even get a reward for its --

CALLER VAL: No, she didn't - like she didn't hurt - she was unbelievable. She --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Didn't eat your garden?

CALLER VAL: No, no, we - I chased it out too quick, because we didn't have any fences and I thought, oh, look, it will go on the road, so I thought I'll chase it into - along the road a bit and it went into the next door neighbours', but anyway, so, yeah, that was my funny story.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, you're winning with that story, Val. Lloyd's cat just brings in underwear, yours brings in cows.

HILARY HARPER: That's great, Val. Thank you. His is a snow dropper and yours is a cattle rustler. We've had a few text messages, too, that are competing with that: our

old dog used to bring home people's milk cartons back when milk was delivered. She'd lay it on the top step, puncture the carton and drink the milk, says Anna.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yeah, I've heard that before.

HILARY HARPER: That's pretty good.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Magpies, in the old days, used to puncture the top of the milk bottle - you know, they had a foil cap.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yes.

DR HUGH WIRTH: And they would - the maggies would use their beak to penetrate the foil and drink the milk.

HILARY HARPER: Smart.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, it was the cream - the cream would come to the surface in those days.

HILARY HARPER: Another text message: I left the back door open one hot summer evening watching TV, and the dog goes crazy in the kitchen. I walked in and found a koala on the mantelpiece. I'm sure the dog didn't bring that in, but nevertheless.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Koala on the mantelpiece.

HILARY HARPER: That would be a shock, I think.

DR HUGH WIRTH: A small shock.

HILARY HARPER: My father came home one night when we lived backing on to a tract of bushland and bent down to pat the cat, because it was eating its meal out of the cat's bowl, and it ran up his arm and leapt on to a tree, and it was a possum, and he had quite deep scratches all along his arm.

DR HUGH WIRTH: I can imagine. Well, they're pretty tough koalas, too, if you try to get them.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yeah. Well --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yeah, they've got those claws, they can do a lot of damage. And they bite, too.

HILARY HARPER: Yes. Well, it's 9 minutes to 11. It's time to check in with the DSE about what's happening with those fires. Stuart Ord is a spokesperson for the DSE. Good morning, Stuart.

[10.51am]

STUART ORD: Morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Now, there's fires in two areas around the State, aren't there? Can you tell us what's happening in both those places?

STUART ORD: The major one is in the Bunyip State Park, Hilary. That fire's about 130, 140 hectares in size. That fire has jumped containment lines, unfortunately. So with the temperature heating up, with the winds increasing in speed, there's some expectation that fire will make a move towards some of the smaller communities. At this stage, as we speak now, they're not - the fire isn't posing a threat to these communities, but these communities of Labertouche, Jindivick, Neerim and Tonimbuk really need to be aware. I'm sure they are - they'll see an increase in smoke in the area during the morning and especially this afternoon, and there is a possibility that fire will come towards those small communities.

HILARY HARPER: So there's no threat messages being issued yet but people are urged to be alert.

STUART ORD: Absolutely.

HILARY HARPER: So are there any community meetings scheduled for the next day or so, do you know, Stuart? .

STUART ORD: I don't, but I'll certainly find that out and I'll be talking to you later on, Hilary, and we'll get that information to you.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. We'll be having an hour of updates between 11 and 12 and regular updates throughout the afternoon. Now, Stuart, the Bunyip fire, has that grown in size since it seemed to be about 160 hectares?

STUART ORD: It has grown in size. There's a bit of what we call spotting, so some of the bark catches fire and

spots ahead of the main fire. So, yes, the answer is the fire is getting bigger. We've got aircraft on it at the moment, and trying to control it on one particular edge and we're just doing everything we can to keep this fire to - to a reasonable size, but once again, I emphasise that with the weather conditions we've got there's every chance that this fire will make some sort of a run.

HILARY HARPER: Now, Stuart, earlier on this morning we spoke and I asked if it was too late for people in those areas to consider leaving. What's the situation now?

STUART ORD: I would have hoped, Hilary, that people in those communities I mentioned and even further away - places like Rokeby, Buln Buln, Fumina, Noojee even - that the people have really thought about this and they've already made their decision, and if they're going to leave, they're already on the road and getting out of the area. I should also mention, Hilary, there are some road closures already in place, and if you like, I can quickly mention those - at the intersection of Beenak Road/Launching Place Road, the intersection of Princes Freeway and the Tynong North Road, the intersection of Princes Freeway and the Bunyip Road, and the intersection of Forest Road and Labertouche North Road.

HILARY HARPER: Okay, so plenty to keep informed about if you are in that community. Thank you very much for that, Stuart.

STUART ORD: Okay, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Talk to you soon.

STUART ORD: Okay, bye.

HILARY HARPER: Stuart Ord, spokesperson for the DSE and earlier we heard reports of people actually riding on trail bikes into some of the areas around the Bunyip State Park assuming that it was still okay to go and visit those areas. That's not the case. The DSE and CFA are advising strongly that you don't go into the area at all unless you have to, and you can call the bushfire information line for more information: 1800 240 667. They can tell you what parts of the State are safe to visit and what parts are not.

[10.54am]

It's 6 minutes to 11. We've also been informed that the Longwarry farmers gala has been cancelled tonight because of the heat and the fire risk in the area today. They're hoping to reschedule that. Also the opera in the park event that was to take place in Prahran tonight has been rescheduled to the 21st of February, in a few weeks time, and details can be accessed through the Stonnington City Council website, or you can give them a call on Monday.

We're talking to Hugh Wirth, the Victorian president of the RSPCA, and veterinarian, and we're asking for your funny animal stories, because there's only so much bad news that you can take in one batch, isn't there?

DR HUGH WIRTH: Too right, yes.

HILARY HARPER: And we're --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Absolutely, and it will be 40 by midday the way things are going.

HILARY HARPER: Exactly.

DR HUGH WIRTH: We need amusement or something to keep us encouraged.

HILARY HARPER: Well, I think Robert from Daylesford may be able to help us there. Good morning, Robert.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, yes.

CALLER ROBERT: Good morning. How are you, Hugh and Hilary?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you.

DR HUGH WIRTH: G'day, Robert.

CALLER ROBERT: Mine's a lovely story. When we were kids we were in Bendigo shopping during the hottest part of the summer and we were driving back and my - we had four - three brothers - mum and dad in the car and my youngest brother wanted to go to the toilet. So they stopped on the big hill near Bendigo, and he went behind a tree and he came back about, you know, a minute later, and he had a

6-foot brown snake stuck in a Coke can.

HILARY HARPER: A Coke can?

CALLER ROBERT: And in them days the cans weren't aluminium - you know, they were stainless steel, so he just calmly walked up to the car and, to my brothers' and my parents' dismay, "Get rid of it" and he says, "No, look in the glove box, you've got a Swiss army knife." So with my oldest brother, you know, holding the snake carefully.

HILARY HARPER: Very carefully.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Very carefully.

CALLER ROBERT: So they cut the thing out very carefully and he just had the lid left on its neck, so they had to cut into it and bend it backwards, and let the snake go.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, that's very public spirited.

DR HUGH WIRTH: So what type of snake?

CALLER ROBERT: It was a brown snake.

DR HUGH WIRTH: A brown snake, good grief.

CALLER ROBERT: Yeah, it was a beautiful snake - a big snake. Like, we've never been paranoid about them, we've always been brought up with them, you know.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, of course.

CALLER ROBERT: And that's the big thing about household rubbish, you know, put on the side of the roads and that, you know, and --

HILARY HARPER: Yeah.

CALLER ROBERT: And he was only 11 then.

HILARY HARPER: Wow. Well, he's been --

DR HUGH WIRTH: Well, he was cool, calm and collected.

CALLER ROBERT: Yeah, well, look it's a wonderful story and since then he's into the wildlife in a big way.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, good on him.

CALLER ROBERT: Fly fishing and, yep. Okay then.

HILARY HARPER: That's great. Thanks, Robert.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Thank you, Robert.

CALLER ROBERT: Okay guys.

HILARY HARPER: Cheers. Well then we will be checking in with some people who can tell us how to take care of wildlife after the news as well during that next hour, because I know a lot of people are very worried about the wildlife in their area.

DR HUGH WIRTH: They've got every reason to be. That's why we repeated, certainly every week that I've been on, to have water out in the garden for the birds, the possums and what have you.

HILARY HARPER: And if you do find an animal that's stressed by the heat, you can help cool it down and give it water.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Yes, wrap it up in a wet towel.

HILARY HARPER: That's the answer.

DR HUGH WIRTH: If it doesn't respond within 30 minutes, then go to the vet. All vets are required to deal with wildlife.

HILARY HARPER: Really? So it's a legal requirement.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It's a legal requirement of their registration.

HILARY HARPER: That's very good to know. Well, I think we'll --

DR HUGH WIRTH: And that's pro bono.

HILARY HARPER: Very good. Okay, so you're not going to be charged for taking wildlife to a vet.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's right.

HILARY HARPER: That's very good to know. We might finish up with a few text messages. Peter says: my cat used to wake me when I slept through my alarm.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Lots of people have that little experience.

HILARY HARPER: Being woken by a pet anyway is a fairly familiar experience, but in relation to an alarm, I don't know.

My dog used to escape late at night, but we always knew where to find him - down at the tennis court scrounging for lost tennis balls.

DR HUGH WIRTH: Oh, dear oh dear.

HILARY HARPER: That's from Dean.

DR HUGH WIRTH: I mean that's imprinted on their brains, that sort of thing.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, I'm going hunting for tennis balls. And James says: I live about 200m from the Barwon River and once my kelpie got out and herded a flock of geese into the backyard.

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's all you need. It's like the cow.

HILARY HARPER: As you do. So we've had the snow dropping dog - snow dropping cat, the cattle rustler dog and now the geese rustler. That's pretty impressive. Hugh, thank you very much for joining us --

DR HUGH WIRTH: That's a pleasure, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: -- this morning and lifting the tone.

DR HUGH WIRTH: It was a little bit of fun.

HILARY HARPER: Yes. Hugh Wirth, Victorian president of the RSPCA, former national president and current veterinarian. Coming up to news time. Another bit of light relief, too. You might know that the Port Fairy - sorry, the Apollo Bay music festival is on in late March.

Well, 774 ABC Melbourne and DIG digital radio are giving independent unsigned artists the chance to perform there. Yes, you can actually play at the Apollo Bay music festival. All you need to do is send us an original song and include the word "Apollo Bay" or the word "ABC" or the word "DIG". You'll get a chance to perform, a performance fee and accommodation. Details on the website under "competitions and events" and entries close 3 March.

FEMALE SPEAKER: You're listening to 774 ABC Melbourne broadcasting online at abc.net.au/melbourne and on your radio 774 ABC Melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: 11 o'clock, it's time for ABC News.

[11am]

[Music]

JOHN REID: ABC News. Good morning, I'm John Reid. Residents near a fire burning out of control in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne are being warned to watch for embers. Jean Edwards reports.

JEAN EDWARDS: Strong winds and searing heat are testing firefighters trying to control the blaze, which has broken containment lines. Authorities are worried the flames could threaten the nearby communities of Labertouche, Jindivick West and Tonimbuk. The Department of Sustainability and Environment spokesman, Stuart Ord, says people need to decide now whether to stay or go.

STUART ORD: People need to understand that this fire is a particularly serious one. The flame heights will be something that they will not be able to stand themselves and have a bit of go at.

JEAN EDWARDS: The Weather Bureau says winds could reach up to 80 km/h in the area, and could still pose a problem after the forecast cool change this evening. Jean Edwards, ABC News, Melbourne.

JOHN REID: The national electricity manager, NEMMCO, says there are fears the Bunyip fire could affect Melbourne's power supply. Spokesman Paul Bird says the flames are within kilometres of the major power lines sending electricity to the city from the Latrobe Valley.

PAUL BIRD: If the transmission lines were seriously affected, and certainly if all those transmission lines were unable to transport power through to Melbourne and the rest of Victoria, then there would be an impact on power supplies in the State.

JOHN REID: Connex spokesman, John Rees, says staff are ready to deal with the problems on Melbourne's rail network caused by the extreme heat.

JOHN REES: We've got spare trains and drivers on standby, we have buses on standby as well, and as well as customer service staff who will be ready to put out - go out with the water bottles if required and it's as much about providing the service today as it is about recovering from any problems that - that do occur today for tomorrow's service, and of course Monday's.

[11.02am]

JOHN REID: Qantas says there are no flight safety risks for passengers, despite revelations an unqualified aircraft engineer has been approving maintenance work on its planes for up to two years. It's the second time a Qantas engineer's been caught with fraudulent qualifications in the past year. The airline says the employee has been sacked and a full investigation's been launched into the matter. Peter Gibson from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority says Qantas has been ordered to audit the employee's work.

PETER GIBSON: It's certainly not acceptable for someone to be signing off on maintenance work as a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer without the appropriate qualifications, so the Civil Aviation Safety Authority has asked Qantas to review all the work this person has done to make sure there are no safety issues.

JOHN REID: Overseas, US senators have reportedly reached a tentative agreement on the emergency economic stimulus package worth around US$780 billion. A Senate aide has told the media that the compromise still needs to win approval from the Democratic majority. It was assembled by a small group of moderate Democrats and Republicans. The agreement would sharply cut into what was designed to be a US$937 billion.

Israeli aircraft have fired several missiles in the southern part of the Gaza Strip. Residents say a series of air strikes targetted open areas near the town of Rafa and smuggling tunnels along the border with Egypt. An Israeli military spokesman confirmed the strikes but gave no further details. The raids came hours after Palestinian militants fired two rockets at southern Israel.

The AFL's pre-season cup begins tonight with West Coast taking on Collingwood at Subiaco Oval. The Eagles haven't won a game in the competition since 2005, and the Magpies since 2006. And in Darwin, Adelaide Crows veteran Andrew McLeod will take on his own side in an exhibition match as captain of the indigenous All Stars. McLeod had knee surgery during the off season, but Crows coach Neil Craig says he's ready to resume.

NEIL CRAIG: His recovery on that has been probably quicker than what we thought and, look, I've had a good discussion with Andrew, we're not being stupid about it. I mean, if there was any doubt or risk at all, Andrew wouldn't play, and plus the importance of the game, and that needs to be considered and he's also the captain in his home town. So everything fits for Andrew to play.

JOHN REID: Now to the weather, and the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire State. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State: very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west, and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays: winds, northerly up to 30 to 35 knots this morning, then tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25 to 35 knot south-west change late afternoon. Squalls nearing 50 knots possible.

And for Melbourne: dry and mostly sunny with areas of raised dust, the winds tending north to north-westerly, and increasing to 55 km/h this morning. A cooler south-westerly change this afternoon, a top of 44. Windy

tomorrow with showers, 23; light showers Monday, 21; and light showers, Tuesday, 20. 37 degrees at the moment.

MALE SPEAKER: Call now on 1300 222 774, or text 1977 4774. Hilary Harper.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

HILARY HARPER: 5 past 11. Hilary Harper with you until 12 today, and as always, as your emergency services broadcaster, we'll be keeping you up-to-date with the situation in terms of the fire, the heat, any possible power issues you might be encountering throughout the afternoon, with coverage of all the areas that might be problematic. You'll have heard about the fire burning at the Bunyip State Park in Gippsland and there's also a fire up near Dargo, so we'll be keeping tabs on that. But give us a call if you're near the fire areas. What can you see or smell? Is there smoke around? What's the visibility like? Are you feeling - feeling the heat in more ways than one? 1300 222 774 is our number, and you can also text us on 1977 4774.

We'll also hopefully be bringing you some information about how to take care of wildlife. If you are concerned about the wildlife in your area or you've encountered some animals that are stressed by the heat, there are steps you can take, and we have learnt from Dr Hugh Wirth that you can actually take them to a vet and it's part of their remit that they have to look after them and there's no charge to you, so vets need to do pro bono work for wildlife, and I'm sure most vets would be more than willing to do that, resources permitting.

Coming up to 7 past 11. We'll check in with the weather situation. Terry Ryan is at the Weather Bureau. Good morning, Terry.

TERRY RYAN: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: What are the temperatures now across the State?

TERRY RYAN: Well, there's been a big jump in the metro area just lately. We've had 41.6 at Avalon. It's currently over 40. It's over 40 at Laverton. It's been 41.6 at Viewbank as well in the east. (Indistinct) between

nearly 40, Moorabbin 41.5. This is fairly hot for 11am, which is really 10am summer time. Across - across the State, temperatures are rising as well. We're getting up to close to that magical 40 degree mark in a lot of places. I'm just refreshing my browser here to have a look for you while I talk to you. It's 40 now at Mildura, Swan Hill, Hopetoun, Walpeup - those places in the north-west are already 41 and above - they're heading for 45, 46 is Mildura, Swan Hill - 46 degrees. And Melbourne we're forecasting 44. A lot of 40s around.

The wind change, there's been a few waffly looking troughs go through the southern areas this morning, but they've all been very weak and they've been overridden by the northerly winds pretty quick smart, so there's no sign of change.

HILARY HARPER: That's the technical meteorological term, is it, "waffly"?

TERRY RYAN: Yeah, that's what we call them. They sort of come scooting along through Cape Otway and some of the southern areas, but you know they're not going to do much and the winds will spin around anticlockwise through east-north-east back to north again as they go through.

HILARY HARPER: It's very (indistinct). It sounds exactly like what it is.

TERRY RYAN: But the nor-wester is overriding all these winds. For example, Mount Gellibrand, which is in - west of Lorne sort of, now the winds there are 40 knots, 70 to 80ks from the north there, and it's 36 degrees there, so the winds at height are quite strong. We have gale warnings out for those - for the land areas for a lot of the State for those winds.

The wind change, we hope to see it on the west coast around about midday-ish, getting close to Cape Otway by about 1pm. It will slope - it will slope south-east up through north-west, so it will go through the Prom, we think, around about 4pm, and sloping through Geelong around that 4pm/5pm mark, through the city around 6, eastern suburbs 7 to 8, moving eastwards through State and moving through the inland areas, too, to be out near Mallacoota by about 11pm, closer to midnight tonight through Mallacoota towards Gabo Island.

HILARY HARPER: What about the really inland areas like Mildura, Swan Hill, places like that, and up in the north-east?

TERRY RYAN: It will push through there overnight or late this evening/overnight. We're going for 33 there tomorrow, so it should have a fairly big effect inland. Upper level temperatures will drop a fair bit. Today's upper level temperatures are about as high as you can just about see for Victoria, and that's why - the computer models have forecast this for a few days now - they've been pretty rock steady in these predictions, so we finished up with temperatures at the extreme for February.

HILARY HARPER: So, Terry, are the temperatures as you expected, or will there possibly be a need to revise them as the day goes on, those tops?

TERRY RYAN: 44, we'd only put it up by 3, we don't fiddle with 2 - by 2 degrees normally, and that would be - putting Melbourne up by 3, we just wouldn't contemplate it, I guess.

HILARY HARPER: So there's no change that we could - there's no chance that we could see temperatures over 44 in Melbourne tomorrow?

TERRY RYAN: It's possible, yeah. Always when you put out 44, you might get 45. And to be more - 45.6 is the all-time record. That's Black Friday in 1939. That's 13 January 1939, 45.6. There was - over 70 people died in Victoria in bushfires that day. That was a day like - like today in that it was a big event of a front coming up, a lot of wind, and a strong change. The heat wave of two weeks ago, we had not so much wind about each day but persistent heat with no strong changes pushing through, but this day is a one-day event, in other words, tomorrow we're going for 23 in Melbourne, so it's hard to believe that it'll be that cool. But the change will push through quite strongly. When that happens, the northerly winds are stronger, the south-west winds are stronger, and there's a lot more wind around, hence the enhanced fire risk. And it's extreme - the fire risk right now is extreme through most districts where the temperature's gone up.

HILARY HARPER: We'll talk to our emergency services

commissioner in just a moment about how this day compares to other days in the past in terms of the fire response, but just before we let you go, Terry, any warnings that we should be aware of?

TERRY RYAN: Oh, we have all the warnings of the fire weather warning, the fire bans. Gale warnings for Port Phillip, Western Port, and gale warning for nearby coastal waters, too, so a fair bit of wind around and a gale force change to come through this evening. What other warnings do we have? That's just about it, I think.

HILARY HARPER: That's probably enough to be going on with for the moment, isn't it?

TERRY RYAN: Yes, it certainly is.

HILARY HARPER: All right, thanks very much for that Terry.

TERRY RYAN: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Terry Ryan, the senior forecaster on duty at the Weather Bureau. And it sounds like a busy day at the Weather Bureau - many, many things to take into account there - different meteorological predictions and - what's the word - equations to be taken into account. I imagine they're going to be extremely busy for the rest of the day. But we'd like to hear from you, too. How are you dealing with the heat? Are you just flat out lying under a wet towel or plonked in front of a fan in front of the TV? Tell us how you're coping in this extreme weather conditions and also if you're in a problem area, a fire area, let us know what it's like. Is it very, very smoky there, or can you actually see flames? Hopefully, if you can see flames, though, you are implementing your fire plan and taking care of yourself there. Dave's called from Mount Evelyn. Good morning, Dave. .

CALLER DAVE: Hi, Hilary. Yeah, you're right, they're not just going to be flat out. I think the electrical companies are going to be flat out today. We've just had a power failure, but it came back on.

HILARY HARPER: So it was an intermittent thing.

CALLER DAVE: Yeah, but it's usually the warning signs of

what's to come, okay, so it's just basically a heads up, because I would guarantee you that today's going to be a shocker for what we experienced in the heat a week ago.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely, so you're --

CALLER DAVE: Yeah, it's going to be overloaded. The grid'll be overloaded. We don't normally get this, but when you get it, you get - like it goes off quickly, then comes on, then goes off, comes on, and then goes off, and it stays off for X amount of time sort of thing. It's going to be a bad day.

HILARY HARPER: We're hoping that doesn't happen to you, Dave, but thank you for the heads up.

CALLER DAVE: I can give you a bushfire report, too.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yes.

CALLER DAVE: Well, we're Mount Evelyn, Dandenong Ranges, very windy here, very hot already, can't see any smoke though.

HILARY HARPER: That's very good.

CALLER DAVE: Yeah.

HILARY HARPER: That's almost a non bushfire report.

CALLER DAVE: And my Labrador loved - he was chuckling all the way through your report with Hugh today, so it was great to hear it.

HILARY HARPER: That's excellent. That's what we aim for --

CALLER DAVE: Beautiful.

HILARY HARPER: -- amused Labradors. Thank you, Dave. .

CALLER DAVE: Okay, have a good one.

HILARY HARPER: Cheers.

CALLER DAVE: See ya.

HILARY HARPER: We're still getting text messages about funny Labrador stories. They seem like a breed that's just ripe for funny pet stories. It's coming up to 14 minutes past 11 and a bit later in the hour we will be checking in with NEMMCO, who administer our electricity market in Victoria, to see whether there will be any strain on electricity supplies this weekend and whether we can expect the load shedding that happened last week, as you may well have experienced losing power to your house for hours, or even days for some people. That was because NEMMCO required the electricity suppliers to cut people off to share the load and ease the strain on the power supplies. We'll see if that's going to happen today. Mark's in Airey's Inlet. Good morning, Mark.

CALLER MARK: Hi, how are you?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thanks. How's things in Airey's?

CALLER MARK: We're toughing it out. My car says the temperature outside's 25.

HILARY HARPER: How are you managing? .

CALLER MARK: Well, I'm sitting having a cup of coffee before - there's a gentle breeze, there's no strong wind and I was just listening to Terry and I was just wondering which State is he in, because it's not happening at Airey's Inlet.

HILARY HARPER: That's fantastic.

CALLER MARK: In '83 there was nothing left of Airey's Inlet after the fires.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it, how different conditions can affect different parts of the State differently. I'm amazed that things are as they are in Airey's Inlet but also extremely pleased that you're not going to repeat that experience.

CALLER MARK: Yeah, that wasn't on my agenda anyway. So, yes, very pleasant. Yes, because we were reluctant to come down because they said, look, you know, stay away from the Otways because that's probably going to go up, and - well, it doesn't - God's smiling I think.

HILARY HARPER: Excellent. May he continue to. Thank you, Mark. .

CALLER MARK: 'Bye, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: 'Bye. Wow, Mark's having a hot beverage. That just seems unimaginable. A quarter past 11.

[11.15am]

Bruce Esplin is our emergency services commissioner, and he joins us now. Good morning, Bruce.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you very much for joining us on the programme.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Pleasure.

HILARY HARPER: How does today compare to other years in terms of the fire danger?

BRUCE ESPLIN: I think a lot of people would say it's the worst on record if the forecast of the bureau is accurate, and I have to say that this is one of the times where we would all be very happy if the bureau got it wrong and it was a lot cooler and the wind didn't last as long and it wasn't as strong. But having just walked back from the coordination centre, it's a very ordinary day out there already.

HILARY HARPER: Yes. Well, when we're seeing those headlines saying "Conditions worse than Ash Wednesday", it's very frightening, isn't it?

BRUCE ESPLIN: It is, but I think it's really important that people are able to be prepared, that communities are able to be prepared. It's not said as a fear-inducing thing; it's said as a reality. That's the forecast, these are the conditions and, hopefully, it helps people to know that they can do something to help themselves - either have a plan to leave early, or if they're prepared, both physically and psychologically, then to be on extremely high alert, because this is - one of the fire services said this is the sort of day that you'll remember in years to come.

HILARY HARPER: I remember one of the forecasters on the TV news last night saying, "I was shaking when I got up and saw the forecast," and that filled me with trepidation. But what's your opinion of the community response to last week's fires and the ongoing hot weather?

BRUCE ESPLIN: By and large, I think the community did a sensational job. We've called a lot for people to help each other, and I think, unfortunately, our communities always come together in adversity; they seem to be just willing to help each other and do everything when it gets bad, and they did it over that last heat wave period, whether it was listening to the need and the urge to stay hydrated, stay out of the sun, be safe around water, be safe around fire. The community was fantastic, and we really need them to be even more fantastic today, because it's the worst time, and listening to Terry Ryan earlier, there's a lot more wind, there's a lot more fire danger than there was last week, and unfortunately we saw what happened in Gippsland when fire takes a hold. And I guess last week proved to everybody that it doesn't have to be a big fire to be a bad fire, and I think a lot of people have seen the fires of 2003 and 2006 and thought of comparatively slow moving fires that burn for a lot of weeks. These fires can come and go in the space of an afternoon and do untold damage, and that's what happened in Ash Wednesday in 1983 - rapid onset, fast moving into built-up areas, and the human toll was huge, and we don't want that today.

And I think the community of Victoria is certainly better prepared than it was then, the fire services are better prepared, they work together more closely, they've got better equipment, they've got better aerial resources. But at the end of the day it's that partnership with the community that'll make the difference, and I think everybody would be calling on the community to have its plan. Hopefully a lot of the people around that Bunyip fire, for example, would have actioned their plan now. They'd either be - have well and truly left the area, or they're - if they're prepared, they stay and are ready to do what they need to do.

HILARY HARPER: So obviously that's the advice for people in the fire areas, ring the bushfire information line 1800 240 667, check the DSE and CFA web sites, have your

plan in place. What about for people who are not directly --

BRUCE ESPLIN: You left out one important part there, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yes.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Listen to ABC radio, because there'll be critical information that's passed through ABC radio as the emergency broadcaster, so don't ignore that part. We - there's not always a lot of time to get warnings out and the fire services will be contacting ABC to make sure that information gets to as many people as quickly as is possible.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely, and we will be doing updates right throughout the afternoon and evening, so there'll be definite updates coming out to you across the State. But if you're not in an area directly affected by fire, are there tips that you should follow today just with the heat?

BRUCE ESPLIN: I think they're the standard tips. If you don't need to go out, then don't go out. Stay inside; it's okay to be a couch potato today, I think. It'll be hot inside but it'll be a lot cooler than it is outside, and I think stay hydrated, drink lots of water. It wouldn't be very pleasant on the beach today with the wind the way it is and the temperature the way it is. Look after each other. I think one of the important things is to know your neighbours and if you've got an elderly neighbour who's not too well, then call in and, if you've got air-conditioning and they haven't, then invite them in to share your air-conditioning. If we look after one another today, we'll get through this okay, I hope, but it is a shocking day and it's - really it's a call to everybody to not just look after yourself and do sensible things yourself, but know the people around you and try to help them through it, too, if they're in need of a little bit of extra help - the elderly, the young, people with special needs and, you know, if you do hear warnings and you think your neighbours haven't, then let them know, too. Share the information, share some responsibility and I think we can - we can deal with what is certainly the worst day I've ever seen and it's the worst day I've ever read about or looked at or seen the numbers from the bureau of. It's a shocker and we've got to pull together.

HILARY HARPER: Well, the one thing that we are starting to see signs of but we haven't had any major problems reported yet with is the power, and that's been something that was a huge problem last week. Why are we seeing these enormous problems with whole chunks of suburbs being cut off and buildings being evacuated in the city, things like that?

BRUCE ESPLIN: I think the power grid was put under a lot of stress over that heatwave period, and there were localised failures that the power linesmen got out and fixed as quickly as they did, and they've been doing a sensational job, too, and I'd be pretty confident that they've been working ever since the heatwave started and worked when the heatwave cooled down again and they'll be out in force today to fix those short localised outages as quickly as is possible.

I think my understanding is that elements of the - of the network just weren't designed to deal with 44 degrees day after day, and I think that's - that's an issue that society's going to have to face into the future of understanding that climate change might bring this sort of weather more frequently than we want, and if it does, then we need to be able to deal with that in our infrastructure, in our emergency services, in our policies of land management, et cetera. It's - climate change will bring a lot of need to look at how we function as a - as a community, as a society, and we'll have to take some really hard decisions.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. And just before we let you go, Bruce, we've got a text message saying: I live in a fire prone area in Macedon. Do I leave now, or wait until there's a fire? I don't really understand what "leave early" means.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Well, if the person's concerned and hasn't planned and hasn't got sort of inbuilt protection for their house and done all the things to clean up their property, leaving now would be a good idea. Don't wait until there's a fire - that's waiting too late.

HILARY HARPER: Okay. And so if - if you're unsure about the level of issue - of problem, you should ring the bushfire information line?

BRUCE ESPLIN: Absolutely. And, Hilary, can I just say one thing?

HILARY HARPER: Sure.

BRUCE ESPLIN: People build their fire plans. It's an absolutely appropriate decision if your plan is to leave. You should feel no issue with that at all. Not everybody's in a position to stay and defend their properties. Not all properties are defensible. And if the plan is that you're going to leave, that's an absolutely fine decision, but just leave a note on your door, or tell somebody that you've left, so that if the fire does come through that area people know what you've done and can make sure that your needs are still protected.

HILARY HARPER: Yeah, it's a sensible decision and not a selfish decision.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Absolutely right.

HILARY HARPER: In fact, it would be sensible selfish to stay.

BRUCE ESPLIN: It's a very valid decision and nobody would quibble with it.

HILARY HARPER: Fantastic. Thank you so much for joining us, Bruce.

BRUCE ESPLIN: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Bruce Esplin, emergency services commissioner, joining us there. And we will check in with the power situation a bit later in the programme coming up until 12. We'll be talking to NEMMCO, who administers the power supply, and just seeing exactly what the situation is there. Peter has called in from Surrey Hills. Good morning, Peter.

CALLER PETER: Oh, hi, yeah. Look, I wanted to talk a little bit about what we're doing here in Surrey Hills. Sort of - there's no fire around, but it feels like a kind of emergency, because it's extremely hot and there's leaves blowing around the street, very strong north wind. So we've got solar panels on the roof of our house, and we're

just staying indoors to keep away from the heat, so the house is designed so that we don't need an air-conditioner, so we've got a fan and shading over the windows. I guess the power's an interesting one because we're producing power right now, but people that have bought air-conditioners and putting them on, you know, they might be consuming 8 kilowatts per air-conditioner, and that's what causing the problem with the grid. So the more people that are turning on air-conditioners right now, the more likely we are that we run out of the supply, so then they have to actually shut down parts of the grid.

HILARY HARPER: That's so true. And we were actually told by the electricity suppliers last week, turn your - if you have to use your air-conditioner, turn it up to 25 instead of 18 or 19, and turn off all your unnecessary appliances. I don't remember being told by an electricity company to use less power in living memory.

CALLER PETER: No, and so we're faced with this - with this conundrum where people are forced to buy the air-conditioner because the climate's getting hotter, but then they can't actually use it if the grid goes off and the Government is still in the process of saying or committing to building a new coal-fired power station and a desalination plant that's going to use a lot of power. So we're really relying on the Government to provide real incentives for people to put on solar panels and the feed-in tariff is a good example of that, really a good incentive, but the Government's bringing in a feed-in tariff that really isn't going to be effective. It's quite a technical thing, but in Germany, for example, they've brought in that sort of feed-in tariff - it's called a gross metered feed-in tariff - they put about 900 megawatts of solar panels on German roofs, where they have a lot less sun, in 2006. Australia's total installed solar panels is about 50 megawatts, so we're way, way behind where we are in Europe. And if we're investing money in solar panels, then we wouldn't need to be building coal-fired power stations.

HILARY HARPER: Well, I'm glad it's working for you, Peter. Thank you for your input. And if you are interested in solar power, I understand there's a website, the Alternative Technology Association, ata.org.au. They have a website with some information about the various rebates you can claim for solar and how you go about

choosing which systems's right for you and installing it. So that might be worth a look if you're keen to follow up Peter's suggestion. 26 past 11. Give us a call, 1300 222 774, and let us know if there are issues in your area with the power or the fires, or just the heat, or you can text us on 1977 4774. Pete says the power's out in Doncaster. We've got a text saying the power's been out in Malvern for an hour, so obviously those power issues are starting to present themselves already. Camperdown, howling 80 km/h winds, very frightening. I imagine it would be. Jason is in Dingley. Hi, Jason.

CALLER JASON: Hi, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Thanks for holding on.

CALLER JASON: That's all right. Just a warning for people travelling to and from Geelong that there is very thick dust getting blown across the highway.

HILARY HARPER: So you've got to take extreme care on the way to and from Geelong?

CALLER JASON: Yes, you do. And it might pay to turn your headlights on at the same time.

HILARY HARPER: So are you feeling that you should be slowing down, Jason?

CALLER JASON: Oh, I think you should be - I think people should be slowing down a little bit and - because there is a fair bit of traffic heading down towards Geelong. I'm on me way back now, so there's not as much coming back, but there is a lot heading down to Geelong, so people just heading down there should be aware. Like the dust is from Werribee all the way down to Lara.

HILARY HARPER: Wow, that's a huge area.

CALLER JASON: Yeah.

HILARY HARPER: Well, thanks for that, Jason, and take care on the roads.

CALLER JASON: I shall.

HILARY HARPER: Okay, cheers. Michael's on the roads as

well. Good morning, Michael, you're in Sebastian?

CALLER MICHAEL: Yeah, I'm just north of Bendigo where there is a lot of (indistinct). There's (indistinct) --

HILARY HARPER: I think we're losing your line there, Michael, but I get the general idea - shocking visibility on the roads.

CALLER MICHAEL: Oh, no, the wind out this way is pretty bad, though. It's very (indistinct) --

HILARY HARPER: The wind is very bad. I think we're going to have let you go, I'm sorry, Michael. 1300 222 774 is our number if you do want to give us a call and tell us about the situation where you are. Do you have a warning for people about the roads, or any fires that might have sprung up? You can tell us about it and we can share that with people. 1300 222 774. That website I mentioned earlier was the Alternative Technology Association, ata.org.au.

Someone suggested plugging old phones in, because the new electronic phones can fail if the power goes off. It's certainly a good idea to have a mobile or something with a battery in it if the power goes off. You should have a battery-operated radio and a battery-operated phone so that you can still hear emergency information and contact people if you need to in an emergency. Your listening to 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in fire fighting for nearly 30 years, but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the State in the next few days, with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster.

HILARY HARPER: You're listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. It's 25 past 11 on a scorcher of a day. You're looking at tops in the mid 40s up at the top of the State, Mildura and Swan Hill region, and 44 in Melbourne.

I wonder how hot it is where you are already. You can text us on 1977 4774. Apparently horse racing is going ahead in Albury today. That seems a bit rich, and we've got a text message saying: I'm heading off to play cricket, the most ludicrous thing I could think of. That does sound ludicrous and, if I were you, I wouldn't go. But do take care if you must. Coming up to half past 11.

[11.30am]

Bruce Salvin joins us now. He's the CEO of Jewish Care, and he's got some concerns about a man who's been missing since Thursday. Good morning, Bruce.

BRUCE SALVIN: Good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Tell us about this gentleman.

BRUCE SALVIN: Well, Les Feig, he's a 54-year-old man who's been one of our residents for the past couple of years.

HILARY HARPER: And the residence at the Montefiore Community Residence in Windsor?

BRUCE SALVIN: That's right, in St Kilda Road. Les suffers from an intellectual disability and epilepsy, and we fear that he may have had a seizure and he's become confused after that. So we have been working with the police all day Thursday and Friday, and we still haven't been able to locate him.

HILARY HARPER: Can you describe what he looks like, Bruce?

BRUCE SALVIN: Yes, he's - he's Caucasian in appearance, he's 170cm tall.

HILARY HARPER: What's that in the old, Bruce?

BRUCE SALVIN: About 5 foot 9. He's about 70 kilos, he's got short grey hair, distinctive sharp teeth and he walks with a limp.

HILARY HARPER: And what was he wearing at the time when he went missing on Thursday?

BRUCE SALVIN: He was wearing a grey shirt and some grey slacks.

HILARY HARPER: So no hat, nothing like that?

BRUCE SALVIN: No. So you can imagine we're really concerned that if he's without assistance at this time in these extreme weather conditions, we're very concerned for his welfare.

HILARY HARPER: So have you had any sightings of him so far?

BRUCE SALVIN: Well, it was interesting on Thursday - he can't use a mobile phone to make calls, but he can receive calls, so his sister, who's his next of kin, was contacting him regularly on the telephone on Thursday and the police were able to narrow down his location to the Dingley/Keysborough/Dandenong area, but his battery must have gone flat at about 4 o'clock that afternoon, so since then we've had no details of his whereabouts.

HILARY HARPER: So if you are, say, in the Dingley, Keysborough or Dandenong area and you think you might have seen him, who can you call?

BRUCE SALVIN: Well, we're working closely with the police, so people can contact their local police, or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

HILARY HARPER: 1800 333 000. Well, thank you very much for joining us, Bruce.

BRUCE SALVIN: Yeah, thanks for your help, too, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: We wish you all the best in locating him. Bruce Salvin, the CEO of Jewish Care. And so if you've seen Les Feig, who disappeared on Thursday from the Montefiore Community Residence in Windsor on St Kilda Road, we're very concerned about his welfare in this heat. You can call Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000, or you can call your local police station. 28 to 12 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

[11.32am]

HILARY HARPER: Stuart Ord is a spokesperson with the DSE. Stuart, what's the situation with the fire in Bunyip at the moment?

STUART ORD: Lots of work going on, Hilary. We've got about nine aircraft in the air at the moment and, because of the intensity of the fire, one of the best ways of attacking it is from the air and what they're trying to do is - especially we've got two of the big sky cranes, they can drop about 900 litres in one drop, so they're good machines to have on a fire like this. They're trying to do some work on the eastern side of the fire, which is one of the important flanks of this fire.

HILARY HARPER: Where are you getting the water from, Stuart?

STUART ORD: Wherever we can, Hilary. There are a lot of dams down in the pastured area, in the farmland south of this fire and south-east of this fire, so the aircraft do about - I would imagine it'd be about a 10-minute, 15-minute run around trip, drop their load, go down, hover over a dam, and then take that 900 litres back to the fire. As well as doing that, the resources up there from the air are trying to put down a retardant strip in front of the fire, and that would serve to either stop or slow down the run of the fire if it does start to make a run towards Tonimbuk and Labertouche and some of these small communities.

HILARY HARPER: So none of those communities are under threat just yet?

STUART ORD: Not yet, no.

HILARY HARPER: And are you expecting them to be throughout the day?

STUART ORD: There's a possibility of that, Hilary. The winds are continuing to increase. We've got gusts up to - up to 50 km/h. The temperature's obviously still climbing - they're up around 35, 36. They'll go up to mid 40s once we get those conditions and we know that there's a change - a wind change coming in through later on in the day, probably late afternoon early evening, and that will

change the dynamics of this fire from forcing it in a south-easterly direction into more of a north-east direction. So that presents its own problems, but that's later on in the day. The name of the game at the moment is to try and retard, reduce the run of this fire towards the small communities.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. And you'll be keeping us up-to-date with any meetings or other information that's available for those communities throughout the afternoon?

STUART ORD: Yes. There are no committees set up at the moment. They were all done yesterday. So - because of the emergency of this fire in terms of those towns ahead of the fire, the important thing is now for those people to be doing what they need to do - either getting out of the area or staying and getting ready for if the fire does come.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Thank you very much for that, Stuart. We'll speak again soon.

STUART ORD: Okay, Hilary.

[11.34am]

HILARY HARPER: Stuart Ord, spokesperson with the DSE, who has been very helpfully supplying us with information throughout the morning from very early this morning, and the emergency service is working together with us to bring you the information to hopefully keep you safe today. We'll be bringing you those updates throughout the afternoon and into the evening every half an hour or hour, depending on the fire situation, so you can be assured that there'll be no shortage of information there.

It's 25 to 12. We've had text messages. It's 44.5 degrees in Woomelang near Sea Lake, 42 in Bendigo and in Rushworth, so it's heating up very, very quickly. Anthony is a truck driver in northern Victoria. Good morning, Anthony.

CALLER ANTHONY: Good morning, Anthony.

CALLER ANTHONY: Hello.

HILARY HARPER: Hi, what's it like in northern Victoria? .

CALLER ANTHONY: Well, I'm a truck driver and I've left Wagga this morning and basically the temperature across the Hay Plains was like 32. I left Balranald since then, which was at about 8.30, quarter to 9 this morning, and I've just gone through Underbool, and the temp gauge on the Volvo is telling me 49 degrees.

HILARY HARPER: 49.

CALLER ANTHONY: The outside temperature, yes.

HILARY HARPER: So is it usually the other way around, hotter up near Balranald and cooler down south?

CALLER ANTHONY: It's always quite hot across the plains (indistinct) --

HILARY HARPER: We're having a bit of trouble catching you there, Anthony, but we understand it's extremely hot. I'm hoping the cabin's air-conditioned. Well, we do hope so. That line's gone. But thank you, Anthony for that. 1300 222 774 is our number. A bit of - more calls on solar issues. Neil's in Benella. Hi, Neil.

CALLER NEIL: Hi, Hilary, how are you?

HILARY HARPER: Well, thank you.

CALLER NEIL: That's good. Yes, here in Benella we're having dramas up here. We've actually got solar on our roof and we could pump - we could be pumping in over 16 kilowatts an hour into the system, but we're not allowed to, because they won't change our meters over. There's a 40-day turnaround to change our meter over.

HILARY HARPER: That's frustrating.

CALLER NEIL: In other words, we've - the electrician's done all his work, we can actually turn the unit on, but what it does is it actually pumps the power in and we get charged for the power that's going in, because we haven't got the right sort of meter, and to have the meter turned over so as we can actually use it and also get reimbursed for it, there's a 40-day turnaround.

HILARY HARPER: That is very frustrating. Thanks for that, Neil. I must admit that sometimes I find the

complexities of solar power going into and out of the grid a little bit beyond me, but I'm sure with a bit of research I could get my head around it for sure, and it does sound like, if we're going to be seeing hotter sunnier days into the future, that it might be an option worth researching. Thank you for that, Neil. 1300 222 774 is our number, if you've got any warnings you'd like to share with people or just updates on the situation around the State with dust or heat or fires. Our text message number too is 1977 4774. The traffic lights are out at the intersection of Wattle Tree and Taronga Roads. They're not flashing, they are just out, and our correspondent says: please remember to give way to the right, which is very good advice. It's still 25 degrees in Torquay, you lucky things.

And Robyn says: my hubby's aged 61 and he's cricket umpiring today. There should be a law to protect men from themselves. Yeah, sadly, Robyn, I don't think it's gender specific, but it does sound like a crazy thing to do today, I must admit. 21 minutes to 12.

We've had many calls throughout the morning wondering how best to care for wildlife in these extreme conditions, because it is very, very sad to see wildlife suffering and wondering if there's anything at all you can do. Well, Tania Duratovic is emergency relief responder with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and she joins us. Good morning, Tania.

TANIA DURATOVIC: Good morning.

HILARY HARPER: So, I mean, Australian wildlife is largely used to quite hot conditions, but these are extreme conditions. What kind of effects do you see on wildlife on days like today?

TANIA DURATOVIC: Yeah, that's right, they are used to hot conditions but not this hot, so we're likely to see things like, particularly small birds being heat affected from heat stroke and things like that. They will often die or just fall out of the sky or search for water in most unusual places. You may actually come across small animals - lizards, snakes, possums, whatever - crawling under your verandah trying to find some cool area, or trying to get some water out of your pond in places you'd not normally see those animals.

HILARY HARPER: So what can you do if you see an animal that seems to be affected by the extreme heat?

TANIA DURATOVIC: Well, firstly, I'd actually recommend that people that do have backyards and properties to actually leave some water out for the animals, so those that are looking for water have got a water source, and obviously leave that in a cool area. If you do happen to come across an animal that looks particularly affected, like they might be excessively panting or very lethargic and unresponsive if you come near it, grab a cloth or a towel and cover it, make sure that you're safe, and bring it inside, put it into a secure cage, if you've got one, or a box, but again, we need to make sure that there's air ventilated through there, in a cool area, and then ring your local veterinarian, or one of the wildlife groups such as Help for Wildlife or something.

HILARY HARPER: So you can monitor the animal's situation and see if it's doing any good, but you may need to take it to a vet if that condition worsens?

TANIA DURATOVIC: Yes. I'd say that if the animal is really unresponsive, it really needs to go to a vet as soon as possible, or one of the rescue groups, because heat stroke can actually occur quite quickly and can result in death. If the animal just looks like it's a bit lost and it's still sort of quite aggressive towards you, then all it may need is the temperature - body temperature is brought down. But, again, it's best to do that with fans and not directly on the animal, but nearby so it just keeps the air circulating, and offer that animal fluid.

HILARY HARPER: Sorry, a lot of people sometimes get concerned with wildlife that they might do more damage taking it out of its natural habitat than leaving it there. What's your advice about that?

TANIA DURATOVIC: Well, this is generally true, but the animal's already come out of its natural habitat by coming closer to you or coming closer to your house. It's obviously somewhere from the local area, so if you can just give it somewhere cool and quiet to recover, then you can return it back when the temperatures drop. If you're not sure, I would strongly recommend to call one of the rescue groups, the wildlife rescue groups in Victoria, and there's a couple of State-wide ones, or call your veterinarian for

advice.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, thank you very much for that, Tania.

TANIA DURATOVIC: You're welcome. And the same applies for pets, I've got to stress as well.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, yes.

TANIA DURATOVIC: We forget about those sometimes.

HILARY HARPER: Oh, no, I think there's a lot of people --

TANIA DURATOVIC: No long dog walks today.

HILARY HARPER: No, there's a lot of people at home with wet towels just standing ready to wrap Fluffy in it.

TANIA DURATOVIC: Well, actually, on that note, with wildlife, don't wrap them in wet towels. That's something you don't want to do.

HILARY HARPER: Okay, so you can put them in a towel but not a wet towel?

TANIA DURATOVIC: Well, just when you're bringing them inside, you grab them in the towel just to protect yourself, and the animal from escaping, but then you place it into some sort of box or something that's a bit more airy and open, but not in a wet towel, because as soon as their body heats up, it'll heat the wet towel and that might actually cause more damage.

HILARY HARPER: Good to know. Well, thank you very much for that, Tania.

TANIA DURATOVIC: You're welcome, and I hope it cools down quickly.

HILARY HARPER: Yes, me too. Tania Duratovic, emergency relief responder with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and we'll try and get the number for Help for Wildlife so that we can give that to you - the Victorian wildlife rescue service, Help for Wildlife, we'll see if we can find that number.

It's 17 minutes to 12. Anthony, the truck driver, has a better signal now and he joins us from north-east Victoria. Good morning, Anthony.

CALLER ANTHONY: Yes, it's me again.

HILARY HARPER: Excellent.

CALLER ANTHONY: It's currently 49.

HILARY HARPER: 49 degrees, that seems unbelievable. Whereabouts are you?

CALLER ANTHONY: About (indistinct) out of Murrayville(?).

HILARY HARPER: Right.

CALLER ANTHONY: And there's quite a bit of debris blown across the road and dust between Walpeup and Underbool.

HILARY HARPER: Okay, so it's going to pay to be very vigilant on the roads. That is a bit of a dodgy signal. But thank you for that, Anthony. So dust and debris on the roads near Walpeup, it sounds like, and 49 degrees, according to the truck. John is in Sale. Good morning, John.

CALLER JOHN: Hello, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: What's your advice for us today?

CALLER JOHN: Well, you had a caller mention about the power going off and then coming on again a couple of times. That's normally a circuit breaker tripping. So there's an overload in the system. Now, what happens, when you have an electric motor, say in an air-conditioner, and it stops, then it draws probably twice as much power when it starts up again. So once the circuit breaker drops out the first time, it almost guarantees that it's going to go off. Now, what you should do if your power goes off is turn your air-conditioner off and wait until the power comes on and wait for a few minutes and then turn it on and you'll give the system a big helping hand, because if they're all starting at once, then it's likely to trip things again.

HILARY HARPER: That's great advice, John. In fact, that was the advice that the power companies were giving last

week, just to make sure that there's no fire danger when the power starts up again.

CALLER JOHN: Yeah, and also, when the electric motor is starting, if the power voltage drops, it also increases the damage to the motor in your air-conditioner, so, you know, it's just commonsense.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, thank you very much for that reminder, John. Good advice, because it is, you know, hard to remember the good tips on a day like today. Your brain goes a bit soggy in the heat, I find. It's a quarter to 12 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

[11.45am]

MALE SPEAKER: Are you an original unsigned artist and sick of hearing this.

[Coughing and clapping]

MALE SPEAKER: Well, here's your chance to step things up. 774 ABC Melbourne and DIG Digital Radio are giving independent unsigned artists the chance to perform at this year's Apollo Bay music festival.

MALE SPEAKER: Send us an original song that includes the word "Apollo Bay", "ABC", or "DIG".

MALE SPEAKER: Go to abc.net.au/melbourne and you could find yourself sharing the bill with some of the best international artists. Proudly supported by 774 ABC Melbourne and DIG Digital Radio.

HILARY HARPER: Quarter to 12, Hilary Harper with you until 12, and we will continue our updates regularly on the half hour and the hour throughout the afternoon. Peter's called from Doncaster. Good morning, Peter.

CALLER PETER: Good morning, Hilary, how are you?

HILARY HARPER: I'm well, thank you. Sorry, East Doncaster.

CALLER PETER: East Doncaster. You're not going to believe this one. I just went up the street a few minutes ago to use our ATM in Doncaster Road. The police were

there and had that roped off plus the building next door, which is a Salvation Army shop and drop-off point, and some idiot, in their stupidity, decided to try and set fire to the shop.

HILARY HARPER: So someone's attempted to set fire to a Salvation Army shop?

CALLER PETER: Yeah, next door to - next door to the ATM in East Doncaster. When I got up there, the traffic lights were on flashing, so I imagine that that's why the - why the power's been going on and off for a little while in the area.

HILARY HARPER: I imagine it would. That's appalling. Well, thank you for letting us know, Peter.

CALLER PETER: It's amazing, isn't it? Okay.

HILARY HARPER: It beggars belief.

CALLER PETER: No worries.

HILARY HARPER: That is incredible. 1300 222 774 if there's something outrageous that you need to share with us and warn people about. Jodie says she's going from Beaufort, half an hour from Ballarat, heading to Robin Vale, extreme heat, severe dust, can't see 2 feet in front of you, so can only travel about 40ks in some parts. That is really disturbing. The text message number's 1977 4774. And Diedre has very helpfully sent us in Wildlife Victoria's number which is 1300 945 35 - you know, I think there might be a number missing there. I think it's 1300 something else. We will get that number for you for Wildlife Victoria and let you know what that is, and you can also find all the details of all the numbers we've mentioned today on our website abc.net.au/melbourne. Go to the radio page and find the Saturday Morning programme and we'll list all that information there.

First, though, we are often tempted to go to the beach on a day like today, but is that actually such a good idea? And, if you do go, what should you be keeping in mind? Guy Britt is the spokesperson for Surf Life Saving Victoria and he joins us now. Good morning, Guy.

GUY BRITT: Morning, Hilary, how are you?

HILARY HARPER: I'm well, thank you. Now, a little earlier we spoke about some of the things you should keep in mind when you go to the beach - swimming between the flags and things like that. Perhaps we should reiterate that, because I imagine there's a lot of people thinking at 12 to 12 that maybe it would be a good idea to go to the beach.

GUY BRITT: Look, they certainly would've, in these conditions, I think as we discussed earlier today, been pretty prepared for going to the beach or the local pool or something like that is really the way to go. I think if you have a listen to the news and what everyone is saying over the airwaves today is that they're urging everyone to stay local, so they don't want people heading down to the surf coast or heading down to the Mornington Peninsula, because there could be some fire danger down there. So people need to sort of keep things like that in mind and think, okay, where is my local beach, is it patrolled, are there life savers there, where is the safest place I can go, is there a pool, are there pool life guards on, all those sorts of things, just to have all those extra layers of protection for you and your family.

HILARY HARPER: So it can be tempting to go to beaches or parts of beaches that aren't between the flags, because those parts will be very crowded. What's your advice on that?

GUY BRITT: That is a problem. People often think, oh, I know a secret little spot, or if I maybe go round the corner there won't be so many people, but, look, the safest place you can possibly be is between the flags on a patrolled beach, the problem being where if you are at an unpatrolled beach and you get into trouble, there may not be anyone there with the necessary skills to rescue you, and the flags are there for a reason, because that's the safest part of the beach to swim. Beaches have all sorts of dangers, whether it's underwater troughs, rips, sea creatures - you just never know what's in there. So - and the bay as well - the bay can be - even though it looks benign, can be just as dangerous as a surf beach can, as can any waterway in Victoria. So people really do need to just play it safe and always head to the safest possible place.

HILARY HARPER: And the other tempting thing can be to kick back perhaps on a deck chair on the beach with a couple of cold cans, but do you have any advice for people suggesting they might be drinking alcohol on the beach?

GUY BRITT: Look, drinking alcohol out in the sun would certainly not be recommended in today's conditions. Just the chances of getting dehydrated, horribly sunburnt, all these sorts of things are extremely high. Also, once you are intoxicated, you start doing things and taking a lot more risks and you probably need to be - you may doze off, may not be watching the kids as closely as possible. If you're there with your friends, your friends might start jumping around, jumping off piers, doing stuff like that, and the risk of drowning or serious injury just increases, so I certainly urge people to take it very easy if they are planning to have some drinks today.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. Well, thank you very much for giving us those tips, Guy.

GUY BRITT: No probs, Hilary. Have a good day.

HILARY HARPER: You, too. Guy Britt, spokesperson for Surf Life Saving Victoria. Be nice to your life guards, they are an extremely useful resource. 10 minutes to 12. Kathy's called from Mansfield. Hi, Kathy.

CALLER KATHY: G'day, Hilary. Great show, thank you very much.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you. Thanks for listening.

CALLER KATHY: A pleasure. Just with that wildlife person that was on before, I think it's very important to stress to people not to bother touching snakes.

HILARY HARPER: Very good advice.

CALLER KATHY: To call in someone. I mean, yeah, get your snake catcher or who ever - your wildlife rescue people to come and deal with snakes, but don't touch them and don't go near them, but I think it's very important that people - it's emphasised to people.

HILARY HARPER: That's a very good point, Kathy, because you can get so caught up in the idea of helping wildlife

that you might be putting your own safety at risk. That's very good advice, and we do have the number for you for Wildlife Victoria. It's 1300 094 535 - 1300 094 535. Helpful tip, too. Apparently if you ring the RACV, they will give you the phone number for your nearest wildlife rescue worker, which might be handier even, because you might have that number already in your car. There's another number, too, for Help for Wildlife, so the first one was Wildlife Victoria. There's a mobile number for Help for Wildlife - 0417 380 687. And, again, we'll pop all that information up on our website after the programme at abc.net.au/melbourne so you can write it down and keep it in the glove box for when you might need it.

Paul Bird is the spokesperson for NEMMCO and we've had quite a few enquiries about the power situation already in Victoria. Good morning, Paul.

PAUL BIRD: Yes, good morning, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: So we've had text messages suggesting there have been power outages in Malvern, Doncaster, Silvan and Newcomb in Geelong. Do you know anything about the current power outage situation?

PAUL BIRD: Well, I'm still getting an update on those localised outages at this stage. I will say that on a high temperature day as we're experiencing at present, that there will be some localised outrages at a household level, and that listeners do need to contact their electricity distributor in regard to those outages. Now, the number to call is the faults and emergency number on their electricity bill, so if you turn to your electricity bill or contact them via the telephone services and get on to your distributor, you'll get more details on those local outages.

[11.53am]

HILARY HARPER: Now, the fire at Bunyip is quite close - I think 2 kilometres away from the transmission lines that carry power up from Gippsland to Melbourne. Should we be worried?

PAUL BIRD: Well, we're certainly monitoring that fire very closely. Our latest advice is that the fire did break through containment lines earlier today. Now, it is within

a couple of kilometres of the major transmission lines that come into Melbourne. There's actually two different sets of lines coming into Melbourne, and it's the northern power lines that travel between the Latrobe Valley and South Morang in the northern suburbs and they're the lines that we're watching closely in the Bunyip State forests. We are very interested in whether those fires do cross the transmission lines, because if that were to happen later today, then it may well greatly reduce power supplies.

[11.54am]

HILARY HARPER: That would be an issue I imagine for a lot of people. We saw during last week's extreme temperatures day after day that we had power outages because of load shedding. Could you just explain what load shedding involves?

PAUL BIRD: Yes. Basically, when there is a large amount of power being used across Victoria at any time of the day, there is a need to generate a large amount of power to meet that demand level for electricity. There's also a need to transport it from the generators to the consumers via transmission lines. And we had a couple of issues a week or so ago. The first issue was with the generation suppliers when a power line between Victoria and Tasmania was affected. That was on the Friday afternoon. And then on the Friday evening the major issue that arose was a transmission line in the northern suburbs of Melbourne that - that had a fault which affected the power supplies through parts of the CBD and then down through the western suburbs.

So, clearly, if there is a high demand for electricity, then there is a need to get that through to the consumer, and if we're not able to do that, then we do need to reduce the amount of power that's being used, to make sure that there's a balance between the amount of power being used by consumers and the amount that can be supplied.

HILARY HARPER: Given that it's a weekend and so we don't have a lot of businesses chewing up power, is it less likely that we'll need to do load shedding this afternoon or this evening?

PAUL BIRD: Well, certainly there's a lower demand today -

it's around 15 per cent below what it was a week and a half ago on a week day, but we're still watching it very closely. The main concern, as I say, is these transmission lines. They do carry around 1,500 to 2,000 megawatts into Melbourne, and that also flows through to the rest of Victoria. If we were to lose that amount of power, then it would be very close in terms of either meeting the demand or not meeting that demand and, clearly, if there was less supply being brought in from the Latrobe Valley than is needed, then we might need to take steps late in the day in terms of balancing that load and there may even be a slight shortfall that can affect customers.

HILARY HARPER: Well, we'll keep tabs on that situation throughout the afternoon. Thank you very much for joining us, Paul.

PAUL BIRD: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: Paul Bird, the spokesperson for NEMMCO, the national electricity market administrator who deals with load shedding in Victoria. We will keep tabs on that for you and let you know if there are any official power outages, because you've been telling us already about some of the ones that have been happening near you. We hear the power's out in Bannockburn as well. Interesting. In Silvan: we lost power hundreds of dollars worth of food in the last week's heat. That's very, very difficult. Why should we lose it again is the question. We had our turn, it should be a priority.

That's interesting. I guess a lot of people are feeling like perhaps they've had their turn, maybe it's someone else's turn now, but I don't think it's going to help if anyone loses power. We'll just - we'll keep tabs on the situation for you and let you know where the knife will fall. Stewart Kreltszheim is the CFA operations manager for the north-east. He joins us next. Good morning, Stewart.

[11.56am]

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Good morning.

HILARY HARPER: Now, you're dealing with the north-east region. What's the issue up there?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Well, (indistinct) they've had eight or nine years of drought leading up to this two weeks of extremely hot weather, and the fire danger, have you no doubt (indistinct).

HILARY HARPER: We're losing you there a little bit, Stewart, so obviously the fire danger's quite high with the conditions today. Are there any particular trouble spots?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Our main concern is to look after the fires which have cropped up over the last two weeks, so we've got spotter planes and ground observers just making sure that we have no flare-ups for them, and all our instant control centres across the north-east are primed and ready to go and we'll just throw a lot of resources to any fire that starts up in the next couple of days.

HILARY HARPER: Now, Stewart, we hear that there are fires in New South Wales in various areas as well, and that that might reduce the number of resources we can use from interstate to help with our fires. Will that have an impact, do you think?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Certainly, but our planning's all on worst case scenario, and all along we consider how (indistinct) being left alone and how we would cope with that, and so our planning is on the worst case scenario. So anything we get from New South Wales and other interstate places is a bonus for us.

HILARY HARPER: Definitely. And what's the temperature like up there at the moment, Stewart?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Pushing 40, and just another day in the north-east.

HILARY HARPER: Well, we do wish that you stay safe there, Stewart, and hope that no major problems emerge.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Thank you very much.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you. Stewart Kreltszheim, CFA operations manager for the north-east.

[11.58am]

Coming up next is the news and then Grandstand as usual,

but we will have half hourly updates for a while, and we'll take rolling coverage if things deteriorate through the afternoon. So rest assured, if the fire situation in the Bunyip State Park deteriorates, or that fire in Dargo becomes a real problem, we will return to you with rolling coverage and we'll let you know also about the situation with power updates. We hear that the power's back on in Silvan, so that's a happy little story to end the hour with. And do take care, all of you. Check on your elderly relatives and neighbours, drink lots of water, and stay out of the sun, and hopefully have a good day. Coming up to news time.

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: Hi, Tony Delroy, the 774 ABC Melbourne website abc.net.au/melbourne, your place to find out about presenters, news, programmes and what's going on in the city today. abc.net.au/melbourne.

HILARY HARPER: News time. It's 12 noon.

[12 noon]

JOHN REID: Fire crews moving in to protect properties threatened by the Bunyip fire. Approval close for a revised US stimulus package. Another Qantas maintenance engineer found to have bogus qualifications, and Michael Clarke expected to pay in tomorrow's one-day international. Good afternoon, John Reid with ABC News.

[12 noon]

Strike teams are moving in to protect homes that could be threatened by a fire burning in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne. Jean Edwards reports.

JEAN EDWARDS: Firefighters are battling wind gusts of up to 50 km/h in searing heat as they try to control the blaze. The Department of Sustainability and Environment's Stuart Ord says crews are working to protect homes and townships ahead of the fire, including Tonimbuk, Labertouche and Jindivick.

STUART ORD: We're moving strike teams into that area to protect people and houses.

JEAN EDWARDS: There are also fears the Bunyip fire could affect Melbourne's power supply. Paul Bird from the national electricity manager, NEMMCO, says the flames are within kilometres of major lines.

PAUL BIRD: Should the fires go very close to those lines or even underneath those lines, then clearly they could potentially reduce the amount of power that Melbourne can gain.

JEAN EDWARDS: Fire crews are worried the fire will spread as the wind picks up this afternoon. Jean Edwards, ABC News, Melbourne.

JOHN REID: The Weather Bureau says temperatures have already climbed into the 40s in many parts of the State. Senior forecaster Terry Ryan says the winds are strong where the fire is burning in the Bunyip State Park.

TERRY RYAN: We've got 50 km/h winds, with gusts to well over 60 near the fire site. The winds are strong. They're also experiencing gusty - gusty northerly winds and the fire danger is extreme out there now.

JOHN REID: Connex spokesman, John Rees, says spare trains and buses are on standby if the hot weather affects Melbourne's rail network.

JOHN REES: There's a lot of drain on power, so we can lose power in places. That certainly happened the last time we had these - a day over 40 degrees. It can also affect the train's air-conditioning units, which are working pretty hard, as you might imagine, so we keep an eye on things, we put contingencies in place, and hopefully we're ready to get back on our feet tomorrow if things do go wrong today.

[12.02pm]

JOHN REID: People are being urged to keep a close eye on the elderly during the forecast extreme heat today. Paramedics are asking people to stay indoors, if they can. Ambulance Victoria's Paul Holman says people should look after one another and take steps to avoid heat-related illnesses.

PAUL HOLMAN: If you have neighbours, check on those

neighbours, make sure that they're okay. This is an extreme weather event that we've never experienced before right across the State, and combined with high winds. You need to keep cool, you need to keep hydrated, and you need to where loose clothing.

JOHN REID: Elsewhere the Country Fire Service in South Australia's today bracing for what it says are the worst fire conditions since the deadly 2005 Eyre Peninsula bushfires. Wind gusts of up to 90 km/h are predicted, along with 40 degree-plus temperatures. More than 10,000 firefighters and 11 water bombers are on standby around the State.

And in New South Wales fire authorities say the bushfire threat to homes in Wybong near Muswellbrook in the State's Upper Hunter has passed. More than 40 fires are still burning around New South Wales, with firefighters concerned about blazes in the Bega Valley, the Shoalhaven, and Tumut.

The flood water level is rising again in Ingham in North Queensland, and there are predictions it could go higher than the peak of earlier this week. Kerin Binney reports.

KERIN BINNEY: Ingham received around 130mm of rain overnight. The Herbert River had been falling, but now it's on the rise again. Forecasters say it could reach a peak higher than Tuesday's 12.2m if the predicted rain continues. Most of the town's residents have been trapped in their high-set homes for six days. Others have been waiting it out at the local evacuation centre. Emergency crews are continuing to travel the streets in boats, taking essential supplies to the residents. Roads in the area that had reopened are cut again, and supplies are being flown in to surrounding communities that are also isolated. Further north there was flash flooding in Innisfail last night after 350mm of rain fell, but the water has since receded.

JOHN REID: It's been revealed an unqualified aircraft engineer has been undertaking specialist maintenance work on Qantas planes for up to two years. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority has ordered Qantas to investigate the employee's work and audit all qualifications of its licensed engineers. It's the second licensed aircraft maintenance engineer caught with fraudulent qualifications in the past year and the latest in a series of embarrassing

incidents for the airline. Steve Purvinas from the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineer's Association says CASA should have prevented this latest incident.

STEVE PURVINAS: What concerns us the most is the fact that CASA are supposed to be the people who have oversight of this whole record-keeping process, and they haven't taken the appropriate steps after the first incident to make sure it didn't happen again. We believe that CASA is inactive. I mean, you have an organisation that's supposed to be there to regulate.

JOHN REID: A spokeswoman for Qantas says the engineer has been sacked and no flight safety issues have been identified.

ABC News, it's 5 minutes past 12. Overseas now where the US Senate has reached a tentative deal on president Barack Obama's massive economic stimulus plan. Washington correspondent Mark Simkin reports.

MARK SIMKIN: A small group of moderate Democrats and Republicans spent the day trying to thrash out a compromise. A short time ago the Senate's top Democrat, Harry Reid, confirmed a deal has been reached, although he didn't outline its details. A vote is expected later today, and reports suggest ailing Ted Kennedy will be called to the Capitol for the first time since he collapsed during Barack Obama's inauguration. Even if the Bill passes the Senate, there'll be more negotiating ahead. The House of Representatives needs to agree to the Senate's revisions before the President can sign the Bill and the money can start flowing. Mark Simkin, ABC News, Washington.

JOHN REID: An across-channel row has erupted between France and Britain, after the French President accused the British Prime Minister of ruining the British economy. Europe correspondent Emma Alberici.

EMMA ALBERICI: French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, said that Britain's decision to cut VAT by 2 percentage points had brought "absolutely no progress". Since the English decided to cut consumption tax, not only has consumption in England not gone up, he said, it continues to go down. The French stimulus package opts for an investment in assets and infrastructure. Mr Sarkozy said that putting a country

into debt to pay for operating costs means you have nothing to show for your debt and you ruin the country. Downing Street is said to be angry about the comments. Emma Alberici, ABC News, London.

JOHN REID: The Italian president, Georgio Napolitano, has refused to sign into law an emergency decree to stop the mercy killing of a woman who's been in a coma for 17 years. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi issued the decree to block a court ruling allowing doctors to remove the woman from life support. President Napolitano says the decree is unconstitutional, but Mr Berlusconi says he'll summon Parliament to force the measure through.

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONE (interpreted): Should the head of State taking on the responsibility for this life decide and persevere in his decision not to sign this decree, we will immediately invite the Parliament to meet in emergency session to approve, within two or three days, a law that contains this decree.

JOHN REID: Prosecutors in Turkey are investigating whether the leaders of Israel can be prosecuted for alleged crimes against humanity over the recent military offensive in the Gaza Strip. The chief prosecutor's office in Ankara says it's acting on a complaint filed by a Turkish human rights organisation.

Now, with sport here's James Coventry.

JAMES COVENTRY: Stand-in Australian captain Michael Clarke expects to be available for tomorrow's third one-day cricket match against New Zealand at the SCG. Clarke was struck in the toe by an Ian O'Brien delivery shortly before being dismissed in yesterday's six-wicket loss in Melbourne. South Africa captain, Graham Smith, has been cleared to play in the Test series against Australia starting later this month after recovering from hand and elbow injuries. The West Indies are 7 for 352 in reply to England's first innings of 318 at stumps on Day 3 of the first Test in Jamaica. Adelaide United hosts Melbourne Victory in tonight's first leg of the major semi-final in soccer's A league.

Adelaide is expecting a top of 41 degrees today, but Reds' defender, Scott Jamieson, says the hot weather won't worry his side.

SCOTT JAMIESON: We're used to it. You know, the lads have been training this week and last week in pretty hot conditions.

JAMES COVENTRY: Last night Queensland beat Central Coast 2-0 in the first leg of the minor semi. The Australian women's team plays Italy in Canberra this afternoon, and Socceroo striker Mark Viduka could return from injury in Newcastle's English Premier League game against WestBrom tonight. Retiring Adelaide 36-ers veteran, Brett Maher, plays what could be his final home National Basketball League match when his side meets New Zealand tonight. Perth plays Sydney and Cairns meets Gold Coast. And the AFL's pre-season cup begins tonight, with West Coast playing Collingwood at Subiaco Oval. The Adelaide Crows play an exhibition match against the Indigenous All Stars in Darwin.

[12.09pm]

JOHN REID: Now, the main points again: fire crews have begun moving in to protect properties threatened by the Bunyip fire in townships including Tonimbuk, Labertouche and Jindivick. There's also a concern over the fire's close proximity to power lines serving Melbourne.

[12.09pm]

And the US Senate has reached a tentative deal on President Barack Obama's massive economic stimulus plan.

The weather: and the CFA has declared today a total of fire ban for the entire State. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State: very hot with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west later. On the bays, light winds tending northerly and increasing 25 to 30 knots this morning, before turning north-westerly early this afternoon. And for Melbourne: dry and mostly sunny before a cooler squally south-west to southerly change expected late this afternoon. An expected top of 44. Tomorrow, windy with a shower or two, 23; light showers on Monday, 21; a light shower on Tuesday, 20. In

the city at the moment, 40 degrees, ABC News.

MALE SPEAKER: ABC'S Four Corners goes wherever necessary to bring you in-depth accounts of issues that affect local, national and international current affairs. Now you can delve even deeper into the background behind the programmes, with Four Corners' broadband special editions. Log on to watch extended editions of selected Four Corners' programmes online featuring additional interviews, interactive elements, and documentary evidence, all brought together for a comprehensive current affairs experience. Four Corners broadband special editions, abc.net.au/fourcorners.

MALE SPEAKER: Your season's path to the best in sport.

MALE SPEAKER: Wow, that is astonishing stuff.

MALE SPEAKER: Grandstand, on ABC local radio.

KAREN TIGHE: And welcome to the programme this Saturday, Karen Tighe with you in the host studio and our thoughts are with you around much of the country suffering extreme weather conditions today. ABC local radio will keep you up-to-date with the latest information, if you are in a region being affected through Grandstand today going in and out of our coverage. So stay with us. A forecast of 44 today for Melbourne. The racing at Caulfield has been cancelled today. The meet, including the group 1, CF4 stakes, has been rescheduled for tomorrow, when a cool change has been forecast. Indeed, let us know how hot it is for you today. Are you or your club still playing sport? How are you keeping cool? 1992 1222 - 1992 1222, our SMS number.

Temperatures not as oppressive thankfully last night at the MCG, but it didn't help the home side - five losses in a row now at home for the Australian team in one-day competition and the New Zealanders just one win away from taking back the Chappell-Hadley trophy. That opportunity comes tomorrow at the SCG. We'll wrap that all up. We'll talk about a huge week in sport, including the record IPL signings yesterday, over AUD2.3 million each for England's Kevin Peterson, and Andy Flintoff. So much happening in cricket. On to all of that very shortly. Tassie playing Queensland today at Bellerive, updates from there. It's the third round of the Australian Ladies' Masters Golf at

Royal Pines on the Gold Coast. Australia take on New Zealand today in the final of the Fed Cup Asia Oceania zone play-off in Perth. The A League semi-finals have kicked off, and that's just the start.

[Music]

[CRICKET SEGMENT FROM 12.13PM TO 12.31pm]

HILARY HARPER: I'm Hilary Harper, 28 minutes to 1.

[12.31pm]

David Nugent joins us. He's the incident controller at the Bunyip Ridge fire in Gippsland. Good afternoon, David.

DAVID NUGENT: Yes, hello Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: What's the latest information on that fire? How large is it, for starters?

DAVID NUGENT: Well, Hilary, just in the last little while, literally in the last half hour or so we've had quite a bit of increased fire activity. Up until that point the fire was about 160 hectares, and we've been very fortunate that this morning the fire behavior had been very kind to us and there hadn't been much movement of the fire, but as this - this wind that's been forecast has started to pick up as the morning's gone on and, as I say, just in the last little while, the fire behavior has really - really started to increase.

HILARY HARPER: So some size larger than 160 hectares but we're not sure yet?

DAVID NUGENT: Exactly, Hilary. I - we don't - as I said, the fire is actually moving at the moment, so it's - it's a bit bigger than 165 hectares, that's right.

HILARY HARPER: So it was burning in a south-easterly direction this morning. Is that still the case?

DAVID NUGENT: Yeah, that is the case, and it's this - it's the strong northerly/north-westerly winds that we're experiencing, and I'm sure in lots of other places, it's happening down here, so that's making - forcing the fire in that - that southerly/south-easterly direction.

HILARY HARPER: Now you expect that to change with the change later this afternoon. What issues will that cause?

DAVID NUGENT: Yeah, the forecast change is not till later this evening, so we've got a pretty tough afternoon in place while the wind is strong from the north/north-west, and it'll come around from the south-west later this evening. When it does that, it depends on - on what the fire does this afternoon, but in effect what you have is a - the effect of a big long fire that's pushed by the northerly wind and the eastern or the north-eastern side of that fire under a south-westerly change becomes the fire front. And so you have this big long fire front - fire flank that becomes the fire front, and that creates some real difficulties, obviously, for us in control.

HILARY HARPER: Now, what's your latest advice for residents, David?

DAVID NUGENT: As this - as I mentioned, the fire activity's just really started now, and we've been able to have aircraft working on it most of the morning, but we're getting to the point where it's too - it's actually unsafe for our fixed wings and our helicopters are still trying to work on it, but areas particularly around Labertouche, Jindivick, they will - they will see more smoke happening now, and around Tonimbuk. So all of those people need to be very aware of the increased activity. We want people to continue to listen to the ABC. We'll give you out the urgent warnings as more information comes to us, as the fire starts to move further towards those - those areas.

HILARY HARPER: Now, you're also warning that a power blackout early this afternoon is a possibility. Why is that?

DAVID NUGENT: Yeah, there's a major transmission line that is not too far away from the fire, and that's certainly a major consideration for us and we're in close contact with the - with the authorities (indistinct) about the impact of the fire that it may have there, so people just need to be aware that that - that is a possibility this afternoon, that there may be some impact on power as well.

HILARY HARPER: Thank you very much for joining us, David.

DAVID NUGENT: Okay, thanks Hilary.

HILARY HARPER: David Nugent, incident controller at the Bunyip Ridge fire. There are a few road closures which you can find by ringing 1800 240 667. The Princes Highway is still open, but it's a possibility that it may close later this afternoon, the Princes Freeway, sorry - open at the moment, may close later this afternoon. Current road closures include the intersection of Beenak Road and Launching Place Road; the intersection of Princes Freeway and Tynong North Road; the intersection of the Princes Freeway and Bunyip Road; and the intersection of Forest Road and Labertouche North Road - all those intersections are closed. The Princes Freeway is still open but it may close later this afternoon and the Bunyip State Park is closed to all vehicles except emergency services.

Lisa Maksimovic is an ABC News reporter and she's in our chopper above the fire at the moment. Lisa, what can you see? Lisa Maksimovic, ABC News reporter, we're just trying to cross to you in the chopper at the fire at Bunyip Ridge, which is in Gippsland and, as we just heard from David Nugent, the incident controller, that fire is a bit larger than it has been - a sudden increase in fire activity has taken it up above 165 hectares in size, and so we'll bringing you updates on the half hour.

Communities of Labertouche, Neerim, Jindivick and Tonimbuk will notice increased smoke. And you can check the DSE and CFA websites for more information, or call the bushfire information line 1800 240 667. Today has been declared a day of total fire ban in Victoria, and also in the Southern Riverina and the Eastern Riverina in New South Wales. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property, you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means there can be no fires in the open and you must not allow a fire to continue to burn. Working with machinery such as angle grinders and welders is banned in the region. Tractors, chainsaws and lawn mowers should only be used if absolutely necessary. For more information, ring the bushfire information line, 1800 240 667, and throughout the day keep listening to ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

And police have advised us of road closures at Wandong near Kilmore due to a fire in that area as well, so Saunders Road is closed, and locals should implement their fire plan. So that's a fire in - near Wandong near Kilmore. Road closures: Saunders Road is closed, and if you live near there, you should implement your fire plan. If you need advice on a fire plan, 1800 2404k667. We'll have more information on that and on the Bunyip Ridge fire after the news at 1 o'clock. Right now it's back to Grandstand.

KAREN TIGHE: And we'll keep that going through the day. Thanks to Jim, but what's happening in the golf?

[12.37pm]

[LADIES MASTERS GOLF SEGMENT 12.37PM TO 12.45PM]

[FED CUP TENNIS SEGMENT 12.45PM TO 12.52PM]

[SOCCER SEGMENT 12.52PM TO 12.57PM]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

[12.57pm]

HILARY HARPER: 3 minutes to 1, I'm Hilary Harper. We've got an urgent threat message for a fire burning west of Horsham along the Remlaw Road in a southerly direction, so that's a fire west of Horsham. The communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted by this fire. Residents in that area may experience smoke and burning embers, and you're advised to patrol your house and find and put out any burning embers that may be landing. Remember to protect yourself from radiant heat by wearing good protective clothing and natural fibres where possible.

So that's a fire burning west of Horsham along Remlaw Road in a southerly direction.

You can call the bushfire information line on 1800 240 667 for more information. There's also an incident information about a fire in Bunyip Ridge. The communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken. That fire is having some heavy spotting and it has

grown from 165 hectares in the last hour or so, so it is much larger now. Residents in the area of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience smoke and burning embers and you're advised to patrol your house to find and put out any burning embers that may be landing. As the front approaches, it will be unsafe to be either on foot or in a car, because of the radiant heat. Buildings will offer the best protection during the passage of a fire front.

As I mentioned, you can always ring the bushfire information line 1800 240 667 for more information about the current fire situation. There's a grass and scrub fire burning at Wandong near Kilmore East as well. Saunders Road is closed and the Hume Highway is now closed between Wallan and Broadford. There's also interruption to V/Line trains. We will have more information on that after the 1 o'clock news.

There's also a smoke report for the Delburn Complex fire. That's out in Gippsland - the fires that you were burning so heavily last week. CFA and DSE crews are patrolling, but communities within the Delburn Complex fire need to be aware of increased smoke this afternoon, with winds increasing. Do take care on the roads, too.

There are a few road closures around the Bunyip Ridge fire: the Princes Freeway is open but may close later in the afternoon and you can find out about those road closures again by calling the bushfire information line on 1800 240 667. You're listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

The urgent threat message that we bring you is for Horsham - there's a fire burning west of Horsham along Remlaw Road. That's burning in a southerly direction. The communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek, and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted upon by this fire, so you'll need to patrol your house, put out any burning embers and be aware that you will be seeing increased smoke. We'll have more updates for you after the news.

[1pm]

[Music]

JOHN REID: ABC News. Good afternoon, I'm John Reid.

Fire crews are moving in to protect townships near a blaze burning out of control in the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne. The communities of Labertouche, Tonimbuk and Jindivick are most at risk. Authorities are worried the fire will spread as the wind picks up this afternoon. The Department of Sustainability and Environment's spokesman, Stuart Ord, says strong winds are fanning the flames.

STUART ORD: Once we get winds up to 50 kilometres an hour, that forces the - the fire pretty quickly. Once the fire gets out into the grassland area, if it does, the fire can move at a speed of something like 6 to 7 kilometres per hour. So that's difficult fire-fighting conditions in anyone's language.

JOHN REID: The Bunyip fire is within kilometres of a major power line to Melbourne. Paul Bird from the National Electricity Manager, NEMMCO, says there are fears it could affect the city's supply.

PAUL BIRD: Clearly, if the power lines are out of service in the Latrobe Valley, certainly if several of those lines or all of those lines are affected, then it will seriously affect the amount of power that's available and - and potentially make it very difficult to meet today's peak demand.

JOHN REID: Fire authorities are concerned about a fire that's started near Kilmore East, north of Melbourne. Strong northerly winds are blowing the fire towards nearby pine plantations, and crews say it's gaining momentum. Fire authorities are about to close the Hume Highway. The CFA says the blaze could threaten properties near Wandong.

And crews are trying to control a fire that's broken out on the western edge of Horsham in the state's north-west. The Country Fire Authority says the blaze could directly affect the communities in the Haven and McKenzie Creek area.

The Weather Bureau says temperatures have soared into the 40s around Victoria as strong winds buffet the state. The Bureau says the mercury has hit 44.9 degrees at Avalon, near Geelong. Wind gusts of up to 80 kilometres an hour have been recorded at Melbourne Airport. The bureau says the wind could still pose a problem for fire-fighters at Bunyip after the forecast cool change this evening.

And fire crews are continuing efforts to contain a fire that's burnt through almost 40 hectares of State Forest near Dargo. A helicopter is dropping water on the fire which is burning through an area that's difficult for ground crews to reach. Bulldozers are establishing control lines around the blaze.

And a small fire has been contained in the centre of Ballarat's dry Lake Wendouree. Fire crews are staying close to the lake to ensure it doesn't reignite.

Over 40 fires are burning across New South Wales. The Rural Fire Service says the threat to homes from a fire at Wybong near Muswellbrook in the Upper Hunter has eased. The service is focusing efforts on blazes in the Bega Valley, the Shoalhaven and at Tumut.

And in South Australia fire crews have only had to put out two small fires, despite gusty winds and temperatures in the 40s.

[1.03pm]

Now overseas, where the US Senate has reached a deal on an economic stimulus package worth almost US$800 billion. Democrats say a vote on the measure could happen in the coming hours, but Republican politicians may try to delay it by a few days. The BBC's Richard Lister reports.

RICHARD LISTER: This $780 billion bill is a significant compromise by Senate Democrats who've been trying all week to get a stimulus measure approved. Their focus is on infrastructure and spending projects, but Republicans have consistently rejected that approach, calling instead for a smaller package focused more on tax cuts. President Obama has become ever more exasperated with their objections, accusing them of persisting with worn-out ideas and insisting the election gave his party an overwhelming mandate to act.

JOHN REID: The United Nations has warned that the effects of the global financial crisis could cause poverty to rise in Latin America by as much as 15 per cent this year. The warning from the United Nations Development Program, or UNDP, was dire. Latin American countries need to inject

public money into their economies to counter the effects of the global economic crisis or face the - losing the significant social gains made in recent years.

[1.04pm]

JOHN REID: Now to the weather, and the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban across the state.

[1.04pm]

There is a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change, extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays, northerlies, 25 to 35 knots, tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25- to 35-knot south-westerly change late afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with the change.

And for Melbourne, dry and mostly sunny this afternoon before a cooler, squally south-west to southerly change is expected late this afternoon. Tomorrow should be windy with a shower or two, a top of 23, light showers on Monday, 21, a light shower or two on Tuesday, 20. In the city now it's up to 43 degrees. ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire Information.

[1.05pm]

HILARY HARPER: Hilary Harper with you. I have an urgent threat message for communities in Horsham. A fire is burning west of Horsham, along Remlaw Road, in a southerly direction. So the communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted upon by that fire. You may see smoke and burning embers reaching your properties, so you will be needing to patrol

your house to find and put out any burning embers that may be landing. You can call the Bushfire Information Line for more information. 1800 240 667.

There's also an urgent threat message for the Bunyip Ridge fire down in Gippsland. The communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience ember attack and heavy smoke due to the containment lines being broken in that fire. It's having heavy spotting fire activity and it's grown in size in the last hour. Again, you can call the Bushfire Information Line, 1800 240 667, and there are quite a few road closures in that area.

The Princes Freeway is open so far, but it may well close this afternoon, so you will need to be update - updated on that.

There's also a smoke report for the Delburn Complex fire further out in Gippsland - that's the fire that was burning last week. There'll be increased smoke this afternoon with winds increasing, because of the fire still burning there. CFA and DSE crews are patrolling the whole of that complex of fires to monitor and extinguish any possible hotspots. But if you are driving in the area, do take care because there will be extra smoke on the roads.

[1.06pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Hilary, thank you. Tonya Roberts here with you now, holding studio-based coverage for this afternoon as we get you through this day of very grave fire concern. Clearly, the Grandstand program has been - well, we've just said goodbye, really, to our sporting colleagues for the moment, for this important broadcast, and we will, of course, be reliant on you for extra updates and information throughout the afternoon. So anything that you can get to us of value, do not hesitate to call 1300 222 774, if you think something is happening in your area or region that we don't know about yet, and there's always the text messaging service as well, 19 774 774, and we will stay with you right through this afternoon and well through this evening and tonight for that purpose.

Clearly, there are three fires of concern at the moment. There's the Bunyip Ridge one, which we've just heard a reasonable amount of detail from - from Hilary on. There is the Wandong fire, near Kilmore East, and then

there is the Horsham area fire as well. So that is the area of the state that we will be ranging across for the moment, but then there are those which looked to be contained, perhaps at a stage late last week, which are being closely monitored for any extra activity today.

I know that just a - a few moments ago our ABC chopper pilot was flying across the Bunyip Ridge fire and he did call in with a report for us. We've just lost that communication, so we'll go back to him in a moment. But Ross, who's listening in in Longwarry this afternoon, has just called too. Hi, Ross? We've got a problem with Ross's phone number as well. I know that he was trying to get through to us with some updated information.

Clearly, the size of the Bunyip Ridge fire, the area that it covers, has changed significantly. I do know that the last-stated size of it, at a quarter to 12, was 165 hectares, and in the hour and a bit which has passed since then, hour and 20 minutes or so, it has increased quite a bit. We will get you an - an actual update on that. The Princes Freeway may have to close at some point this afternoon. So I guess that really just underlines for us the general advice, the core advice, that the CFA and DSE have been giving all along the line, which is do not, please, travel anywhere today if you really don't need to, and we will get an update on that from the CFA's State Duty Officer very shortly, too.

I know we have all heard this core advice before, but it can be easy to not fully tune into it until the situation arises. That being the case, let me remind you of a couple of aspects of it. Please continue to listen to us this afternoon. We are your emergency services broadcaster here on the ABC, 774 ABC Melbourne, and your local ABC, for updates. Things will change constantly throughout this afternoon, and a way to be sure of precisely what is happening, and where, is to stay tuned to us. Remember, too, that if you are going to go or stay, that decision needs to be enacted now. It is very dangerous, we're reminded, to leave late with a fire in the area. Road use - and we've already heard this this morning, too - is going to be extremely hazardous once visibility becomes low. Smoke will be a problem. There may well be fallen trees and power lines. The wind has been strong. So just some of those core advice things to underline.

There are problems, too, with the train services. Daniel Maloney from V/Line is able to talk to us about that right now. Hi, Daniel.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Good day, thanks, how are you going.

TONYA ROBERTS: Tell - tell us what you can.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Well, at this stage we're still running train services to and from Gippsland, but we're strongly advising people to - to defer non-essential travel to Gippsland, because we expect, at some point this afternoon, Emergency Services will tell us to stop the trains, and - and that will basically mean we just can't guarantee travel in the area.

TONYA ROBERTS: And what's the reason that you would just even keep going with services now, Daniel? Why wouldn't you make an early decision?

DANIEL MOLONEY: Well, we've - we've been talking to the CFA and the police about that, and getting the regular briefings from their control point at Pakenham. They're telling us at this stage that the fire's contained far enough away to be able to allow us to keep running the trains. I guess the idea is we don't want to cut off the region completely, because some people still do need to - to travel for essential reasons. But we - the frequency of our trains is - is about hourly, so that gives us enough time to - to stop our trains a couple in advance, so basically, as soon as the police and - and CFA have any concerns whatsoever, we should have about an hour's notice to - to stop things.

TONYA ROBERTS: And have you, or, indeed, anybody at V/Line, actually had to deal with this level of - of threat of closure of train lines to such a large region as Gippsland ever before?

DANIEL MOLONEY: Not certainly in the memory - look, I've - I've only worked with V/Lines for five years now, and not - not in that period of time. Ironically, floods, of course, is the most problem in Gippsland in recent years. But even people who have been with us for 30-odd years say this is certainly the worst summer we've been dealing with in their memory, not only just for bushfires

but just the general impact on our train lines with such a sustained period of above 40 degrees, is what's - what's really giving us the - the hassles at the moment. It's - typically you get those, you know, one or two days, the 40-plus degrees, and then you get a week or more to catch up on train maintenance and everything else, but it's just been relentless, as we all know.

TONYA ROBERTS: And - and Daniel, will you replace those trains immediately with buses?

DANIEL MOLONEY: We will try to, but the advice from police and the CFA is that we may even see road closures in the area as well, which - which is why we are strongly - strongly advising people to stay away from Gippsland today, if you don't need to travel that way.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. Well, we had heard that it's possible that the Princes Freeway may close.

DANIEL MOLONEY: That's right. And in fact it looks like the Princes Freeway may close before the train line, the way the fire's moving at this stage. So, I guess it jumps the Princes Freeway, the - the train line's next, and that'd be the guide for us, really, too, is that if the fire gets close to the Princes Freeway, then we'll be shutting down ourselves.

TONYA ROBERTS: All right. Well, I know that you'll let us know as soon as there's anything more to report, and we'll bring that to everybody.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Yes, definitely.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thanks, Daniel.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Thanks for that, thanks Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Almost a quarter past one here now, on our special Emergency Services Broadcasting updates for you, throughout the Saturday afternoon.

An SMS message from Rushworth - you just look it the numbers, don't you: 45.6 degrees at Rusworth Observatory at five minutes past one this afternoon, it was. Goodness me.

We have an update for you on one of our urgent threat messages. John Hayes has been - Haynes, I should say, has been able to join me. He's the deputy chief officer of the CFA. Good afternoon, John.

JOHN HAYNES: Good day, Tonya, how are you going?

TONYA ROBERTS: I'm well, what - what can you tell us.

JOHN HAYNES: We've just got an urgent threat - threat message for the communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North at the moment. The - the Bunyip State Park, or the Bunyip Ridge fire, is really starting to pump through now and it's - you may get ember attack and - and heavy smoke, in both those locations. We've got our strike teams pre-placed there this morning, so there'll be a fair bit of activity with our crews doing some asset protection. So there will be a fair bit of action in - in Labertouche and Labertouche North now.

TONYA ROBERTS: And - and what sort of numbers? What - how many crews have you got now across that Bunyip fire?

JOHN HAYNES: We - we put in five strike teams this morning, which is 25 trucks, and we are putting more in now. So that, plus the helicopter support still at - at the fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: And I know earlier today, John, I think about quarter to 12, we were reporting that there were 165 hectares covered by that Bunyip Ridge fire. That's increased. Do you know to what?

JOHN HAYNES: I'm not sure of the exact size now, but in the last half an hour, the wind has really picked it up, and it's - it's starting to really motor, so it will - you will see a larger smoke plume in the distance, and you'll also get some ember attacks close in.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm. And - and the actual width of the - the spread of the fire front; do you know what that is?

[1.15pm]

JOHN HAYNES: No, at - at the moment, it's just - main issue is the spot fires coming over the top.

TONYA ROBERTS: I see.

JOHN HAYNES: As it comes over the ridge. So there's no great fire front coming out of the - out of the bush, as yet.

TONYA ROBERTS: Is that what you would fear, though? I mean, you say "as yet" and I hear the - I hear the care in your voice when you say that, but the weather conditions are - are just not getting any better for several hours yet.

JOHN HAYNES: No. We're - we're in for a long day today. We've got, you know, not only it's going to be a northerly for a long time, but the wind change from the south-west later in the day is going to cause us problems as well, because it actually pushes a fire in a different direction.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm.

JOHN HAYNES: So the immediate threat at the moment is - is really just for Labertouche and Labertouche North.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, we'll seek an update on that change, because, in fact, just while we've been talking, John, an SMS has come through from Caroline. She's in Warrnambool, and the cool breeze is there now.

JOHN HAYNES: Oh, that's magnificent.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm.

JOHN HAYNES: Hopefully, it gets closer. There - but the only thing with a south-westerly change is that it's also strong wind behind, so it's not a - it's not a gentle change today. So it's going to blow just as hard from the south-west as it is now, currently from the north.

TONYA ROBERTS: And you're faced with that tricky situation of having all your crews in certain positions and, I mean, goodness the - the speed at which the trucks can travel, and so on, you just cannot quickly get into position, can you, for the next challenge?

JOHN HAYNES: No, and - and the main - main thing, as we said all day yesterday, too, is to make sure all our crews get home safely today. That's our main goal, and we're -

we're still tracking for that.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm, yes, definitely. Well, all the best with that John, I know we'll talk again. Goodbye.

JOHN HAYNES: No worries, thank you.

TONYA ROBERTS: John Haynes, who is the deputy chief officer there with the CFA.

Yes, well, with that cool breeze coming through to Warrnambool, we will check in the next half hour or so with the Weather Bureau, and just see what we can tell you about the change, as much as we can get from them at that point.

Another significant fire burning today, of course, is the one that's west of Coleraines, so we're talking to the far west of the state of Victoria now. Bill Spears is the incident controller for the Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire, which is the official name for it. Good afternoon to you, Bill.

BILL SPEARS: Good afternoon, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: What can you tell me about the status?

BILL SPEARS: Tonya, we've got a - a fairly fast-running grass fire. You are correct in saying it is west of Coleraine. It started north of the Glenelg Highway, jumped the Glenelg Highway heading in a southerly direction. The westerly wind change has now reached the fire ground, and it's burning in the direction of Coleraine itself. So we've got strike teams coming from both directions, from the west and also from Hamilton, to provide not only some suppression work on the fire ground itself, but looking at asset protection within the township itself, should it - should it be needed.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, Bill, you refer to the grass fire, I mean, is the - the grass can't be long because of the conditions that we've had leading up to this, but there's enough there for it to - to obviously cause this degree of trouble?

BILL SPEARS: Well, there is, Tonya, and we - we actually had 4 inches of rain in December, so there is quite a bit of grass around, although there are lots of paddocks that -

that are quite bare as well. So it's still a concern to us. There's - there's a reasonable amount of grass about there.

TONYA ROBERTS: And just in terms of how highly stocked, how densely stocked that area is; what would you say?

BILL SPEARS: Well - well, it's basically a prime lamb country, and - and cattle.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm.

BILL SPEARS: So there would be reasonable amount of stocking, the stocking rate there. And the other - the other problems we've got is that coming into Coleraine itself and heading to the south edge of the fire is the Wannon River, and once - and - and if the fire gets across the Wannon River, that's going to complicate it a bit more for us.

TONYA ROBERTS: Do you think there's a likelihood of that?

BILL SPEARS: At this stage, yes. Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: And - and in the - is that in the next few hours, Bill, or?

BILL SPEARS: Well, the fire's been running for about 40 minutes at this stage.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm-hmm.

BILL SPEARS: And certainly that would be within the next - if it's going to happen, it will happen within the next hour or so, I think.

TONYA ROBERTS: So a lot of concentration on that effort. Are there blue gums around that area as well, plantations?

BILL SPEARS: Not in that vicinity, no. There's - it's purely grassland and - and, you know, farm plantations and that sort of thing.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm. Do you feel well equipped?

BILL SPEARS: Well, yeah, we've got a lot of gear here. Our biggest problem's going to be because of the weather.

We're limited with our air attack, and we've just had two bombers use their loads and they took off out of Casterton. Conditions are that they can't land back at Casterton, so we have to transfer equipment to Hamilton, and we're hoping still to be able to get them off the ground there. And that's the wind speed that's causing the problem.

TONYA ROBERTS: And do you know what the wind speed is at the moment?

BILL SPEARS: Well, the wind speed's currently westerly at 35 kilometres an hour.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm-hmm.

BILL SPEARS: But it's - the upper winds, of course, are much higher than that.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

BILL SPEARS: Which causes problems for the planes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. And just with them having to change arrangements, I mean, if they had been taking off from Casterton and now having to change to Hamilton, their route, as such, I guess has changed and they'll have to think again about where to get the water, won't they?

BILL SPEARS: Well, the water will be available at the - at the air strip, but it means that we have to change and alter our logistic supply of the - of the retardant material. So that's got to be shifted from Casterton to Hamilton.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, and which airport it's coming out of.

BILL SPEARS: Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, that's exactly right.

BILL SPEARS: Mmm, mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, there's a lot of work ahead of you. Really appreciate your time. Thank you, Bill.

BILL SPEARS: Okay, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: That's Bill Spears. He's looking after that Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire, and, as you probably heard him say, the fear is that it may cross the Wannon River, and that would bring a great many further complications.

[1.20pm]

Twenty minutes past 1. 1300 222 774. That's our phone number. Our text number is 19 774 774. If you are able to help us out with any extra information or observations that are useful this afternoon, we would love to hear from you.

Lisa Maksimovic is the ABC News reporter who is based somewhere around the ring of the Bunyip fire. I'm not sure precisely where. Where are you, Lisa?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: I'm - I'm as close as we're going to get on the ground, actually, at the moment. So I'm just at the foot of Labertouche.

TONYA ROBERTS: And the heat must be feeling intense. And the wind - has that increased in velocity in the last hour?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Absolutely. In fact, it was about an hour ago. I was actually interviewing a farmer in Tonimbuk and they were just in the valley, so the fire was - was puffing just slightly over the other side of a - of a hill in Bunyip Ridge. Now, we were talking about their anxiousness, their feeling of - of - of a false sense of security, almost, because they actually couldn't see what was going on, but as I was conducting the interview, the wind got strong enough that we had to stop the interview and we turned over this farmer's shoulder and the fire just absolutely got out of control. It was a matter of 30 seconds. The smoke was puffing along and, all of a sudden, it was billowing into the sky and we could see the flames coming over the hill and it's orange and black smoke, just puffing from that area now.

TONYA ROBERTS: You - you can't do anything but feel fear, can you?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: No. I mean, I've covered many bushfires, but I was very frightened where we were standing, because it's just the - the immensity of - of

how - of how quickly it all starts, and - and, you know, the understanding that the fire will choose its path and - and you really have no idea where it will go, and this family we were talking to, they'd - it was a farmer, his wife and teenage daughter, they'd all decided to stay, and as the community has been told here, if you go, you must go before - before the fire starts, and that this morning would be the latest they should leave, because, of course, the real danger is leaving and getting stuck in the fire.

Now, these guys just took one look at it when it started and the farmer, his wife and daughter just said "This is too emotional, this is too frightening", we can't stay", and they took off.

TONYA ROBERTS: Despite the advice that they really should have stayed put at that point?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, that's - that's what happens, and that's the danger here.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Because, you know, people have a fire plan, they've never lived through a bushfire before, and they think, "We can handle this, we'll stay, we'll protect our home, we'll all be together", but actually seeing it and seeing it start, you know, it's one thing to have helicopters here for - for two days beforehand and to have warnings that, you know, this could be quite dangerous, but when you see a bushfire pick up in under a minute, it is absolutely frightening, and - and this is the reaction that - that people have, and many take off at the absolute last minute, and - and that's - this is what I've seen first-hand today.

TONYA ROBERTS: Lisa, stay safe. We'll reconnect throughout the afternoon. Thank you.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Thank you.

[1.24pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Twenty-four minutes now past 1. Tonya Roberts here with you broadcasting on this Saturday, the 7th of February. Dreadful day. Dreadful day, right across the state. You've heard the official forecast so many

times, the top of 44, but it would seem that change starting to creep through the west of the state, and we'll get you some data on that, very, very shortly.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network, Bushfire Information.

[1.24pm]

HILARY HARPER: 24 past 1. Hilary Harper with you. There's an urgent threat message for the Bunyip Ridge fire. So the communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience ember attack and heavy smoke due to the containment lines being broken around that fire and heavy spotting and increased fire activity. That fire's grown from 165 hectares earlier this morning and, as you just heard from Lisa, it's - it's seeming very out of control to people on the edges. So that's an urgent threat message to communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North.

There's also an urgent threat message out for communities near Horsham. A fire is burning west of Horsham along Remlaw Road, and that's travelling in a southerly direction. The communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted by that fire. So residents in that area may experience smoke and burning embers reaching their properties and if you live there, you are advised to patrol your house and find and put out any burning embers that may be landing.

There's also an alert message for communities - the community of Minhamite. The grass fire burning 10 kilometres south-west of Caramut, near Purdeet East, is burning in a southerly direction, and that fire is estimated to be less than 5 hectares in size, even though the fire's not currently posing a threat, the communities of Minhamite need to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased and that has a potential to impact directly. So you need to remain alert if you live in the area as there may not be time for a warning if conditions should change unexpectedly, and continue to listen to the ABC local radio for updates on that fire.

A smoke report, too, for the Delburn Complex fire out

in Gippsland. Be aware that there will be increased smoke this afternoon with winds increasing. CFA and DSE crews are patrolling the whole of the Delburn Complex to monitor and extinguish any possible hotspots. But if you are using the roads, take extra care as road travel may be hazardous due to low visibility from smoke.

If you've got any questions about the current situation or any road closures, you can call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line, 1800 240 667, and we'll keep you updated throughout the afternoon.

[1.25pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you, Hilary. Yes, those updates still to come right through the rest of Saturday.

[Music]

JOHN CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney, I'm Chief Health Officer of Victoria. Just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions. The main ways of preventing heat-related illness would be to stay cool and have plenty of water. Try to reduce physical activity as much as possible, and you really need to look out for the frail, elderly, people living on their own. Those are the people who are most at risk.

MALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services broadcaster.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, as I said, we're very much welcoming your input this afternoon. Kevin from Kilmore East has just phoned. Hi, Kevin. Can you hear me Kevin?

CALLER KEVIN: (Inaudible) me?

TONYA ROBERTS: Kevin, yes, now I've got you loud and clear.

CALLER KEVIN: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: Which fire? Which fire are you - are you - be the Wandong, would it

CALLER KEVIN: Oh, it's the - the Kilmore - yeah, the Kilmore East-Wandong fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

CALLER KEVIN: But it started about 500 metres from my farm, and it's now travelled about 3 kilometres. It's in about a thousand acres of pine forest and Wandong and Heathcote Junction, I believe are going to be - they'll be singed. They've - they've got to go on full alert, but there's no announcement saying that they've got to put their fire precautions in place. But it's - the wind - I'm on top of my hill, on the farm, and the wind's blowing at 80 to 100 kilometres an hour and it's going to build up and the fire trucks are not making any difference at all, they're just trying to save some property. So I don't know why Wandong and Heathcote Junction haven't been alerted, because they're so close.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, Kevin, we have to assume, I suppose, that the alerts that need to happen are in place. We will check that with the CFA, of course; we are keeping very closely in touch with them.

CALLER KEVIN: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: But thank you for the update and the advice.

CALLER KEVIN: Bye.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you. The Hume Highway is closed. We do know that, between Wallan and Broadford, so that has already happened. You've heard that it's quite possible that the Princes Freeway down in Gippsland may close this afternoon and, in fact, the road, V/Line were saying to us earlier, the road may actually end up closing before the train line does, so that's a possibility.

I know Peter is nearby in Broadford as well, close to that Wandong fire. We'll see what he's got to say. Hi, Peter.

CALLER PETER: Hi, Tonya. I was - you've just raised the point that I was - I didn't realise that the freeway had now been closed because I thought the name "Wandong" might not mean a lot to people the Hume, and there was a danger of the - of the freeway being closed. So that was the only point I wanted to make.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm. And are you - are you alike with Kevin, in thinking that it's very, very serious.

CALLER PETER: Well, from my place, from my backyard, yes, you can - you can see it. I'm - I'm fortunate that at the moment it's to the south of us and the wind's to the north, but it's 44 and a half degrees here and wind is really rocketing through now, so they're going to have - they're going to be lucky to get it under control some time today, you would think.

TONYA ROBERTS: And what's the visibility like, Peter? I mean, there must be a lot of dust around, because it's like a desert through there at the moment, isn't it?

CALLER PETER: Yeah, it's - the visibility for here is good, like, because, as I said, we're to the north of the fire and the wind's blowing the smoke away from us at the moment, but it's just towering. The smoke's just towering up into the sky and then being blown away. It's - it is a big fire and it's - they're going to have a hell of a time trying to keep that under control or get it under control.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. Oh, look, it's just all - all hands on deck for them this afternoon. They do an extraordinary job, I think, all the volunteers and the paid fire staff as well.

Thank you, Peter, and we will underline the fact that the Hume Highway is closed between Wallan and Broadford.

Now, Daniel Moloney was talking to us just a little while ago. He's from V/Line, and he can tell us what's what with the trains. Hi, Daniel.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Yeah, g-day again, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: We spoke about the Gippsland services last time, you and I, have you got an update?

DANIEL MOLONEY: Mmm. Well, we - we've now just shut two train lines, in the last ten minutes, since we talked last. So the Gippsland line is shut as well as the Seymour train line. The last two callers have pretty much outlined the reason there, with the - the fires in the Wandong/Kilmore area as well, have seen the Seymour line also shut.

[1.30pm]

So at this stage, yeah, two train lines are now completely inactive, and I don't think we can even get back-up buses at this stage, for the same reason, all the roads being closed within those regions as well. So, obviously, we're advising people to, yeah, that we can't guarantee a - a train service to - to - to Gippsland and Seymour at this stage, and certainly till - till things calm down.

Over on the east of the state, with Gippsland, we were talking about earlier, we've had reports of grass fires coming in in the Longwarry area. I'm not sure if they're related directly to the - the main one in the Bunyip region, but they're all looking to be very close to each other, but those fires are enough of a concern for us to be halting trains. So we're at the stage where we've called a complete cease to all services in Gippsland and Seymour at this stage.

TONYA ROBERTS: And when we think, Daniel, about tomorrow, let's say people have got travel plans which are quite important, and it's clear that they cannot take place today, we all know that the forecast is for a much, much kinder day tomorrow. Would - would you assume that services will run tomorrow or not?

DANIEL MOLONEY: It depends, really, on where the fires end up, and, you know, the CFA's obviously doing a top job keeping things under - you know, as under control as they can I guess, but if it does - the ones in Longwarry are of particular concern for us at the moment, because there's a lot of very sensitive signalling equipment in that area, and if fire does take out that equipment, that is serious long-term damage to the line, potentially, so we just to have wait and see what sort of damage is done and we're updating our - our website regularly, that's vline.com.au, which we're encouraging people to keep visiting for regular updates, especially if fires spread to other regions.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, and it's a challenge for you managing staff, I suppose.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Yeah, that's right. So, you know, it's - it's quite possible we'll have, you know, staff stranded in the region as well. Many of our conductors and drivers

come from Melbourne and will be stuck in Bairnsdale or Traralgon, probably tonight, but we've made arrangements for those people already, but, yeah, the main thing is that we're taking - we talked about it a bit earlier - a pretty conservative approach to the services. So any hint of a fire within cooee of a train line, we're shutting things down and that's - that's where we're at right now, with both Seymour and Gippsland.

TONYA ROBERTS: And when we spoke a while ago, you said you thought it was actually quite likely that the Princes Freeway would end up closing before the trains shut down, but that hasn't happened, as you know - as far as you know, it is just the trains right now?

DANIEL MOLONEY: Yeah, as far as we know, and I think that's probably because of that separate grass fire in Longwarry. I'm not sure if the - the big one has actually jumped the Princes Freeway or not, you might know better than I do.

TONYA ROBERTS: I will find out very shortly.

DANIEL MOLONEY: But, yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, we're just about to get an update on that Bunyip fire. So, yes, we can - we can inform you at that point. All right, Daniel, well, anything more for us to know, you will let us do so.

DANIEL MOLONEY: We shall do. We'll keep you up-to-date throughout the afternoon.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

DANIEL MOLONEY: Thanks.

TONYA ROBERTS: Daniel Moloney there. We will get, as I say, a bit more surround detail about the Bunyip Ridge fire and whether, indeed, the Longwarry grass fire is connected with it. But, first, let's get the latest news headlines, Mary McDonald standing by in the news room. Hi, Mary.

[1.32pm]

MARY McDONALD: Hi, Tonya, how are you going? Residents

of Kilmore East, Wandong and Clonbinane are being warned to be on alert as strong northerly winds fan a fire in the area. The blaze is currently burning 3 kilometres east of Kilmore near Saunders Road. The CFA says the fire is gaining strength as it heads towards pine plantations near Wandong. Authorities have closed the Hume Highway between Wallan and Broadford.

Meanwhile, fire crews are moving in to protect townships near a blaze burning out of control in the Bunyip State Park, east of Melbourne. The communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North are under ember attack. Tonimbuk and Jindivick are also at risk. Authorities say the Bunyip blaze is now within a kilometre of major transmission lines which feed power to Melbourne.

To the weather and the CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire state. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including the bays.

For the state, very hot with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change, extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays, northerlies 25 to 35 knots tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25- to 35-knot south-west change late in the afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with that change. Seas to 2 and a half metres.

For Melbourne, dry and mostly sunny this afternoon, before a cooler, squally south-west to southerly change expected late this afternoon. A top today of 44 and we have reached 44 degrees currently. Sunday, windy with a shower or two, 23. Monday light showers, 21. Tuesday, a light shower or two and 20. ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire Information.

[1.35pm]

HILARY HARPER: Twenty-five minutes to 2. An urgent threat message for the Bunyip Ridge fire. The communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken and heavy spotting and fire activity. That fire has crossed the Princes Freeway now and we'll have more information on that for you in just a moment.

There's also an urgent threat message out for a fire near Horsham. A fire is burning west of Horsham along Remlaw Road in a southerly direction. The communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directed - directly impacted upon by that fire.

A message from the DSE and the CFA too: do, by all means, check their websites for information, but, when you have had a look, shut the window down because it's - the site's having a lot of traffic and people are being unable to access information because some people are leaving the windows open for long periods of time.

There's also an alert message for communities at Minhamite, just north-west of Mortlake. That's the Caramut-Purdeet Road fire. That grass fire is burning 10 kilometres south-west of Caramut near Purdeet East. It's burning in a southerly direction and it's to be - it's estimated to be less than 5 hectares in size. The fire's not currently posing a threat, but the community of Minhamite needs to be aware that fire activity in that area has increased and has the potential to impact directly.

There is also a smoke report for the Delburn Complex fire. There'll be increased smoke in that area. CFA and DSE crews are patrolling that complex to monitor and extinguish any possible hotspots but take care if you're on the roads, because you will see a lot of smoke on the roads.

The Victorian Bushfire Information Line is 1800 240 667 and we'll have more updates for you very soon.

[1.36pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you, Hilary. Yes. It's almost 22 minutes now to 2, and things are getting busier on the ground for all the people trying to manage these fires

today. There is, indeed, just an urgent threat message come through for communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay. Now, this fire, the one that's burning immediately west of Coleraine, has jumped the Glenelg Highway and it's burning in an easterly direction. So those three communities - Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay - and in that area that are bordered by the Gardiner St, Lower Hilgay and Barnes Roads, may be directly impacted upon by this fire. So we will get back, again, to the incident controller there shortly and bring you extra information.

But, for the moment, I want to speak, because he is available and he is very much in demand right now, understandably, to David Nugent. He's the incident controller at the Bunyip Ridge fire. Hi, David.

DAVID NUGENT: Yeah, hello, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: This has crossed the Princes Freeway, now, this fire. I guess you - you have been factoring that in as a possibility since the start of today, but what does it now mean for your management?

DAVID NUGENT: We certainly have been thinking about this over the last day or so in our - in our preparations, and unfortunately, as we had included in our plans, this fire has done a run in the last little while and it's spotting in quite a few places, and - and as you say, it's got over the Princes Freeway, just near Longwarry North, and in fact it's - it's spotting even to the - sort of the north-west of - of the Drouin area as well. So we've been working with - with VicRoads here, and the police, and they're putting their actions in place now to - to close the Princes Freeway, and that will happen, as I understand it, between Pakenham and maybe down to Warragul. So all that's - that's under way at the moment. And similarly we have - we have V/Line working here with us as - as well, and they've put their plans in place to - to stop the trains for the time being.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, and really, I mean, to try and stretch back into anybody's memory in a time when these sorts of full-scale, I suppose, actions have had to happen with regard to shutting down transport across the state, I mean, it - it just seems remarkable, doesn't it?

DAVID NUGENT: Oh, absolutely. It's - it's a significant

day, there's no doubt about that. As I say, all - all I can reassure you, perhaps, is that we have been working on our plans for this as a possibility, and, you know, things are starting to - to swing into action now. We're trying - all of the - all of the fire crews, as you would appreciate, are trying to do what they can at the moment. We've got the - the ability to use aircraft is pretty limited, given the wind, but wherever we can, we've - we've identified, you know, where we - we can try and use those aircraft and that's all - all happening at the moment.

TONYA ROBERTS: And so you said it's closed from - or the police are thinking about closing the road, or it will happen, from Pakenham to where? How far along the freeway, David?

DAVID NUGENT: I'll need to - you'll need confirmation on this, Tonya, but the - the plans were to Warragul, so --

TONYA ROBERTS: All right. We'll check that.

DAVID NUGENT: -- that's - we'll be working on that, yeah. There'll be people - it will be worth people just checking that one in - in the next little while.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, no, I - we will do that --

DAVID NUGENT: Yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- and be able to bring it out to people, because, I mean, one of the things - and we've just been reminded of this, too, in the update, and hopefully this is where radio comes in, I mean: (a) we are immediate with what we can bring --

DAVID NUGENT: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- but also, people do not have to have web pages open all the time on their computers or their hand-held devices, because there's such enormous traffic, apparently, the CFA and the DSE are both saying, "Shut those windows down as soon as you've checked out what's going on."

DAVID NUGENT: Yeah, and we - we encourage people to listen to - to ABC Radio, because, as you say, it's the most immediate way that people can - can hear what's -

what's going on, and we'll provide that information to you as soon as it - as soon as we can.

TONYA ROBERTS: So do you feel that it is now at a worst-case scenario stage, David, from what you were thinking of - of what would happen today?

DAVID NUGENT: In terms of our prediction work, under a worst case, it's - it's pretty much on track, unfortunately. So the work that we have been going through in the last couple of days, it's - it's moving, you know, along the - the lines that we were planning for, so the conditions are - are pretty bad out there, Tonya, yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. Well, we'll let you get on with it. Thank you.

DAVID NUGENT: Okay, thanks very much, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: David Nugent, and we will try and talk to the police, Victoria Police, in the next little while, just to bring you the specifics about those - the road closure that we understand to have taken place, or about to take place, on the Princes Freeway, probably Pakenham to Warragul.

[1.40pm]

Twenty minutes, now, to 2. 1300 222 774 is our phone number. Please do give us a call if there is anything that you have seen, anything you would like to know more about, that we can bring this coverage to you more fully in some way. Do let us know, 1300 222 774, or if you can just report something useful or helpful to us, don't forget the text messaging service is great, too, you may not have time to hang around on the other end of a phone, if you are taking action with regard to your own property or territory today. 19 774 774 is the text message number.

Good afternoon to you, David. Now, you're re witnessing the Bunyip fire right now. Are you on a farm there? Hi.

CALLER DAVID: I am on a farm. Yeah, yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: What can you see?

CALLER DAVID: I can see a - flames probably 20, 30 metres high on the corner of Ellis Road and Jolley Road, heading down - that's heading - that's in Bunyip, or Tonimbuk, heading towards the Labertouche area.

TONYA ROBERTS: And have you been as close as this to that scale of fire ever before, David?

CALLER DAVID: Well, a couple of times we've been pretty close. I don't know whether this scale. It's a bit hard to sort of work out, but the sky's gone pretty black and there's - I've - I've noticed that there some spotting and fires now in Longwarry North, which is to the north-east, so the main bulk of it is really to the - to the east of me, due east. But there's been some ember attack, looks like it's jumped towards the highway at Longwarry there. But I can see flames in several points looking out east, which is in line with the power lines that come up from the valley.

TONYA ROBERTS: And there are --

CALLER DAVID: And there are properties in there. There are families that have farms in that area.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. And of course none of us really want to think about what would happen if a number of the power lines ended up being affected.

CALLER DAVID: Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Because that's just a whole 'nother story. David, do you feel well prepared?

CALLER DAVID: Well, I'm well prepared enough as I can be here, and I suppose the - the nature of the wind has meant that in the last hour or so, the main front of the fire seems to be heading away from my property. That would be about a K or two, one or two kilometres away from my property, but now we just have to be on - on guard for ember attack.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

CALLER DAVID: And there's - there's the - the - the main bulk of the fire from Andersons Track in the Bunyip State Forest is - is raging. It's very - very, very strong, very

strong northerly winds, you know, north-westerly winds blowing at the moment.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. We can actually hear that on your phone.

CALLER DAVID: Yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: So, yeah, the intensity is huge.

CALLER DAVID: Mmm. Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, look, good luck with the stamina, David.

CALLER DAVID: I - I just noticed that some of the - the radios have gone out for the - the people who are on the - on the network, so --

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh, you've just heard the extra band of CFA people called up?

CALLER DAVID: Well, the bands have shut down, so maybe the CFA's taken it over, I don't know.

TONYA ROBERTS: I see. Oh, well, we might check that too.

CALLER DAVID: There were some people talking before. I know an elderly couple that are pretty close, and - and they - they cut out, so I just assume that they're okay.

TONYA ROBERTS: Right. Well, hopefully some neighbour can check on them. That's one of the things we're being asked to do today.

CALLER DAVID: Yep, yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: Just to make sure. Yeah, I'm sure you are across that. Thanks, David.

CALLER DAVID: No worries.

TONYA ROBERTS: Really appreciate that.

CALLER DAVID: Okay, bye.

TONYA ROBERTS: Look, I've got some new advice now from

V/Line that a grass fire in Colac has shut down the Warrnambool train line. So we're now talking those three train lines: the Warrnambool train line has been shut down by V/Line, the Gippsland one and also the Seymour train line, affected, of course, by that Wandong-Kilmore fire band. So just presume, pretty much, that you cannot travel by train in any of those areas. We'll have more road closure updates for you shortly, because they are increasing as we speak as well. Janine's just managed to tell us, via text, that in Sea Lake it's 43 degrees and the wind is scorching. She actually was driving from Deniliquin down to Sea Lake, and about 10 Ks out of Sea Lake her visibility was such that she could only see the two white lines on the road, that's it. So that's how drastic it is. So we presume that Janine's trip was of an essential nature, because with visibility like that, you just stay at home if you possibly, possibly can.

[1.45pm]

Terry Ryan has been around a long time, really, as a senior forecaster at the Weather Bureau. I don't know if he's actually seen a day quite like this, though. Hey, Terry.

TERRY RYAN: G-day Tonya, how's things?

TONYA ROBERTS: Good. Busy, like it is for you.

TERRY RYAN: Yeah, it is. It's - it's the peaky one-day effect where the temperatures in the upper levels have finally been realised at the surface. During the heat wave the other week, we didn't have the wind to do this to us, but we just thought if we ever got the wind a bit later on, this would happen. Avalon's been to 46.8. 45.8 at Laverton. 44.6 in Melbourne, that's the hottest day ever in February.

TONYA ROBERTS: Ever, ever, ever?

TERRY RYAN: Ever.

TONYA ROBERTS: Since records were taken?

TERRY RYAN: 43.2 on dust storm day, 1983.

TONYA ROBERTS: And what did you say we got today? I was quickly writing down --

TERRY RYAN: 44-point - 44.6 so far, and going up. When we get the nor-wester, when has been through Avalon and Laverton and Geelong - Geelong, 45.1. When - when the nor-wester gets through the city itself, closer to the wind change, that's when we'll get our maximum temperature recorded. And it's going to give 45.6 an awful shake, which was the hottest-ever day in Melbourne. That was a January day. That was January the 13th, Black Friday, 1939. 45.6. The way we're going, I think we'll go awfully close to that. Moorabbin's right now 45.4.

TONYA ROBERTS: Is it? Goodness me.

TERRY RYAN: Melbourne's had 45.2. Laverton 45.8. Essendon 45.8. I mean, these are seriously high temperatures.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, and --

TERRY RYAN: You should stay inside this afternoon, unless you really have to go places.

TONYA ROBERTS: That's the only wise advice to follow, isn't it, yes. And so when you are talking about the change and anticipating that potential real, you know, an extra spike in that heat, Terry, how far away do you think it is from the city?

TERRY RYAN: Looking at observations, it's gone through Cape Otway, Warrnambool, Port - Port - Port Fairy and the south-western corner. The next place will be Apollo Bay and along the Great Ocean Road, stretching up in towards - close to the Grampians. Timing wise, through Cape Otway it was 1 o'clock. Wilsons Prom about 4pm, and stretching through the surf coast towards Geelong. Melbourne around about 6pm, the city itself, so through the bay a bit before then. 6pm in the city. In the outer-eastern suburbs, around 7; in the far-northern suburbs around 7. And that's when our - just before the change is when our temperatures should be realised, the full maximum ability of the atmosphere will be realised then. It's going to be awfully close to 46 in a lot of places. Well, they've had 46 already in these places to the west of us.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, you said Avalon, I think, 46.8, didn't you?

TERRY RYAN: 46.8 is the maximum, yes. That would be the all-time record for - for Avalon. Laverton and Geelong, I think they've probably broken their all-time records. I've got a massive spreadsheet here on the floor, as I'm trying to work all this out.

TONYA ROBERTS: For the sheer scale --

TERRY RYAN: Amongst all these records --

TONYA ROBERTS: -- you've had to put it down on the ground, goodness me.

TERRY RYAN: And I've just noticed we've gone very dry. Melbourne's dew point's gone to minus one. So the humidity's dropped to 6 per cent. That's probably the worst thing that could happen to us now, is to have the humidity drop right to low levels. That accentuates any sort of fire behaviour and just makes things worse.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, Terry, I mean the humidity has been quite high for the last, what, 48 hours or so?

TERRY RYAN: It has been up there, which is --

TONYA ROBERTS: And now it's just zoomed.

TERRY RYAN: It's starting to drop a bit. And - but the fire danger ratings we are getting are off the scale, almost. Extreme fire danger ratings, and I guess that's fairly obvious.

But it's a - a day we - we thought might happen this summer. We were a bit lucky during the heat wave, we didn't get the - the gale-force winds during those three days, and so fire behaviour wasn't so bad then. It was hot enough. But the wind today is obviously a lot stronger, a stronger change is coming up, and tomorrow it all falls over, basically. Tomorrow, we're going for 23 or -4, I think, tomorrow, and just low 20s for the rest of the week, and only 30-odd in the north of the state tomorrow, 33, 34s as a maximum temperature.

TONYA ROBERTS: And so that is good, because I was wondering, when you were speaking about how the change would sweep through, when it would get, if it would get, to

the north-west and north-east of the state. So it will?

TERRY RYAN: It looks like pushing through quite strongly up through there. Be through the far-east of the state by about midnight, early hours of the morning, through Gabo Island, Mallacoota; stretching up towards Woohlpooer, up into the Mildura region, about the same time. So pushing through there overnight and the early hours of Sunday. There may be some showers and thunder storms about early tomorrow morning, with instability coming along with the change. There's a chance of that. So we have to look out for fires, obviously, started by lightning strikes, as that happens overnight and the early hours of the morning.

So the change will push through, and a much cooler week coming up next week in all southern and mountain areas. In the north, there won't be the high 40s like we're getting today, there'll be low 30s and then probably slowly climbing as we get closer to next weekend. So it looks like our dry run will continue until maybe a shower or two tomorrow morning when we get through Melbourne. Many dry days in a row. I think I've lost count.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thirty-eight, isn't it, something like that?

TERRY RYAN: It would be - yeah, it's a lot.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm, no, it is. It's just so, so very extreme. And look, it's great news that there's a cooler week coming up, but, for the moment, it's all about today.

TERRY RYAN: It's about getting through today, and with these temperatures getting up into the mid 40s and high 40s, I spoke to VENCorp a little while ago, and the power usage is climbing due to the airconditioners in houses, I guess there's no factories around today and there's not as much public transcript.

TONYA ROBERTS: No, and large public institutions, like schools, and so on, I mean, schools aren't in, obviously, today, so that, hopefully, helps.

TERRY RYAN: That's helping.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm.

TERRY RYAN: But there's a lot of power usage - your airconditioners.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

TERRY RYAN: Evaporative coolers and things, but, it's - I don't think it will be as extreme as the other day, the Friday.

TONYA ROBERTS: In terms of the power cuts?

TERRY RYAN: Power usage, yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: We're - we will check in with that in the next hour here this afternoon. Terry, thank you for all that, we'll talk again.

TERRY RYAN: Thanks, Tonya, okay. Ta.

TONYA ROBERTS: Ciao. Terry Ryan there, Senior Forecaster on duty at the Bureau. I think he said it all, really. I mean, this is the hottest February day that Melbourne has ever had.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire Information.

[1.51pm]

HILARY HARPER: Nine minutes to 2. We have an urgent message from the CFA on the Bunyip Ridge fire. Ritchie Road, McGlone Road and Fairway Drive in Drouin will experience embers and smoke in the next 10 minutes and may be directly impacted by this fire. That's Ritchie Road, McGlone Road and Fairway Drive in Drouin. So stay alert there.

Some more urgent threat messages for the Bunyip Ridge fire. The communities of Labertouche and Labertouche North will experience ember attack and heavy smoke. That fire has crossed the Princes Freeway now and is experiencing heavy spotting. There's also an urgent threat message out for the Remlaw fire near Horsham. That's burning west of Horsham city in a southerly direction. The fire crossed the Wimmera River at 10 to 1 and has crossed Golf Course

Road. It's currently burning towards Old Hamilton Road. So the communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted upon by this fire. There are also reports of spotting at the back of Kenny Road in Horsham, so do take care if you are living around there.

Another urgent threat message for the Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire. That's impacting the communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay. The fire burning immediately west of Coleraine has jumped the Glenelg Highway and is burning in an easterly direction. So the communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay, in the area bordered by Gardiner Street, Lower Hilgay and Barnes Roads, may be directly impacted upon by that fire. You will need to stay alert for smoke and burning embers and patrol your properties and put out any ember fires that you find.

An alert message, too, for the Caramut-Purdeet Road fire just north of Mortlake. That's affecting the community of Minhamite. That grass fire's burning 10 kilometres south-west of Caramut. It's burning in a southerly direction and it's less than 5 hectares in size. It's not currently posing a threat, but the community of Minhamite needs to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased and has the potential to impact directly.

And a reminder, too that there is a smoke report for the Delburn Complex fire. You will see increased smoke in that area in the afternoon with the increased winds. It's 7 minutes to 2.

[1.53pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Thanks, Hilary. And just even in the time that you've been on air then, Hilary, we have another urgent threat message. This one is a new fire that's burning in a pine plantation at Churchill. So we've had that advice too. The CFA is advising the communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North and Jeeralang Junction may be directly impacted by this fire.

And all the time we're getting new information, incident information, they call it, about fires which may not be a particular threat to people or privately held property but, nevertheless, are burning.

There is an alpine fire now burning 35 kilometres north-north-west of Dargo, so back in Gippsland, east Gippsland, far-east Gippsland. It's stable, or relatively stable. But, as the afternoon progresses, there are fears that it could burn in a south-easterly direction. It's about 30 hectares in size right now. So if you are aware of increased smoke in that area, then that's why, and all the usual sorts of precautions apply, including the fact that there is strong advice from the DSE and CFA not to drive along the Dargo High Plains Rd. I don't know why you would be, unless there was an emergency, anyway - across there this afternoon, it would be particularly unpleasant. But there will be emergency vehicles, of course, using the roads, so just be very aware of that. And also that new urgent threat message, which relates to the new fire burning in the pine plantation at Churchill. So be alive to that as well.

We'll have some more information shortly for you about the Wandong fire. You really start to get the message now, and I know I've been saying, or passing on this message from DSE about not staying too long on their website. We, of course, have it up in the studio this afternoon and will continue to do so, so we can bring you the information, but they are keen, if you are using it at home, for you to have a look and then shut it down again so that the traffic flow across these websites can be managed.

When you look now at the map of Victoria, if you were to draw - try to sort of draw lines across where all the fires are happening in the state, apart from, intriguingly, that very, very hot, very parched far north-west of the state, they really are well scattered right across the guts of the state. I suppose that's an inelegant phrase, but you know what I mean when I'm trying to draw a picture. Right across that centre body there are little fire symbols everywhere. So we will, as I say, surround you with information about that this afternoon. And, if you want to add to it, if you can help us in any way, 1300 222 774 is our phone number. You can text us, too, 19 774 774

[Music]

JOHN CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney. I'm Chief Health Officer of Victoria. Just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions. If you have to work

outdoors, protect yourself from the sun, wear light-weight, loose-fitting clothing, cover exposed skin, use sun screen and wear a hat, and if you are feeling really hot, take a cool shower or bath.

MALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services broadcaster.

[1.56pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: It's 4 minutes now to 2. We will have some news, for you, of course, at 2 o'clock.

Just a bit of extra information that came through about the Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire. This is the one that's burning immediately west of Coleraine. It's now burning - it was, anyway, but is continuing to burn - in an easterly direction, but it's crossed the Coleraine Balmoral Road. So the communities of Muntham and Coleraine itself and Hilgay may all be directly impacted upon by that fire. So that's the one that we were getting the information about previously having crossed the Wannon River. It's now crossed the Coleraine Balmoral Road. And it was - it was a grass fire, effectively, and you might think, "Well, what grass is there left to burn?", but the 4 inches, or so, of rain that fell, 100mm or so that fell in December, actually did give a chance for some grass to grow, and now this is the - the sad and savage result.

Doug's down at Newborough and he's found time to call us, which is great, because he's actually sitting or standing there, looking out at the Hazelwood fire. Hi, Doug? Can you hear me, Doug? No, we've got some hassle with Doug's phone. We'll see if we can sort that out, because I presume that's connected to the - the family of Gippsland fires that's going, and the Hazelwood fire is one we haven't actually heard directly about. Doug, Hi.

CALLER DOUG: Hello, can you hear me?

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, loud and clear.

CALLER DOUG: Yes. Look, I've just been up the top of Coach Road at the back of Newborough, which looks east over the Latrobe Valley, and directly behind Hazelwood Power Station, at the base of the Jeeralangs, it looks just horrific. It's a major, major fire brewing.

TONYA ROBERTS: And when you say "brewing", Doug, I mean, are you describing an area that you don't think was under fire until very recently? Is it a sort of a brand new fire?

CALLER DOUG: To my knowledge, yes, because you haven't reported on it on the radio.

TONYA ROBERTS: No.

CALLER DOUG: And I have been keeping track. And it looks massive now. It absolutely looks massive.

TONYA ROBERTS: Perhaps it's part of that sort of suite of fires - I mean, it would sound like the Longwarry grass fire, what they're calling the Longwarry grass fire, has definitely connected up with this Bunyip Ridge fire, so it may be part of the same family.

CALLER DOUG: No, no, this is the Delburn. This is behind Hazelwood Power Station.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh, the Delburn suite, oh, yes, all right.

CALLER DOUG: This is at the base of the Jeeralangs, over towards Boolarra area.

TONYA ROBERTS: So we need to get an urgent update on that, by the sounds of it.

CALLER DOUG: It's massive. It absolutely - it looks apocalyptic from here.

TONYA ROBERTS: All right, Doug, well we will chase that, thank you.

John Haynes from the CFA has the Wandong fire in his sights, so we want a quick update before the news. Hi, John.

JOHN HAYNES: G-day, Tonya, how are you going?

TONYA ROBERTS: Good.

JOHN HAYNES: Just an urgent threat message for the residents of Wandong. The fire is spotting into the north

of the - of the town as we speak. So it's - fire spots have crossed the Hume Highway and into the - the top end of Wandong. So that's our urgent message, and we've got some more after the news, hopefully.

TONYA ROBERTS: How big's the town?

JOHN HAYNES: Wandong's a growing town on the Hume Highway, so I'd probably reckon there'd be 800 plus.

TONYA ROBERTS: All right. So all those people we need to be assured will be in safe - in a safe place. So we will update further on that particular fire and more threats after the upcoming news. Thank you for that, John.

JOHN HAYNES: Good on you, ta.

TONYA ROBERTS: It is now news time, here on 774 ABC Melbourne, ABC Victoria. It's 2 o'clock.

[News beeps and Music]

[2pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good afternoon, Alicia Byrne with the ABC News. Fire authorities say the townships of Labertouche and Labertouche North are coming under ember attack from a fire in the Bunyip State Park, east of Melbourne. The blaze, which has burned through more than 160 hectares is, being fanned by strong winds. Stuart Ord from the Department of Sustainability and Environment says the fire could threaten homes.

STUART ORD: Those communities, in particular Labertouche, Jindivick, Neerim and - and Tonimbuk, would be seeing smoke at the moment coming from the - from the fire further back. We're expecting the temperatures to get into the mid 40s today and this afternoon and we're expecting the wind speeds to increase. So as that happens, the speed of this fire will increase.

ALICIA BYRNE: A spokesman for the National Electricity Manager, NEMMCO, Paul Bird, says the Bunyip blaze is now within a kilometre of major transmission lines that feed power to Melbourne.

PAUL BIRD: When that does happen, the - the smoke and the

fire itself can affect the power flows through the transmission line, and we want to make sure that those power lines are maintained and work efficiently through this afternoon, and that - that we can meet that peak demand late this afternoon.

ALICIA BYRNE: And a fire is burning on the southern outskirts of Horsham in the state's north-west. Peter Lenaghan reports.

PETER LENAGHAN: The fire started just before 1 o'clock along Remlaw Road on the south-western edge of the city. The CFA's Jenny McGennisken says conditions are tough for crews.

JENNY McGENNISKEN: Horrendous conditions at the moment, as we would know, with the dust, with the wind, and we've got as many crews out there as we can at the moment.

PETER LENAGHAN: The fire's now crossed the Wimmera River and Golf Course Road. It's moving southward, and the CFA says people in the communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and Wonwondah should be patrolling their homes for burning embers. Police are blocking roads around the fire.

ALICIA BYRNE: Residents of Kilmore East, Wandong and Clonbinane, north of Melbourne, are on alert as strong northerly winds fan a fire in the area. The blaze is currently burning near Saunders Road. The CFA says the fire is gaining strength as it heads towards pine plantations near Wandong. The Hume Highway has been closed south of Kilmore.

Melbourne has recorded its - its hottest ever February day, with the temperature in the city reaching 44.6 degrees. Temperatures have passed 45 degrees in the outer suburbs, and the weather bureau says they will continue to rise until a cool change comes through later today. Terry Ryan from the weather bureau says the change is passing through coastal towns, but it won't reach Melbourne for several hours.

TERRY RYAN: Melbourne around about 6pm, the city itself. So through the bay, a bit before then. 6pm in the city. In the outer-eastern suburbs, around 7. In the far-northern suburbs, around 7. And that's when our - just before the change is when our temperature should be

realised, the full maximum.

ALICIA BYRNE: Power is being cut to 700 homes across suburban Melbourne. Homes in Brighton, Oakleigh, Parkdale and Templestowe are the most affected, with high winds causing damage to power lines. A spokesman for Jemena power says the company is hoping to fix the problem within a few hours. Power was also lost to the Chadstone shopping centre this morning, affecting the airconditioning system.

V/Line has suspended train services on three lines because of bushfires. Services have stopped on the Warrnambool, Gippsland and Seymour lines.

And the New South Wales Rural Fire Service says a bushfire in the Bega Valley in the state's far south has crossed containment lines. The blaze has burnt over 1,000 hectares since it began late last month at Jingera Rock. While it's not currently threatening any properties, residents from nearby villages have been asked to stay prepared. A spokeswoman says water bombers have been deployed to fight the blaze. There are more than 40 fires burning across New South Wales.

To the weather. The CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of Victoria for today. There's also a gale warning between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, and for Port Phillip and Western Port. For the state, very hot with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler, squally, south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the north-east until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust. Isolated light showers over the south-west and nearing the coast during the morning and also in the south near the change.

On the bays, northerlies of 25 to 35 knots, tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25- to 35-knot south-west change late afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with the change. Seas to 2 and a half metres.

For Melbourne, a dry, mostly sunny day, with areas of raised dust. Windy, with a late cool change. It's passed the top - forecast top of 44 degrees. For Sunday, windy then a shower or two and 23. Monday, a light shower or two, 21. Tuesday, a light shower or two and 20.

Wednesday, a light shower or two, clearing, and 20. In Melbourne, 44 degrees. This is ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network.

[2.05pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: It's 5 minutes past 2. Tonya Roberts here with you throughout this afternoon, and of course my colleagues keeping you company throughout the evening and into the night, so that we can keep you abreast of all the important data which is flowing, and at such a rate. The situation with so many of the fires which are burning across Victoria today has changed quite markedly in the last hour or so, and we will update you as frequently and as specifically as we can on all of those fires.

We are reliant, of course, on the excellent communications from the DSE and the CFA. But we are also reliant on you. So if at any point you need or want to ring, 1300 222 774, or you can text us, 19 774 774, to tell us, alert us to something you think perhaps has not yet been taken into account. We've got road closures in significant areas, including, we understand, the Pakenham-Warragul section, and it's a long section, of the Princes Freeway, and train lines down. There are no trains to Gippsland, to Seymour or from - to and from Warrnambool. So we have lots of information to update you on, and the range of fires, including the Wandong, Bunyip, Remlaw, Caramut, Churchill, Colac and Delburn fires, are all burning or spotting to some extent. So updates on that very shortly. But John Haynes, who's the Deputy Chief Officer with the CFA, I was talking to him just before the news, and we're to get some more information from him now. Hello again, John.

JOHN HAYNES: G-day, Tonya, how are you going?

TONYA ROBERTS: Pretty good. Shall we just pick up where we were?

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, we'll just start again with Wandong. As I said, Wandong's fire-spotting into the north end of the down. We've got 40-odd trucks and a few helicopters

there to try to do some asset protection. So the residents of Wandong are to be aware that that's happening, and I'm pretty sure they're probably very aware that's happening.

Also the Bunyip fire is spotting fairly heavily now, and also we've had reports of fire spots as far away as - as Drouin. So that's causing a fair bit of grief.

The - the vectors one at Horsham, still got urgent threat warnings out for Haven, McKenzie Creek and - and the townships of Wonwondah, which is to the - to the south, south-west of Horsham.

Also Coleraine fire, we've just had a report about two minutes ago that fire's coming into the outskirts of Coleraine from the west. So the wind change is starting to come in to south-west Victoria. So it's - it's burning with a westerly wind towards the township of Coleraine.

And the last one, which is immediate threat, is the Glendonald Road fire in Churchill, which is north-east of the Delburn fires the other day, where it's burning pretty severely into the - in the pine forest. So they're - they're our top five or six at the moment, but all got different issues and all causing us some concern.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, John, I mean, we're talking now about at least a couple of towns, significant-sized towns, under very direct threat.

JOHN HAYNES: Yes, yes. And at - Wandong is probably one of the larger ones. South of Horsham, there's a lot of 5-acre blocks, a fairly large population there, and out of the - the - the Drouin - sorry, the Bunyip fire, that, you know, there's a whole lot of small communities going to be impacted out of that job.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, all those small settlement areas where people might be, you know, 5 or 10 kilometres away, but they're - they're reasonably densely populated, compared to how they were even 10 years ago.

JOHN HAYNES: They are, yes, yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: And some folk too, very new to the whole idea of actually being in a rural or semirural area.

JOHN HAYNES: Yes, and if you look at, you know, around south of Bunyip there, very much like the Strzelecki Ranges it - normally, it's so wet you can't light a fire, so they'd be a new experience for a lot of people there.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, look, it's just - it will be - I presume we will look back on it as one of the very profound days in our climate history.

JOHN HAYNES: Yes. It's one day out of the box; something to tell your grandparents about - sorry, your grandchildren about, anyway.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, I really hope that's the case. I really hope they're not so prolific over the next while that - that it doesn't be - it doesn't rate as a startling fact any more. John, you've got lots to do. We will let you got on with it. Thank you.

JOHN HAYNES: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: John Haynes, he's the deep chief officer - deputy. I'm sure he is deep and meaningful, too, but, he, in addition to that, is the Deputy Chief Officer of the CFA.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire Information.

[2.10pm]

STEVE MARTIN: Hello and good afternoon, Steve Martin here with the latest advice being issued by the - the CFA in relation to a number of fires. As far as urgent threat messages are concerned, for the Remlaw fire burning in the - the Horsham area, in the western districts west of the Horsham city, it's burning in a southerly direction. The latest advice is the fire crossed the Wimmera River at about 10 to 1 and has crossed Golf Course Road, is currently burning towards Old Hamilton Road. The communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek and all the way through to Wonwondah may be directly impacted upon by this fire. There are some reports of spotting at the back of Kenny Road in Horsham.

Now, our ABC Horsham studios are broadcasting live updates on this, so if you are in that area and you are listening to us, probably best, if you want local fire information, to be tuning in to 594 on the AM band. That's ABC Western Victoria, 594. I think Prue Bentley is on air in - in Horsham this afternoon.

Some of the other urgent threats, threat messages, which are still around, the latest for Bunyip Ridge fire. For the communities of Garfield North, Tonimbuk, Labertouche, Robin Hood, Drouin West, Tarago, Jindivick, Jindivick North, Longwarry, Longwarry North and Bunyip, those communities are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to the containment lines being broken and heavy spotting. That is, the - the latest urgent threat message for that fire.

The Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire. It's burning immediately west of Coleraine, burning an easterly direction. The fire has crossed the Coleraine Balmoral Road. Now, the communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay may be directly impacted upon by this - by this fire.

As far as the - the Caramut-Purdeet Road fire, the latest information we have on that is that that fire is estimated to have burnt five hectares, 10 kilometres south-west of Caramut near Purdeet East, and crews are patrolling the area, but - well, that's the final advice for that community of Minhamite that has come through at this stage, Tonya. I think you have some - some other information on other fires, particularly that - that Colac grass fire, that needs to be updated?

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. We've got something on the Colac grass fire and also, I think I've got standing by right now, in fact, Peter Lockwood, who's the incident controller at the Delburn fire complex, so we'll get on to that, too. Steve will be back with us right throughout the afternoon, updating us with these threat messages. But Peter is on the phone right now. Hi, Peter.

PETER LOCKWOOD: Hi, how are you?

TONYA ROBERTS: I'm well. So you've got this mighty complex to manage. Where are you concentrating your attentions now?

PETER LOCKWOOD: At this stage, we're - we have a new outbreak at Glendonald Road, which is just south-east of Churchill, which has started in pine plantation, and we'll be running that fire in conjunction with the Delburn. It will become a sector of the Delburn fire.

We have issued an urgent threat message to the communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction, and we also suspect that this fire will be heading in the area of Traralgon South.

TONYA ROBERTS: Right. So that way as well. Now, we had a caller from your area, in fact Doug phoned in a while ago, saying that from what he could see - and he was standing at Newborough looking around - I mean, he described it as "apocalyptic". Is that overdramatising it?

PETER LOCKWOOD: Well, we've certainly got a very difficult situation here at the moment, given the weather conditions. Aircraft is - is unavailable to us at this stage due to the weather conditions. So the message we'd like to send to the communities that might be affected by this fire, and especially those that have the urgent threat message, is they need to make their decision whether to stay and defend or whether to - to leave, and if they make the decision - if they are to leave, they should leave now.

TONYA ROBERTS: So you're saying make your decision by a quarter past 2?

PETER LOCKWOOD: Make your decision by a quarter past 2.

TONYA ROBERTS: It's now 14 minutes past 2.

PETER LOCKWOOD: Yes. I realise that. I just looked at my watch.

TONYA ROBERTS: I'm guessing that's what you're suggesting: the next 60 seconds is a good time to crunch on that decision.

PETER LOCKWOOD: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Peter, when you say the difficulty - and we understand about that - with the aircraft in these conditions and the winds and so on, how much would the

conditions have to change for you to be able to get back to using them, because that's obviously where the effectiveness comes in.

PETER LOCKWOOD: If the wind dies down --

TONYA ROBERTS: Yep

PETER LOCKWOOD: -- we would be calling to have aircraft come into the area as quickly - quickly as we possibly can.

TONYA ROBERTS: But how much would it have to die down?

PETER LOCKWOOD: Preferably down to around 40 - 35 or - 30 to 40 kilometres an hour.

TONYA ROBERTS: And what is it at the moment?

PETER LOCKWOOD: I haven't got that information with me at the moment. At the moment we're - we're doing a lot of the coordination to get the messages out to the community, but the wind is quite strong.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah. Good luck, thank you.

PETER LOCKWOOD: Thank you.

[2.15pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Peter Lockwood. He's got phones going off, beepers going off. I mean, the - the management of the situations and the calm and the control that people can have inside these command centres really has to be witnessed to believe. No reality TV program is ever going to really bring it home to you, but standing there and actually watching these men and women at work really can. So we will check back in with Peter again. We will continue to bring you all the surround information, as I say, the stuff about trains, also about roads, so all that coming to you very shortly, and if there's anything new in the way of weather.

In fact, maybe, if you are listening this afternoon and you've got some time to send a text, 19 774 774, you might be able to tell us where the cool change is, and also how real it is. Certainly it's the wind direction that those fighting the fires are interested in. If you are

just hanging out for an actual change in the weather conditions then you want to know how cool it is, of course, and approximately what time is something that everybody's interested in knowing. So give us a ring if you can, if you've got the time to do so, 1300 222 774 to let us know about that. It was along the southern coastline of Victoria roughly somewhere between - well, somewhere along the Great Ocean Road, we'll put it that way, shall we, about a quarter of an hour ago. So perhaps you could update us on that.

Tonya Roberts here with you throughout this afternoon, and we will continue this coverage as your emergency services broadcaster for as long as is needed, so that we can let you know precisely what is happening in your part of Victoria.

[Music]

JOHN CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney, I'm Chief Health Officer of Victoria. Just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions, particularly if you have a run of them, can affect you emotionally as well as physically. It is common for people to start feeling tired, irritable or a bit vague. If you are feeling like this, it is important to relax, try to get cool, stay hydrated.

MALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services broadcaster.

TONYA ROBERTS: A reminder that if you are looking for local information, particularly in areas where fires are raging and are very uncertain and their - their quality and their direction is changing, do tune in, won't you, to your local ABC.

Steve Martin, before, when he was running through that list of fires for us - and Steve, for those of you who don't know, is situated in Ballarat, he's part of our regional team there and very much aware of all the sort of local areas around the central and western part of the state - reminded us that on Horsham ABC, which is 594 on your AM band, there is rolling coverage for that fire. So that's one direction to send you in if you are after that specific fire information. Of course, there are also the websites, the CFA and DSE websites. Just be brisk, won't you, when you pop on and off them so that people can -

other people can get access to them as well.

We are taking your calls. We are reading your texts. I haven't run through them for a while. Let me see, what's news there. "The wind's blowing an absolute gale", says Maureen. "The fire on top of the" - "was on top of us before we knew it". Now, I'm not sure where she's sent that message from, but it illustrates what's going on across the state today.

"Skipton is horrendous, there is dust everywhere", tells me - another person tells me. "It's terrific to have the ABC". Well, we're glad that you're appreciating that. It's very much the least we can do.

"The external car thermometer" - this is Zoe, who is listening to us this afternoon, just in Kew "hit 48.5 degrees". She's had icy poles for breakfast, lunch and dinner. "Never a better excuse", she says.

Steve's phoned in from Bunyip. Hi, Steve. Hi, Steve. Having real difficulty with the phones today. We're going to blame that on the weather as well. There must be a reason that we're having difficulty with Steve, but I think he's in Bunyip. We'll see if we can say Hi. How about that, Steve, can I hear - you hear me now? Andreas, is that you? Andreas of Pakenham and Steve of Bunyip are both trying to get through to us to give us some information, but we can't hear either of them at this point. Is that you, Andreas?

CALLER ANDREAS: It is.

TONYA ROBERTS: Terrific.

CALLER ANDREAS: The horizon from Pakenham is pretty well, oh, 45 kilometres of smoke. I mean, the fire's nowhere near that big, but the smoke has spread so far. The city people just can't appreciate what the - I'm not going through it here, but I was in the CFA on Ash Wednesday, and I've got so much heart for the guys and girls who are out there, fighting the fires now. I can't do it now because of the profound psychological effect that it has on you.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, tell us, tell us how frightening it is, Andreas.

CALLER ANDREAS: I fought fires for 18 years.

TONYA ROBERTS: Tell us how frightening it is.

CALLER ANDREAS: Well, when the wind comes up a gully at 150 kilometres an hour and your truck catches fire - and I'd only just joined the CFA the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, and the bloke that was with me was - had joined the Monday before it, and we had a metro, MFB fire fighter, who was a pretty high-up officer, he's still in - still in the MFB now, as the crew commander in (inaudible) South on Ash Wednesday, and that's what people have to deal with. And people in the city just don't realise.

TONYA ROBERTS: And Andreas, obviously the training is excellent and it's thorough, but does it - can it really prepare you for being out there under those conditions?

CALLER ANDREAS: Yes. The trouble is that you've got to have somebody who can be in command who can actually make sure that they hold the crew together. I mean, I was in Sydney when Sydney went up. I was in charge of a crew of 20 fire fighters, and two of them died, and that's probably the main reason I'm not a CFA fire fighter any more.

TONYA ROBERTS: And you would like to be?

CALLER ANDREAS: No, I couldn't handle it. I'm perfectly honest. I really can't handle it. I can't - if - I can't even watch a fire on the TV at night any more.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well.

CALLER ANDREAS: It totally freaks me.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, yes, I'm - I'm sure people listening could understand you saying that, because of the sheer - the sheer scale of fear.

I guess the appreciation that the rest of the community has for you would be one of the reasons that people would want to be - be part of it and the teamwork and so on, but knowing the conditions were coming today, too, Andreas, I mean, does that help at all, people being able to be a bit more prepared? I mean, it was always going to be a shocker today, wasn't it?

CALLER ANDREAS: No, people haven't cleared their blocks. They don't care, they don't know. They just have no - no real comprehension of what can happen. They think that, "Oh yeah, the CFA will be there to save your lives", and --

TONYA ROBERTS: Well I'd - I'd like - I'd like to think that we don't - we don't necessarily take that completely --

CALLER ANDREAS: No, you do have - well, I'm a local taxi driver, and I'm not going to name any names, but I took a bloke last night out and his house was so unprepared, it was absolutely unbelievable, when I picked him up last night. I mean, if the fire happens to hit the area where he is, there's no way that his house is going to be saved, and they've just done nothing to clear undergrowth or cut back grass, and grass fires travel about three times faster than forest fires.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, and, look, it's many grass fires that we've been hearing about today, that have been bringing about these rapid changes in the conditions of them, too.

Look, thanks, Andreas, it is good to get those reflections of yours, we will move on, because there's more news flowing in all the time. Still happy to talk to you, though. 1300 222 774. Twenty-three minutes, now, past 2.

[2.23pm]

We've had another caller in the meantime tell us that the cool change has hit Mortlake. It's only - and I use the term advisedly - 35 degrees there. Only. And we will have an update for you very shortly, too, about how power supplies and use are going across the state.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire information.

STEVE MARTIN: Thanks, Tonya, Steve Martin here with the urgent threat messages as released by the CFA. Now, since I was on just after 2 o'clock, another couple have been issued by the CFA.

An urgent threat message is current for

Camperdown-Danedite Road or - Danedite Road, I think. You will have to apologise if - I'll have to apologise if I've got that incorrect. The urgent threat message for residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh. For residents in those areas, communities need to know that the grass fire burning approximately 7 kilometres east of Camperdown, on the south side of the Princes Highway, poses a threat, and those residents are asked to enact their bushfire survival plans immediately. That's an urgent threat message for residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Roads - Caters Roads Settlement [sic] and Swan Marsh communities, that the grass fire burning 7 Ks east of Camperdown on the south side of the Princes Highway is a threat and you are being asked to enact your bushfire survival plan immediately.

Another message that has come through, an urgent threat message, for the Glendonald Road fire. Glendonald Road fire burning 1 kilometre south east of Churchill, near the pine plantation, is burning in a south-easterly direction. The communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang and Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction, may be directly impacted upon by this fire. Yes, if you are in that area, you may experience smoke and burning embers reaching your properties. You are advised to patrol houses and find out - find and put out any burning embers that - that may be landing in that area.

The other urgent threat messages continue. For the Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire, it's burning immediately west of Coleraine, burning in an easterly direction. The fire's crossed the Coleraine-Balmoral Road. Communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay may be directly impacted upon by this fire.

And of course the Bunyip Ridge fire, Garfield North community, Tonimbuk, Labertouche, Robin Hood, Drouin West, Buln Buln, Tarago, Jindivick, Jindivick North, Longwarry, Longwarry North and Bunyip are experience - experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken and heavy spotting of fires.

So those two new urgent threat messages, Tonya: The Camperdown-Danedite Road. I'm not sure on the pronunciation, but I'm sure locals will know, the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire, you are being asked to implement your bushfire - bushfire survival plans

immediately.

[2.25pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you for all that, Steve and Steve back again very shortly with extra information.

I did promise an update about the power situation. Scott Parker is from Jemena. He's on the phone. Hi, Scott. Are you with me, Scott?

SCOTT PARKER: Yes, I am. Hi, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh, g-day. Now, what have you been tracking today? I'm - I'm a sure you've been doing it from very early this morning.

SCOTT PARKER: Well, yes. We've tripled our normal weekend crew numbers and doubled our call centre operators in anticipation of today's heat and wind, causing repair work needing to be carried out across our two networks. And at the moment there's about a thousand customers without power, particularly in the Brighton, Oakleigh, Parkdale and Templestowe areas, with a combination of heat-related and vegetation-caused faults. In other words, it's both the heat and trees or tree branches falling on our network that are causing us to be out there identifying and repairing at the moment.

TONYA ROBERTS: And how much of that has happened with the wind?

SCOTT PARKER: Oh, well, quite a lot. The - the trees or tree branches that are - that are falling are obviously related to the wind and, in turn, it's related to the heat we've been having over the last several weeks which has caused the, you know, particularly large trees in the eastern and south-eastern suburbs to be quite unstable and, you know, they're - they're ripe for, sort of, high winds today on top of heat. So - but we're aware of it, we've - we've planned for it. As I say, we've doubled our normal crew load and we're doing everything possible to ensure customers are not unduly inconvenienced throughout this afternoon.

TONYA ROBERTS: And is there any sense of those people who are without it at the moment, the thousand or so

households - any sense of when they will regain power?

SCOTT PARKER: Well, the majority of faults tend to be, once they are identified tend to be in the sort of two- to four-hour range. So if they're without power now and they've been in contact with our call centre, with any luck, they should be back on supply by mid-afternoon, if - if not then, certainly late afternoon. Of course, we're getting new faults on the network all the time, so - but I think, in - on average, people should anticipate, if it's a heat-related fault or tree branches that are not so heavy that we need the SES or any other crew out there helping us, it's a sort of two- to four-hour mark that we're looking at for those people.

TONYA ROBERTS: And at this stage of the day, Scott, how does today compare with the - the sort of run of three days of extreme weather that started about 10 days ago?

SCOTT PARKER: Well, what we had physically on Friday was a build-up of heat on the networks, and so it was particularly bad for those related faults. We just didn't get those cooler nights or cooler mornings to let the network take a breather, as it were. At least on this occasion, last night was relatively cool, so we're only dealing with the heat build up that we're getting today. So we do anticipate, as the day goes on, those type of faults to increase, but certainly at this stage, things are much more comfortable for us than they were at the end of those three days last week. But we've - we've got other issues that we're planning for. Once the wind picks up later this afternoon with the cool change, that's likely to bring more vegetation-caused faults to us, and then, if we even get a sprinkle of rain overnight and in the morning, that's when we get the - the potential for pole top fires, because we - we really need our networks cleaned off with a - with a great big dump of rain, and we're just not getting that either. So, for all these reasons, our crews are maximised to the number and call centres numbers are maximised because we do anticipate ongoing issues at the end of the day.

TONYA ROBERTS: And their own health - Scott, the health of your own crews must be under very real threat at times, too.

SCOTT PARKER: And that's probably one of the things we're

most conscious of at the moment. Our guys are pretty worn out. Most of them stick up their hand and say, "Yep, I'm willing to work weekends" and, you know, full 10-hour shifts, but we're very conscious of their health and safety. We've got head office on - on a roster themselves; a - a bunch of volunteers out there taking drinks and food to crews on site and to depots, just making sure their welfare is well and truly looked after, because, from our point of view, they're - you know, they're - they're our heros, they're the ones out there in extraordinary conditions getting people back on supply as soon as possible. You know, those and others that are mobilised around them to support them are doing a fantastic job and I know it's of no comfort if you are without power currently, but people just should know that our company, and I'm sure the other distributors, if they've got faults as well, are doing everything they possibly can to restore as soon as possible and, as you say, look after the guys that are out there doing the work.

[2.30pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, I think all those overpaid footballers should donate their ice vests to them.

SCOTT PARKER: [Laughs] Well, yes, perhaps. I don't - I'm not sure ice vests are - are all that ideal when you're up on a cherry picker or a ladder fixing - fixing wires and - and poles and things, but certainly we do our best to keep them safe and - and healthy and - and encourage them to continue the do the work that they're doing for us all.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm, very much. Thanks, Scott.

SCOTT PARKER: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Scott Parker, who's the Jemena spokesperson. I think at this point it's a good idea to get the latest news, the headlines, anyway, from Alicia Byrne. She 's standing by with them. Thanks, Alicia.

ALICIA BYRNE: Thank you. Residents of Labertouche and Labertouche North, east of Melbourne, are under ember attack from a blaze that's burning in the Bunyip State Park. The fire has now burnt through more than 160 hectares. It's being fanned by strong winds. The Department of Sustainability and Environment is warning the

fire could threaten homes. It's now within a kilometre of power lines that feed Melbourne.

There are urgent threat messages for residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh, near a grass fire burning at Camperdown.

Also, for the communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang and Jeeralang North, as well as Jeeralang Junction.

A fire burning on the southern outskirts of Horsham in the state's north-west has cross the Wimmera River and Golf Course Road. The blaze started just before 1 o'clock along Remlaw Road. Residents of Haven, McKenzie Creek and Wonwondah are being warned to patrol their homes for burning embers.

The Hume Highway has been closed south of Kilmore as a blaze burns near Saunders Road. It's gaining strength as it heads towards pine plantations near Wandong and residents of Kilmore East, Wandong and Clonbinane are being warned to be on alert.

And Melbourne has recorded its hottest February day on record, reaching 45.4 at 2 o'clock this afternoon. To the weather, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the entire state. There is a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom, between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, and for Port Phillip and Western Port.

For the state, hot, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally, south-westerly change extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

On the bays, northerlies, 20 to - 25 to 20 - 25 to 35 knots tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25- to 35-knot south-west change late afternoon, squalls to 50 knots possible with the change. Seas to 2 and a half metres.

For Melbourne, dry, mostly sunny this afternoon, before a cooler, squally, south-west to southerly change expected late this afternoon. For Sunday, windy, a shower or two and 23. Monday, light showers 21. Tuesday, a light

shower or to and 20. Currently, 45 degrees. This is ABC News

[Music]

JOHN CARNEY: I'm Dr John Carney, I'm Chief Health Officer of Victoria, just giving you some tips on how to cope with extreme heat conditions. During a power failure, the most important thing is to try to keep the frozen food cold. Food that is in the fridge or freezer is no longer cold to the touch, you have to consume that within four hours, and if you can't do that, you have to throw it out.

MALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services broadcaster.

TONYA ROBERTS: Tonya Roberts here with you on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. We'll get a state-wide update now, just as we enter this sort of mid section of the afternoon, to have some understanding of how we are, east, west, north and south across this very hot and highly distressed state today.

Richelle Hunt, one of our very experienced reporters, is down today at the Integrated Emergency Control Centre, and she's there with John Amore [sic], who's the Deputy Chief Officer with the CFA. Hello to you both.

RICHELLE HUNT: Good afternoon, Tonya. Yeah, I'm down here with Deputy Chief Officer John Haynes, actually, and where - where we are at the moment at the headquarters, Tonya, there is all areas here of State Emergency Services. There's the DSE, there's the D - the DHS, the SES, the Melbourne Fire Brigade have come down here, the police, the water, NEMMCO power, so all areas of State Emergency Services are down here at the moment, and there would be at least over 100 people here all moving really swiftly at the moment.

I overheard a conversation just before to one young worker saying, "Look, go home. You've been here since 6 o'clock this morning. You were here till 10 o'clock last night and you're going to be back here at 6 o'clock again tomorrow morning. Go home and get some rest." And it's just - it's really quite manic, and, John, we're sitting here at the moment, and just explain to Tonya, if we look at this screen here in front of us, Tonya, the state of

Victoria here on the screen in front of John that we look at, there's so many different symbols and little keys and little messages, that it's really quite difficult for me to understand what is what. But it looks like the whole state of Victoria is covered with some kind of symbol of concern there, John. John, what are we looking at and what - I mean, is it as bad as Ash Wednesday, as - as what we've been saying all week?

JOHN HAYNES: The weather is. The screen we're looking at is a map of Victoria and we've got the weather information, live weather information, and we can see that, you know, places like Horsham at the moment have got a 45 degree Celsius temperature and a - and a wind of 60 to 80 kilometres an hour from the north-west, and on top of that is all the fires. So once a - a fire - once a fire truck gets dispatched to a fire, it comes up on our screen, and the updates come --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah, one's just popped up, right then.

JOHN HAYNES: -- thick and fast at the moment.

RICHELLE HUNT: And there seems to be quite a lot of aeroplane symbols around, too, so across the state, I mean, how many aircraft do we have out there at the moment.

JOHN HAYNES: In our fire-bombing fleet, I think we've got about 33 or 34 today, and, on top of that, we've got reconnaissance planes which do fire spotting and also direct the helicopters in. So imagine sitting in - in the aircraft today with a bit of turbulence, it would be a fair old bumpy ride today, I give you the tip.

RICHELLE HUNT: Well, just walking in here this morning to the CFA, that wind was so extreme, I could barely cross Nicholson Street, and the thought of what these guys and what these families are going through out there at the moment. But, Tonya, just as we're speaking now, John's just been handed some more urgent threat messages. So, look, should we go through state-wide? I mean, where do we begin, really?

TONYA ROBERTS: I think if you've got them there right now, let's get the fresh news out.

JOHN HAYNES: Okay. Well, we'll start with the Coleraine fire, which is in western districts between Hamilton and Casterton. They've got the - we're just starting to get the south-west wind change there. So the - the - the wind has changed direction and causing the fire to move in a - in a north-easterly direction now, and we've just got a - an urgent threat message: for the communities in the Douglas Road, Coleraine, at Balmoral Road, Cavendish-Coleraine Road and the Highlands Road and Melville Forest Road, they may be directly impacted by fire. So it's - it's not fire spotting or anything; it's actually the fire front coming in to the west of Coleraine township. So that's our most urgent one at the moment. We've - and the fire before was about 200 hectares, with a prediction from the locals to be close to 800 in - by the end of the hour. So that's a - the - the first large problem.

Second one, if we're going across the state, is the fire south-west of Horsham, which is in the McKenzie Creek, Haven and Wonwondah areas. The - our guys are in asset protection there, so we haven't got any word at the moment whether we've had any structural losses there at the moment.

From there, we're - the Swan Marsh fire, or the one west of Colac, that - that has been going better than most. The Princes Highway is closed, but there's an urgent threat message before, I think it was Danedite Road, from - from memory.

Into the north, up in the Hume Highway, at Wandong, the - the fire was spotting into the top end of Wandong and we had about 40 fire trucks and we've got the Air-Crane up there doing some asset protection as we speak. And, again, I'll just check on the computer to make sure that we haven't got a latest and greatest update on that one. Here we are.

RICHELLE HUNT: The list here, Tonya, as - as John's going through this, the - the list of what's in the red and the sheer amount of information is actual - oh, is - is really intense, and some - and some pretty devastating news is just coming through now, John.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, we've just - we've got a structure fire and there's reports of some people being locked in

there. So we're just waiting on some more advice of that, but - we'll see what happens with that one. But the fire would be, with the weather conditions today, and we've been saying all week, it's going to be extreme and it's proved to be extreme, and it will be pretty uncomfortable for the residents of Wandong.

RICHELLE HUNT: Now, you're using the language that I know that you need to use, John, but, I mean, a "structure fire"; so somebody's house is alight and there's concern that there are people in it?

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, people might have been not in the fire but they might be - won't be able to get out the road, potentially. So very sketchy at the moment. We'll - we'll find out a bit more information as it comes through.

Now, on to the Bunyip Ridge fire, I'll just peel that become a bit and (inaudible).

RICHELLE HUNT: Oh, my gosh, it's just lists and lists and lists of places here, Tonya. It's horrific.

TONYA ROBERTS: And your knowledge of geography must have to be quite extensive. It must be one of the first things you need to test when new staff come on board, John.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, probably. I've worked a fair bit around the state and travelled around the state, so I'm probably - know most places. Now, I'm just trying to find where we are.

RICHELLE HUNT: And what's amazing too, Tonya, is that all of the staff here are really keeping it calm and - and really keeping it together, and are - even though you - there's a real pace in everybody's step, everyone is looking after each other and - and keeping polite. So it's amazing to see this level of action take place and - and be done in - in such a together manner.

JOHN HAYNES: Just the Bunyip State Park one, we reported before about some spot fires coming as far as Drouin, and they've been impacting on around Longwarry North, Robin Hood and Drouin, and we've got the Helitacks working on the spot fires there at the moment with our ground crews, and we've got a heap of ground crews that we pre-deployed this morning into locations for this actual incident that we

knew would potentially happen.

There's - just said they've got some good asset protection performed around Labertouche, Bunyip, Robin Hood, Jindivick and Tonimbuk at the moment, and there are assets being impacted on; they're not being able to confirm how many as yet, but I would assume that, the ferocity of the fire, that we would lose some assets in this run of the fire. So that's the Bunyip one.

And probably finally, the one at Churchill, which is north-east of the one at Delburn last week, that was in the - the pine plantation. It was 600 acres and - and getting larger, heading in a - in a southerly direction. So that was - had a fair head of steam on it.

RICHELLE HUNT: Now, we had over - nearly 30 houses lost in the Boolarra fires just over the weekend, and you're concerned here about more assets potentially being lost. I mean, fingers crossed, but are you expecting anywhere near the same sort of number of - of potential homes being lost throughout this next 24 hours?

JOHN HAYNES: Oh, look, to - with experience, I think that we're going to lose a fair bit of assets today, just as the - you know, the ferocity of the fires coming through and the - and the number of fires going at once. You know, we've got six major fires across the state, all pretty well --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

JOHN HAYNES: -- around where people are. So it's going to be a fair day's - fair day today, I reckon.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, John, having had the knowledge that it would be as bad - a shocker --

JOHN HAYNES: Mmm-hmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- has that helped at all?

JOHN HAYNES: Well, probably tomorrow morning, we'll know. The main thing is about people being prepared and the community being prepared, and - and I think that's the main

difference between now and Ash Wednesday in '83. I think community are better prepared, better informed and - and hopefully we'll work together as a partnership to - to get through it.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm. Well, we will let you get on with it. No doubt we'll talk again this afternoon. Thanks John, and thanks Richelle.

RICHELLE HUNT: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Richelle Hunt. She's one of our reporters. She's down there at the Integrated Emergency Control Centre. It's buzzing this afternoon, obviously, and John Haynes, the Deputy Chief Officer of the CFA. It's almost a quarter to 3 and we'll have an update in just a moment from Steve. But Rhonda from Churchill, I know, has been hanging on. Rhonda, hello? What can you see?

CALLER RHONDA: We're out - where we are here, in Morwell, we're looking down a hill and it looks out over Churchill, and it's gone from this very small fire to something that's probably 20, 30 Ks wide. It's - it's just huge. "Apocalyptic", I think a guy in Moe Newborough said before. It truly is. It's - you can see flames that are at least 100 foot high. It's just - it's not good. It's not good at all. We've got lots of friends in that area, so we're - we're - I'm just waiting for a call from a friend in case we've got to go and try and help her, but, yeah, it's not - it's not good.

TONYA ROBERTS: You've got the lines of communication going, though, obviously --

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- and you're getting good information?

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah, she - she's actually across the road from where - where it's sort of - she said, like, where - where she is at the present, if the wind changes, she's got to get out, like, but where she is at the moment, she's safe, but we've got other friends that are in Jeeralang Junction and Jeeralang North, who are - had actually - had no idea that this - this fire is actually coming down upon them until we rang somebody else to tell them that there's a fire. So --

TONYA ROBERTS: Surely, everybody's on the look-out, though, today?

CALLER RHONDA: I think so, but what I think is, it just - with - with this arsonist around here, we've had another fire here in Morwell that was deliberately lit, and power's gone out because of it, and then half an hour later this - this one pops up. So it's - everybody around here's a bit touchy.

[2.45pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: And Rhonda, I mean, just the very thought of - of an arsonist, potentially someone in the local community.

CALLER RHONDA: Mmm. Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Does that make ordinarily sane people a bit wild?

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah, definitely. I've heard a - a lot of expletives used and a lot of --

TONYA ROBERTS: From people who wouldn't normally use them, do you mean?

CALLER RHONDA: Yes. [Laughs] Definitely. My mother being one of those people. And we're just watching this thing and it's just - it's just ripping through the pine forest. It's just incredible. It's uncontrolled. It's just - it's so out of control, it's just unbelievable to watch.

TONYA ROBERTS: And to see that destructive force up close, yes.

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, I'm glad you're safe. Hope you can help your friend. Thanks so much for the call.

CALLER RHONDA: Yeah, no - no problem, thank you.

TONYA ROBERTS: Bye - bye, Rhonda. Helen's in Broadford, too. I just want to speak briefly to her before we get our

next update from Steve Martin. Hello, Helen.

CALLER HELEN: Hi, Tonya, how are you?

TONYA ROBERTS: Really well. Now, you've got your son off fighting fires.

CALLER HELEN: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Where's he?

CALLER HELEN: Yes. He's - he's doing the Wandong fire today. They - they got called out, the alarm went off about five times in 20 minutes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh.

CALLER HELEN: And, of course, every time he goes out I'm, you know, sort of very nervous. He was at the - the Woodend fire a couple of weeks ago and he had to - ended up in hospital with a lung full of bad smoke. It is horrendous, and I - I really despise whoever would start a fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: I can completely understand your nervousness about him.

CALLER HELEN: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: What about him, he himself, is he nervous?

CALLER HELEN: No. No. He - he - he is very, very in control. They've got a good group of guys that go out to these fires from the Broadford station. They're - they're all very committed. He's been spending 24/7 up at the fire - up at the fire station for the last 10 days. So they're there on call, and he was instrumental in putting out a fire next to one of the hotels, through his quick thinking, they didn't wait for any more - any more trucks to arrive and they just went and they managed to save one of the houses, otherwise it would have gone up in smoke.

TONYA ROBERTS: Which is just terrific. I mean, you must be very proud.

CALLER HELEN: I am. And I just don't think people give them enough credit for what they do, I really don't.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, certainly not all the little ones that we don't hear about in between. I guess on big days like today, we all salute them, and it's easy to do it publicly and well.

CALLER HELEN: Exactly.

TONYA ROBERTS: But, as you say, all that other work that goes on in between, and, I mean, we just heard, didn't we, from the Incident Control Centre --

CALLER HELEN: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- that there is a - there is a house that is on fire.

CALLER HELEN: Yes, yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Somewhere in that Wandong fire, and the people probably - well, I'll use his words so that I'm accurate - either they're in it or they can't get out on the road.

CALLER HELEN: That's right. That's right.

TONYA ROBERTS: That - that has got to end very, very tragically, that situation, and your son's there.

CALLER HELEN: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Maybe with a hose in his hand, maybe driving a truck, whatever.

CALLER HELEN: Yes. Yes. Yes, and they - and they spend time, you know, maintaining their equipment and things like this. They're very dedicated. And they don't get paid. They don't get paid. They don't get anything for it. It's just a community thing and, as you said, I am very proud of him, because he hasn't had a - a very good life. He's - he's a bit disabled. He lost an eye in an accident. But he's out there. He's unable to get work, but he's - that's his job. He's up at the Fire Brigade and that's - that's - you know, he's there 24/7 as I said and I am - I'm very proud of him.

TONYA ROBERTS: So glad you called, Helen. Thank you.

CALLER HELEN: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Bye-bye now. It's almost 10 to 3.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire information.

STEVE MARTIN: Thank you, Tonya. Steve Martin here with some information running through the current urgent threat messages, as they - they are being released. I can also pass on to - pass on to you that power has been lost in some parts in Ballarat this afternoon in about the - the last five minutes.

But to the - the fire information as it stands. Now, we have a - an urgent threat message from the CFA in relation to the Bunyip Ridge fire. The information that goes with that is that communities of Garfield North, Tonimbuk, Labertouche, Robin Hood, Drouin West, Buln Buln, Tarago, Jindivick, Jindivick North, Longwarry, Longwarry North, Bunyip, the outskirts of Drouin townships are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken. There is also heavy spotting of fires in relation to - to that.

Now, I can also tell you that ABC Gippsland is broadcasting localised updates with more extensive information, so if you are in that part of the state, you can tune in to 100.7 FM. 100.7 FM or 828 AM for ABC local radio. That's ABC Gippsland. And they are providing detailed information this afternoon for you.

Another major fire, which is the subject of an urgent threat message, is the Remlaw fire. It's burning west of Horsham city. Currently burning in a south-westerly direction. A westerly wind change is due between 3 and 6 o'clock today. Communities currently under threat are Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungally or Bungalally, I think, and Green Lake. When the wind change comes through the area, the communities on the eastern side of the Western Highway - so that's the eastern side of the Western Highway - between Drung Drung South and Horsham may be under threat as well.

There are road closures in place for that fire. The Western Highway between Dadswells Bridge and Horsham; the Henty Highway north of Wonwondah; Golf Course Road is closed at the intersection of the - the Henty Highway; the Horsham-Noradjuha Road - I hope I've pronounced that correctly - closed at Lower Norton to the Wimmera Highway; and the Wimmera Highway between Horsham and Noradjuha Road. An emergency relief centre is located at the Horsham Town Hall. There - so that's the latest information on that Remlaw fire.

Now, for listeners in that Horsham area, we are broadcasting also through our ABC Western Victoria studios in Horsham. You can tune your radio to 594 on the AM band. 594 AM, and you will receive detailed updates on that fire. That's the Remlaw fire, currently burning west of Horsham city.

The other urgent threat messages: there's one that's just been issued for the Kilmore East fire. A grass and scrub fire burning 4 kilometres east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road. It's burning in a southerly direction and is estimated to be 638 hectares in size. The community of Wandong may be directly impacted upon by this fire, "imminently" is the word. So that's the - the fire east of Kilmore. The community of Wandong may be directly impacted upon this fire imminently.

The Camperdown-Danedite Road fire. Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement, Swan Marsh communities, there's a grass fire burning approximately 7 kilometres east of Camperdown, the south side of the Princes Highway. It poses a threat and residents are asked to enact their bushfire survival plans, and you should have those up and running if you have chosen to stay for today.

The latest information I have on the Glendonald Road fire is that it's burning 1 kilometre south-east of Churchill near the pine plantation, south-easterly direction. Communities of Hazelwood South and Jeeralang, Jeeralang North and Jeeralang Junction may be impacted upon by this fire. Once again, if you are in that area, tune in to ABC Gippsland, 100.7 FM or 828 AM for those frequencies for further detailed fire information.

The Glenelg Highway fire. Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire, burning immediately west of Coleraine, burning in an

easterly direction. Crossed the Coleraine Balmoral Road. Currently, communities of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay may be impacted upon by this fire also.

And just scanning down this screen at the moment, Tonya, I think that's it for the urgent threat messages. However - well, I've just refreshed the screen and nothing's changed from when I started talking, so that's at least some good news. That's the - the latest urgent threat messages from the CFA.

[2.53pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. Well, thank you, Steve. Now, I think when you are going through them and you see that word "imminent", which I guess we all know means now --

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- that's when it really - it comes alive, doesn't it, and when you think about the peaking of temperatures around about this time of the day across the state, it's - it's going to be the next couple of hours, clearly, that are even more problematic than the rest of the day has already been.

STEVE MARTIN: Now, Tonya, I did just have a quick look at the - the Weather Bureau site in between the updates as well.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm-hmm.

STEVE MARTIN: Mount Gellibrand, which is just on the outskirts of Colac, is recording wind speeds of up to 100-kilometre-an-hour gusts at this stage, and it was having - well, the regular wind is about 87 kilometres an hour. The gusts are 106 kilometres an hour. So they are still blowing fiercely from a nor-nor-westerly direction.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm. And you can get a little bit disassociated from it, can't you. You're sitting there in an airconditioned studio, so am I. But to be standing out there in that hour after hour after hour and trying to make good decisions about --

STEVE MARTIN: Oh --

TONYA ROBERTS: -- wise decisions about things to do, it's a remarkable job.

STEVE MARTIN: What - yeah, what to do when and all that sort of stuff. And, like I said at the start of that, we lost power just prior to - to me doing those updates, in the studio, and we've got a generator here, but I've had a couple of phone calls telling me that power is out in Ballarat at the moment.

TONYA ROBERTS: And you don't know how widely that is at this stage?

STEVE MARTIN: No, I don't. I know it is at home.

TONYA ROBERTS: Okay.

STEVE MARTIN: But other than that, at this stage, no --

TONYA ROBERTS: The Martin household is down.

STEVE MARTIN: The Martin household.

TONYA ROBERTS: But we'll --

STEVE MARTIN: I'll do a bit of investigating.

TONYA ROBERTS: There are other important people in Ballarat, too.

STEVE MARTIN: Yes. [Laughs]

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. We'll hear from you on the next round on that score. Thanks, Steve.

STEVE MARTIN: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Steve Martin, and his reminder there, of course: for detailed local coverage, get on to either Horsham - and you'll know which one is relevant to you - Horsham, that 594 on the AM band, or Gippsland ABC, 100.7 or - on the FM band or 828 on the AM band. Both those will work for you.

Bernice has rung in. She's in Churchill this afternoon and watching the Jeeralang fire. Hi, Bernice. The Churchill phones are playing havoc with us. It may

just be the Melbourne studio phones. Bernice, how's that?

CALLER BERNICE: Oh, it's good.

TONYA ROBERTS: Good.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes. Yes. I'm outside Churchill on a little farm and my son's next door and then I've got another son around at Jeeralang Junction, and we've all opted to stay, and we've got our water ready and our - in our buckets and our hoses ready, and I've been watching the flames for quite a while up on the ridge, and it's just, sort of, one hill sort of coming down to meet the - the grass where we are, kind of thing.

TONYA ROBERTS: So are you in a bit of a valley, Bernice?

CALLER BERNICE: Well, we're on the flat.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm-hmm.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes, which is sort of looking in on to the town and we can see the Glendonald area of the township of - of Churchill.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes. So I - I just want to congratulate the firemen. They're doing a marvellous job. They - every time you see the flames licking high, they come out with the helicopters. And there's two running, and they've really saved the whole situation, really.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh, now, that's good.

CALLER BERNICE: It is a big fire, but, you know - like it would have been here by now, otherwise, you know.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, that's terrific that you can still see those helicopters operating.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Because a couple of the incident controllers that we've spoken to have said they've simply had to stop sending the aircraft up.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Because of the winds.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: But perhaps it's slightly more moderate, where you are.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes. Yes. So, yeah, it's - the township would be under great threat if they weren't about, I can tell you that.

TONYA ROBERTS: And, Bernice, have you done this before? Have you defended your own property against --

CALLER BERNICE: Yes, yes, I have. When we were living --

TONYA ROBERTS: You sound very calm.

CALLER BERNICE: Yes. Well, I lived in Jeeralang Junction where my son is now, and we had fires just over the ridge from us in the past, and had embers dropping, and, yes. I - I guess when you live in the - in the country, you - you tend to have a very calm attitude, because if you don't stay calm, everybody panics, and - and it becomes a disaster, then. The - you know, it can come to a stage where your men folk get in a panic because of the children, and - yeah, you've just got to stay calm and be the centre of the family, really.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, it sounds like you're doing a terrific job of that and we hope that things play out well for you over the rest of today.

It's almost 3 o'clock. We'll have the news, of course, at 3. But Megan Flamer's just come into the studio. Hi, Megan.

MEGAN FLAMER: Hi, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: And I know you've been trying to compile some road closure data. There's so much of it.

MEGAN FLAMER: There is a lot at the moment.

TONYA ROBERTS: But we'll start with it now and if we

extend across the news, we will.

MEGAN FLAMER: No worries. The Hume Freeway at Wallan to Broadford. The police have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between both towns due to smoke from a large fire reducing visibility. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore, and Broadford, using the Northern Highway and the Broadford-Kilmore Road.

At the Bunyip State Park, east of Melbourne, there are local road closures. Beenak Road at Gembrook Launching Place Road; Tims Corner and Jacksons Track; McDonald Street at Jacksons Track as well; Old Sale Road at Main Neerim Road West, that's in Robin Hood; also the Princes Way near the Princes Freeway in Robin Hood; Sand Road - you might know it as the Koo Wee Rup-Longwarry Road - at Princes Freeway; also Longwarry North, Tynong North Road at the Princes Freeway in Tynong North; the Tonimbuk Road at the Princes Freeway; and the Princes Freeway south of Bunyip State Park in Bunyip. And the Princes Freeway is also closed at the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road, Racecourse Road in Pakenham. All traffic there is being detoured via the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road, South Gippsland Highway, to Korumburra then to Warragul via the Korumburra-Warragul Road. And they're saying that motorists expecting to travel between Pakenham and Warragul should plan their trip, expect to be detoured at - at short notice. Don't bother contacting VicRoads, because we've just been on hold to them for half an hour. They're really inundated. If you're unsure, you can call the - the Victorian Bushfire Information Line. That's 1800 240 667.

TONYA ROBERTS: And all that information you've just shared with us, did that come from the VicRoads website?

MEGAN FLAMER: Yes, yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Okay, so that's another avenue for people.

MEGAN FLAMER: They've got a new tab on there that says "Emergency Closures". So if you are planning a trip, that's the perfect way to do it.

TONYA ROBERTS: Terrific. Well, thank you, Megan. We will repeat all that, of course, at some point, and we'll update you on trains as well, because there are all these train lines affected, as we know, both across the west and

the east of the state now. More to come, of course, news now at 3 o'clock.

[News beeps and music]

[3pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good afternoon Alicia Byrne with ABC News. Fires burning in west Gippsland and the Strzelecki Ranges are threatening a growing number of towns and rural communities. Mark DeBono reports.

MARK DeBONO: The fire in the Bunyip State Forest north of the Princes Highway was started by lightning earlier this week and has now burnt through 160 hectares. Strong winds are driving the fire and embers south. Bunyip, Longwarry and the outskirts of the Drouin township are experiencing ember attacks and a number of small spot fires have been reported. Warnings have been issued for Labertouche, Robin Hood, Jindivick and Tonimbuk. The Victorian Ambulance Service is evacuating people from aged care homes at Neerim and Bunyip.

Another fire is burning a kilometre south of Churchill in the Latrobe Valley and is throwing embers and spot fires towards Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North, Balook and concerns are also held for Traralgon South. Fire authorities are now concerned that houses and other buildings will be lost in the fires. Mark DeBono, ABC News, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: Homes at Wandong, north of Melbourne, are in the path of a large fire that's heading south from Kilmore East. The fire has already burnt through 640 hectares, and the CFA says homes will be hit by the fire. It's burning along Saunders Road and gaining intensity as it moves toward pine plantations. The Hume Highway has already been closed south of Kilmore. ABC reporter James Bennett says residents in the area have been preparing for the fire's arrival.

JAMES BENNETT: Certainly the state here for residents is one of - one of really realising that it is indeed time to go. The fire is extremely close. The flames are visible on the hillside and it can't be too long before the fire really will be encroaching on all of these houses.

ALICIA BYRNE: Crews are struggling to contain a fire threatening communities on the southern edge of Horsham in western Victoria. Peter Lenaghan reports.

PETER LENAGHAN: The fire started on Horsham's western edge and is being fanned by gusty winds across the city's southern outskirts. The deputy incident controller, Graham Parkes, says the fire's burned more than 300 hectares.

GRAHAM PARKES: Currently we have 40 fire-fighting tankers working on this fire, two aircraft, five graders and three dozers. We are putting every effort to contain this fire.

PETER LENAGHAN: The CFA says the fire's threatening properties in the Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally and Green Lake districts. A wind change, due soon, is expected to turn the fire towards the Western Highway between Horsham and Drung Drung South. Several roads have been closed and an emergency relief centre's been established at the Horsham Town Hall.

ALICIA BYRNE: The CFA has told residents of numerous towns that could be threatened by fires to immediately enact their bushfire survival plans. A blaze burning near Coleraine in Victoria's south-west has crossed the Coleraine Balmoral Road after earlier jumping the Glenelg Highway. It's heading east and residents of Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay are being warned to be on alert.

A grass fire east of Camperdown is posing a threat to homes on the Scoullers Road and Carters Road, as well as the community of Swan Marsh.

Bushfires have forced the cancellation of several country rail services. There are no trains between Melbourne and Bairnsdale or between Geelong and Warrnambool due to a grass fire at Colac. Services between Melbourne and Shepparton have also been suspended due to the fire at Wandong. V/Line is urging people to defer non-essential travel and says there are no replacement bus services to Gippsland but some have been arranged for Warrnambool. Connex has cancelled 23 metropolitan rail services and more are expected as a result of the V/Line cancellations.

And Melbourne has recorded it's hottest February day on record, with the mercury reaching 46-point - 46 degrees

at 27 past 2 this afternoon. The mercury reached 47.4 at Avalon, between Melbourne and Geelong, while 46.8 has been recorded at Laverton. In regional areas, it's reached 46 degrees at Mildura, 46 at Yarrawonga and 45.3 at Aireys Inlet.

To the weather now, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the state for today. There's also a gale warning between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, also for Port Phillip and Western Port.

For the state, very hot with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally, south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust. Isolated light showers in the south near the change.

On the bays, northerlies 25 to 35 knots tending north-westerly early this afternoon, ahead of a 25- to 35-knot south-west change late afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with the change. Seas to 2 and a half metres.

For Melbourne, dry, mostly sunny with areas of raised dust, windy with a late cool change. For tomorrow, windy, then a shower or two and 23. Monday, a late shower - a light shower or two and 21. Tuesday, a light shower or two and a top of 20. In Melbourne, it's 45 degrees. This is ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network.

[3.05pm]

RICHARD STUBBS: Good afternoon, it's 5 past 3. It's Richard Stubbs speaking. I know that strikes you as a little surprising because it is, after all, a Saturday, but, you know, I was sitting at home listening to all this, I got worried about you. So for the next couple of hours, I'll be with you, and together we'll work our way through the many fires that are happening across our state, and I'll be updating you with all that's happening in terms of

emergency services, road closures, power outages and, just generally, talking about how we're surviving in something you don't hear, the news person throwing to me with the words "and in Melbourne it's 45 degrees." 1300 222 774 is the number, or you can SMS 19 774 774. Fill me in. What's happening in your area? You tell me what you can see, tell me what you're experiencing. It doesn't matter if you are wandering around the suburbs or if you are at one of the fire centres. And there are many of the fire centres. I've made Tonya stay behind, exhausted as she is, because I want to find out exactly what's going on. Hey, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, Hi, Richard, we do all move into another gear, don't we?

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. What's the story so far? Fill me in from your perspective.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, at a quarter to one today the first threat message was actually issued. I mean, everybody's been on alert, clearly, all day and yesterday leading up to it and days before that. But the actual threat alert, threat message, came through at 12.45. That was the Bunyip fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm-hmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: So we're talking about the Drouin area, the Longwarry area, and so on.

Now, since then, at least eight more separate fires have started across the state and of most concern are the ones at Wandong - I'll just list this in no particular order: Wandong; Bunyip; Remlaw - that's the Horsham area; Caramut; Coleraine; Churchill; the grass fire that's at Colac - that's at the Swan Marsh/Colac fire; and the Delburn area where there is a smoke report.

So what we're saying to people, in terms of their local information, is that they need to go to their much-loved local ABC station. So if you are anywhere around that western Victoria area and you want more information, you go to the Horsham ABC.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: Which is 594 on the dial. If you are in

Gippsland, then it's 100.7 on the FM dial and 828 on the AM dial. So, really, I guess I'm saying there are eight there, but in fact the way the CFA described it about 20 minutes ago was that there are now six major fires across the state, and the significant thing is that they're all burning in highly populated areas.

RICHARD STUBBS: I think that was one of the things I really got through - that you really got through to me as I was listening to you, that these aren't fires burning in bushland that's inaccessible; these are fires burning close to where people live and it is of critical importance that we keep updating them.

What - I'm going to go through what you've been doing, which is talking to all these organisations and finding out more detail from them, but, from your perspective, how do you feel? Are the CFA ahead on points at the moment? Is the fire ahead on points at the moment? Which do you think, just from the tone and the way they're dealing with it? How are we going?

TONYA ROBERTS: It's not a competition, but I think that they, having had the - the forecast of the weather that they've had, they've been as physically prepared as they could be.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm. Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: I think these guys are incredible about putting their emotions to one side and just doing the job.

RICHARD STUBBS: No question. I'm just wondering, are they - are they succeeding? Are these fines in control, on the edge?

TONYA ROBERTS: Right now, it's no worse than they thought it was going to be, until that report just came through, and I think the language is significant, the guy in the CFA uniform sitting at the desk and it comes through scrolling on his screen, saying, "There's a structure fire" at Wandong.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm. Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Someone's house is on fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: And they can't account for the people.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: And I said, "Are the people in it?", and he said, "Well, they're either in the house or they won't be able to get out of that road."

RICHARD STUBBS: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: So when something like that happens, I think that's when they start to say, "Uh-uh, it just got worse than we anticipated."

RICHARD STUBBS: Yes, absolutely. And of course it is critical, if you are unsure, that you should have already put your fire protection plan in place. If you are going to decide to leave your property, you must leave it early. Don't wait. The roads will become clogged with smoke, it will become dangerous on the roads. You need to make that decision very early and if the decision is to leave your property, go. Don't wait. It's critical. But if the decision is to stay and fight, then, hopefully, your plan is ready and you've activated it.

TONYA ROBERTS: And I think, Richard, that the other significant thing is that probably until about, I don't know, two hours ago, it was - it was a weather story.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: And now it's a fire story.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay.

TONYA ROBERTS: We've - we've stopped dwelling on the fact that it's the hottest day in the city of Melbourne since ever, for February, and it's now fire. It's just about the fire and - and people's safety.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Tonya, thank you so much. You go away, have a little lie down and stroll around. In the meantime, 1300 222 774. You can SMS 19 774 774. It is Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. I want to be with you for the next couple of hours, and just tell me what's going on

in your area. You put us all in the picture. What - what you've experienced so far and what you can see on a day of incredible heat, where, as you and I are going about our normal things, talking to each other about, "Gee, isn't it hot?", other Victorians are standing in front of fire walls, dressed in the hottest gear they can find and are desperately fighting against fire. I couldn't imagine a more terrifying thing to attempt to do. I couldn't imagine having to walk towards the walls of fire that are in some of the areas that we've been talking about, and so if you are listening and you are a part of those teams, take care of each other in whatever you're doing. It's important, the job you do, but not as important as taking care of each other.

1300 222 774. You can SMS 19 774 774. I will be updating you over the next little while with road closures, emergency services, reports, but right now, I'd like to hear from you. What's going on where you are. Patrick's in Warrnambool. Hi, Patrick.

CALLER PATRICK: Yes, we've - the temperature's dropped out here to 25 degrees now.

RICHARD STUBBS: Wow, that is good news. How long ago did that happen, Patrick?

CALLER PATRICK: Oh, about the last half an hour. And it's a strong south-easterly, but it's quite a pleasant day out here now. So it's - it's back to 25, so. It never got much - much over 32-or-3, so we've had a pleasant day down along the beach.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yeah, well, that's nice for you, and - but I hope that that cool change is the echo of something that we're going to experience sooner rather than later:

The wind blowing an absolute gale.

says this SMS --

Fire could be on top of us before we knew it. Thank you.

That's from Maureen:

Without taking too much of your time I just

want to say that ABC Radio's invaluable on days like today. Here in Skipton right now it's 44 and dust everywhere.

"There's a fire at Traralgon", says this SMS. Some of these SMSs that are coming, you can tell people are absolutely rushed and they are just simply quickly sending an SMS to us to give us some information. You can be a part of that if you have more time. Don't risk your own safety at any moment, even to talk to us and tell - tell me what's happening. You keep yourself safe. But 1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. Lynne's in Ringwood. Hi, Lynne.

CALLER LYNNE: Hi, I was just coming back home from work, it's down Croydon Road, and found these four teenage kids panting on the side of the road, and I've just driven them back to Ringwood, because they were going to try and walk from Croydon to Ringwood, and the temperature in the outside of my car was 50 degrees on the Maroondah Highway.

RICHARD STUBBS: Look, you are the second person, and it's a great thing to remind ourselves, as we're dealing with the emergency fires, if you see someone in trouble walking around, whether it's in Melbourne, the city, or whether it's in any of the areas where you are, stop and help. Heat - heat distress happens very quickly, and it's a disorientating distress, and so you often don't know it's upon you. I was speaking to someone today, there's a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses out there without hats, water, knocking on doors. I know, if you are normally short with those people, today may be the day to offer them a drink.

I will be updating you throughout the hour. In fact, let's go now to Steve Martin, who's coming hard now in just a moment and he'll update us with our threats.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire information.

[3.13pm]

STEVE MARTIN: Thank you, Richard. Steve Martin here with a run-through of the current urgent threat messages as they

stand from the CFA.

The most recent update to the threat messages is for the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire. The fire has now crossed the Princes Highway heading east towards Pomborneit North. Residents in the Pomborneit North area need to implement their fire survival plans immediately. That fire, the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire, has crossed the Princes Highway, it is heading east towards Pomborneit North. Residents in that area need to implement their fire survival plans immediately. Residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh communities, you are advised to remain alert for burning embers. That's the latest update for the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire.

The other urgent threat messages which continue. The Remlaw Road fire. I will just update this information. It's burning west of Horsham city, burning in a south-westerly direction. Westerly wind change due between 3 and 6 today. Communities under threat at the moment: Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally, Green Lake. When the wind change comes through that area, the communities on the eastern side of the Western Highway between Drung Drung South and Horsham may be under threat. Now, I just had a call from a resident in that part of the - of the world, too, to find out the latest. If you want to know the latest, you can tune in to ABC Western Victoria for current information on that fire on ABC - or on AM, I should say, 594. 594 on the AM band for regularly updated information on that fire.

[3.15pm]

The threat message for the Kilmore East fire: 4 kilometres east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road, burning in a southerly direction, estimated to be 638 hectares. Community of Wandong may be directly impacted upon by this fire imminently. That update was issued over half an hour ago. So be aware that that "imminently" the message of that being imminent was half an hour ago. It hasn't been updated on the - the CFA information at this point, but worth repeating to you.

And the Bunyip Ridge fire: urgent threat message for the communities of Garfield North, Tonimbuk, Labertouche, Robin Hood, Drouin West, Buln Buln, Tarago, Jindivick, Jindivick North, Longwarry, Longwarry North, Bunyip and the

outskirts of Drouin townships. They're experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken and heavy spotting. Once again, I will remind listeners in that part of Victoria, you can tune into ABC Gippsland. The frequencies for ABC Gippsland, if you are unfamiliar: 100.7 on the FM band; 828 AM. They're the two choices of - or the -the choices of frequency you have. 100.7 FM or 828 AM for detailed updates on fires in the Gippsland region, specifically that Bunyip Ridge fire, but other fires in that region as well.

Glendonald Road fire, burning 1 K south-east of Churchill near pine plantation, south-easterly direction, communities of Hazelwood South and Jeeralang and Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction may be impacted upon by this fire. That advice is still also current.

And the Coleraine-Glenelg Highway fire, burning immediately west of Coleraine in an easterly direction. The fire's crossed the Coleraine-Balmoral Road. Communities: Muntham, Coleraine and Hilgay are - are still being warned of a threat in relation to that fire.

But, as I say, the - the most recently updated one that we have is the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire. It's - that fire's crossed the Princes Highway heading east towards Pomborneit North. If you are in Pomborneit North you need to implement your fire survival plans immediately Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh communities remain alert for burning embers. That's the latest advice from the - the CFA and, Richard, I'll do what I have done every other time --

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm-hmm.

STEVE MARTIN: -- just double-check, double - I will just refresh that page. And in the time I've been speaking, there is a new threat message for Kilmore East. The - the community of Hidden Valley has been added into that Kilmore East fire. It may be directly impacted upon by this fire within 60 minutes, and that advice has just come through. So 4 kilometres east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road, south - southerly direction. It's now about 1,000 hectares in size. So that's jumped up 4 hectares - 400 hectares in the last little bit.

[3.18pm]

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, that's an enormous list of threat messages and fires.

STEVE MARTIN: I know.

RICHARD STUBBS: And I hope everyone who heard their communities mentioned is able to pass the word to people who perhaps didn't hear them. Steve, thank you so much.

STEVE MARTIN: My pleasure. I'll be here --

RICHARD STUBBS: You'll be updating us, of course, throughout the day. It is quite incredible the amount of threat messages you've had to get through. Thank you, so much. Steve Martin, part of the ABC team who's bringing you updates as they occur in our situation across the state.

It is, of course, an incredibly hot day. It is the day that we feared would impact on our fires, and it certainly has proven to that. 1300 222 774. You can SMS 19 774 774. Kay is in Heathcote. Hi, Kay. Sorry, I will go to --

CALLER KAY: Yeah, I was --

RICHARD STUBBS: Kay's - hey, Kay, how are you doing?

CALLER KAY: Good.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sorry, whereabouts, are you, Kinglake?

CALLER KAY: I'm at Kinglake.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER KAY: Yep. And I was just sitting here watching the wall of smoke just come across, and it's just black, like a storm cloud, and it's just completely blocked out the sun.

RICHARD STUBBS: Whereabouts is the fire coming from, if you're sitting in Kinglake?

CALLER KAY: Well, that would be the Kilmore-Wandong fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: Which, as we've just heard --

CALLER KAY: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- has had another threat message, and among the thousand hectares.

CALLER KAY: I assume, I hope. It - I mean, if I didn't know about those fires, I'd say we're about to be hit by a wall of flames.

RICHARD STUBBS: Kay, have you got anything prepared for embers, just in case?

CALLER KAY: To be honest, no. I actually live in a little old miner's shack in the middle of the bush with 13 dogs, who I have real hassles to get out if there's - if it does hit me, because I've got problems with my car.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, you better get - better get --

CALLER KAY: So I am listening to you avidly to try and organise something, so yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, I'll keep you posted. I'll certainly be thinking of you. Make sure you get at least a mop and bucket, Kay, so you --

CALLER KAY: Oh, I've definitely got that.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay. So you've got all that gear. And whereabouts are the dogs at the moment?

CALLER KAY: Half are inside and the other half chained up under big trees --

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay.

CALLER KAY: -- to keep them as cool as possible, but they're all - they're all safe from dehydration and anything, but, yeah, they'll all have to pile in the car with me. [Laughs]

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay. Well, you keep an eye on it. Keep listening to us. I will be updating you throughout today.

CALLER KAY: I am, and thank you very much for that.

RICHARD STUBBS: Thanks Kay.

CALLER KAY: No worries.

RICHARD STUBBS: 1300 222 774, or you can SMS 19 774 774. Fill me in. Tell me what's going in your area; what's - what are you seeing? Are you like Kay, are you seeing the side effects of the smoke that's blowing your way, or are you actually right there, where the fires are heading. For more information about fires, their location and how to prepare a bushfire plan, if you haven't already, then please call the Bushfire Information Line, 1800 240 667. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: Homes are confirmed destroyed in the Darlimurla and --

MALE SPEAKER: I've lost everything and I don't know where to start.

MALE SPEAKER: Victoria's Gippsland region has been affected by fire and some of the people of the region have been left with nothing after losing their homes and personal belongings to devastating bushfires. ABC Victoria is encouraging all listeners to help victims of the recent bushfires by making a donation to relieffund.org.au. That's relieffund.org.au. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

RICHARD STUBBS: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon.

[3.21pm]

Twenty-one past 3 as you and I work through what is an incredibly hot day in Victoria's history, and with the combination of a drought and the winds that are around, it was feared that this would be a day that we would long remember as a terrible fire day. So far, it is fulfilling all expectations. We have at least six major fires burning, and the critical thing with the fires that have seemed to be burning at the moment - we'll get a clearer picture a little later on - is that they're - most of them

are burning close to habitation. SMS 19 774 774 or, of course, you can call, 1300 222 774. Roger's in Bendigo. Hey, Rog. Hey, Rog, how are you doing?

CALLER ROGER: Yeah, good, thanks, mate. Yourself?

RICHARD STUBBS: Not too bad. What can you see there?

CALLER ROGER: Well, we're not too bad smoke-wise, fire-wise up here.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm-hmm.

CALLER ROGER: But - but the point I'd - I'd like to make it is can good come out of bad. This will make some people - make a lot of people living on bush blocks really look at their fire protection. This is the scariest I've ever seen it. It is spooky.

RICHARD STUBBS: What's the - what's the actual weather like where you are? Is there strong winds?

CALLER ROGER: It's hot and - hot and strong winds. You just - if you put a garden hose out there, it was just like, you know, just like peeing into the wind. It just would do nothing.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm, mmm.

CALLER ROGER: So if you had a - you had a bush block, you need to look at how good your pump is, your water supply. It's going to make a lot of people really have a look around, I think.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think I heard a comparison between today and Ash Wednesday in terms of conditions, and one of the points they were making is that we're much more organised, we're much more aware, things like the ABC provide emergency services broadcast, and you are quite right, it is one thing to have a plan, it's another thing to see how your plan goes up against the reality of something that's as intense as what we're experiencing across the state now.

CALLER ROGER: Because there's - there's been an awful lot of people move onto bush blocks after Ash Wednesday.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm.

CALLER ROGER: So this - this is a real wake-up call.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Thanks, Rog.

CALLER ROGER: Thanks, mate.

RICHARD STUBBS: If - if you'd like to give a call, 1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. This SMS says:

> A wall of orange dust has moved through Craigieburn with the wind rattling. This house is built on a slab. It sounds like a jumbo jet's hovering above us.

Can I just put out a word, too, to be aware that your animals will be in stress. If you have animals out in the heat at the moment, you need to be looking after them as well, and also be aware that there will be wildlife fleeing these fires and you will need to contact wildlife carers to try and assist with them. Perhaps even just doing something like providing a source of water, a bird bath or a baby's bath in your backyard, purely for animals as they're bolting from the fires. There's going to be suffering all around the species - flora, fauna and of course us - as a result of today.

1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. James Bennett is our ABC reporter, somewhere between Wandong and Heathcote Junction, to tell us what's happening with the Wandong fire. Are you there, James?

JAMES BENNETT: Yes, good afternoon, Richard.

RICHARD STUBBS: James, whereabouts are you? What can you see?

JAMES BENNETT: Look, at the moment we're on a - a narrow road between the two towns and there are areas of the paddocks to our left burning and trees beginning to burn on the road just in front of us. This was a road which we traversed probably only about 10 minutes ago and saw some amazing walls of flame coming up a valley at extreme speed towards a house which, given the direction this fire has gone in, I would now presume may well have been destroyed. It's - it's a picture of people on the run here. Certainly

the point you made about wildlife, there's lots of very scared kangaroos around and what appears to be water-bombing aircraft circling, some of which, I think, are having quite some difficulty in gaining access to water, because there - there seems to be a lot of moving about but with very little in terms of being able to actually make an impact on this blaze.

RICHARD STUBBS: I wanted to ask you, you mentioned water bombers and I can hear one in the background, well, what I think is one in the background. How many other emergency services vehicles are in your area. Are there units fighting the fire around you or have - has everyone pulled back?

JAMES BENNETT: There - there are no units within our immediate vicinity on the ground. A lot of those have been concentrated further north, they're attempting to protect property up around the Wandong area, and certainly we're on the western fringe of this blaze that's moved south, and you can probably hear that those water-bombing aircraft are extremely close by now, as they try and prevent this blaze coming any further to the west and affecting property in the Heathcote Junction area.

RICHARD STUBBS: James, what's the - what's the weather conditions at the moment? How strong is the wind?

JAMES BENNETT: The wind is certainly quite gusty, Richard. It's - it's probably - I would hazard a guess it's of gusts of around 75 to 80 kilometres an hour. It's - it's probably not at its - at its most destructive. There were a couple of passages just, as I was describing earlier, when - near the house further up this road, where the - the wind increased almost instantaneously and there was an intense roaring as the blaze came up the hill towards this area, and - and actually, at the moment, there's a small spot fire just developing in the bushes and some of the trees just next to us on this road, so I might cut this conversation short, if that's okay.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely, James. I was just about to say, you keep yourself safe.

JAMES BENNETT: Will do.

RICHARD STUBBS: And - and then get - mainly because

I don't have another reporter in that area so - you know. [Laughs] James look after yourself. Thank you so much, James Bennett, ABC reporter, who, as you can hear, is right in the middle of what sounds like a war zone. It is a war zone. We're in the middle of fighting a war against the bushfires that are raging across our state.

It is one of the hottest days on record and, of course, you don't need to be told that the combination of hot winds, this extreme dryness and the fuel that lies around under our forests has been sufficient to trigger off at least six major fires, major fire fronts. There are lots of little fires that are impacting on homes and, of course, as James said, our wildlife. Also be aware that if you can leave water out, if you can help them in any way, they're - they'll be desperate as well.

Michael's in Wandin North. Michael? That's - I will try and get up to Michael.

CALLER MICHAEL: G-day, mate, Richard, how are you going?

RICHARD STUBBS: Hey, Michael, not too bad. How's things where you are?

CALLER MICHAEL: Mate, at the moment, it's just quite hot. Struggling a bit with the - with the heat, and fortunate enough to have a pool and I just went out for a quick dip and I've actually got quite a lot of black ash in the pool.

RICHARD STUBBS: I've just heard about fires in between Wandong and Heathcote Junction. Where are you in relation to that?

CALLER MICHAEL: Well, I'm actually out of the eastern suburb of Wandin North, which is sort of Lilydale area.

RICHARD STUBBS: Beautiful. Sorry, I'm --

CALLER MICHAEL: Yeah, obviously the wind is picking it up and - and throwing these embers quite a long way to, to, like I said, for them to end up in my pool, so --

RICHARD STUBBS: If you are starting to get that kind of thing coming near you, have you enacted any of the kind of procedures you need to - like have you got a mop and bucket nearby?

CALLER MICHAEL: Oh, I've certainly got - I've certainly got things ready on stand-by, but I'm - I'm certainly hoping that it doesn't come to it, and I'm certainly hoping that all around it, the - the guys out there that are doing their jobs get on - get on top of it very quickly, and - so we don't have too much loss.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Yeah.

CALLER MICHAEL: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: And the - one of the critical things, of course, is that people can only work for so long in these extreme conditions before they need to be spelled and replaced, and that's what's happening all the time today, but eventually, even with the thousands of volunteers working, that we are going to run out of fit bodies to get in the path of these fires. I --

CALLER MICHAEL: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: I can't think about how incredibly brave that is, to be doing that kind of work.

CALLER MICHAEL: No, well, actually - I actually was a member of the SES for a while, so. Yeah, I - I sort of - in a way, sort of know what - what they are going through to a certain degree. I certainly haven't faced a wall of fire. However, I have spent, you know, hours and hours searching in bush and stuff for lost people and so forth. So, you know --

RICHARD STUBBS: You know all about the team work. You know all about the --

CALLER MICHAEL: I take my - I take my hat off to them, I tell you.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely.

CALLER MICHAEL: Because, you know, it's like a - like an army of ants, they are. They're very well drilled and everything, and they know what they're about. So, yeah, all I can do is wish them all the best and hopefully they get on top of them soon.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. The same for all of us, Michael. It is 3.30 and we'll check in with Alicia Byrne with the news headline.

[3.30pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Thanks, Richard. A growing number of towns are being threatened by fires burning in west Gippsland and the Strzelecki Ranges. The fire in the Bunyip State Forest north of the Princes Highway was started by lightning earlier this week and has now burnt through 160 hectares. Strong winds are driving the fire and embers south. Bunyip, Longwarry and the outskirts of the Drouin township are experiencing ember attacks, and a number of small spot fires have been reported. Warnings have been issued for Labertouche, Robin Hood, Jindivick and Tonimbuk.

Another fire is burning a kilometre south of Churchill in the Latrobe Valley and is throwing embers and spot fires towards Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North and Balook, and concerns are also held for Traralgon South.

Crews are struggling to contain a fire threatening communities on the southern edge of Horsham in western Victoria. The fire's burnt more than 300 hectares, is threatening properties in the Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally and Green Lake districts. A wind change due soon is expected to turn the fire towards the Western Highway between Horsham and Drung Drung South.

Homes at Wandong, north of Melbourne, are in the path of a large fire that's heading south from Kilmore East. The fire has already burnt through 640 hectares and the CFA says homes will be hit. It's been burning along Saunders Road and gaining in intensity as it moves towards pine plantations. An urgent threat message has been issued for residents of Hidden Valley. Also an urgent threat message for Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh due to a fire at Camperdown.

To the weather now. The CFA has declared today a day of total fire ban for the entire state. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, including Port Phillip and Western Port.

For the state, very hot with strong and gusty north to

north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change, extending from the south-west and reaching the far north-east tomorrow. Areas of raised dust.

For Melbourne, dry, mostly sunny this afternoon before a cooler, squally, south-west to southerly change expected late this afternoon. For tomorrow, windy with a shower or two, 23. Monday, light showers, 21, and Tuesday, a light shower or two, 20. Right now in Melbourne it's 45 degrees. Next news at 4.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your Emergency Services Network. Bushfire information.

[3.32pm]

STEVE MARTIN: Twenty-eight minutes to 4. Steve Martin here on ABC Victoria. Just a bit of a quick update on the Remlaw fire from Horsham, some information that's come through. Fire fighters from the CFA and DSE are fighting that fire. It's west of Horsham city. It's currently burnt around 1800 hectares and the advice is asset protection is the priority of fire crews. Now, the CFA has confirmed that the Horsham Golf Club, three houses, several sheds and the Dimboola Brigade unit have been destroyed in the battle against that blaze. The fire fighters from the Dimboola brigade unit are well and they are back on the fire line, is the advice from the CFA. So the Horsham Golf Club, three houses, several sheds and the Dimboola Brigade unit have been destroyed. Fire fighters, however, from that unit are safe.

Currently 50 CFA tankers, 35 DSE units and 300 CFA and DSE personnel working on that particular fire, so it is certainly one of the - the large ones around the state.

Just a reminder, you can listen for more updated information, if you are near that fire, on ABC Western Victoria, 594 on the AM band. Prue Bentley is broadcasting.

Richard, I'll be back in about 10 minutes time with a full list of all the urgent threat messages as they stand.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, thank you so much. And although that's terrible news from Dimboola, it is great news that the Dimboola Brigade unit people have made it out safely.

STEVE MARTIN: Mmm.

RICHARD STUBBS: And, extraordinarily, have now just gone back to keep on fighting the fires.

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah, well, that's - that's the advice that we're - we're getting through. So they're in the - the Horsham fire. They've obviously been called in from - from a way away, and, yeah, well, the golf club and three houses and the sheds - doesn't list the number of sheds, so I assume maybe three or four, if it just says "several".

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm. Steve, thank you so much.

STEVE MARTIN: Thanks, Richard.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve Martin with the latest information from the CFA and he will be updating you again in about 10, 15 minutes time. We are doing lots and lots of updating to try to keep you in the picture wherever you are throughout our state, because all of us are under siege at the moment.

For the latest roads - road closures, because of smoke, because of emergency vehicles, because of all the other things, even as simple as a branch across the road, Tonya Roberts didn't go away, she just went away to find new work. Hi, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, I got reassigned the minute I - I walked out the door. In fact, we've just worked out, in fact, I'll be here until 6 o'clock tonight.

RICHARD STUBBS: Handy.

TONYA ROBERTS: And then Jon Faine is coming in after 6 o'clock.

RICHARD STUBBS: Good.

TONYA ROBERTS: So it's a real tag-team thing. And you're right Richard, sometimes the roads are closed just because of a branch, or something. Other times they're closed because the fire is actually literally jumping across the

road in front of motorists' eyes. So, police have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions now between Wallan and Broadford. Now, that is due to smoke from the large fire which is reducing visibility for motorists. The alternate route to take is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford, but what you have to do there is you actually use the Northern Highway and then the Broadford-Kilmore Road.

Now, at the Bunyip State Park, which is east of Melbourne, there are some local road closures. Beenak Road, at the Gembrook Launching Place Road, McDonald Street at Jackson's track. Old Sale Road at main Neerim Road West and Robin Hood, and the Princes Way at Princes Freeway, Robin Hood. Sand Road, which you might know as the Koo Wee Rup-Longwarry Road, at the Princes Freeway, Longwarry North. Tynong North Road at the Princes Freeway Tynong North, and Tonimbuk Road at the Princes Freeway, and the Princes Freeway itself, south of Bunyip State Park in Bunyip.

Now, it's closed at Healesville at the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road as - as well, the Princes Freeway, so that's Racecourse Road in Pakenham and you're going to be detoured, if you need to go - and I guess that's what we stress, Richard, the business about do you need to go --

RICHARD STUBBS: Critical, isn't it. Because, of course, with all of these roads choked, we have emergency vehicles flying through there, all these roads, you really need to stay away, if possible, from any of these routes into the fire areas.

TONYA ROBERTS: Particularly when you can't see too well.

RICHARD STUBBS: Especially.

TONYA ROBERTS: So all being detoured via the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road, the South Gippsland Highway to Korumburra, and then to Warragul via the Korumburra-Warragul Road. Now, if you know that area as well, I mean, that is just a real twist. So just don't do it.

Motorists expecting to travel between Pakenham and Warragul should plan their trip and expect to be detoured. Do get on to the Bushfire Information Line if you want to

know more. 1800 240 667. And now I've got a whole lot of trains information.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm-hmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: Because the stuff that's happening with trains is unprecedented. On the Gippsland line, there ain't nothing. All train services between Melbourne Traralgon and Bairnsdale are just closed. They don't - they can't really tell us at this stage what will be the case tomorrow, if you were hoping to sort of transfer your travel to tomorrow. Don't do that just yet. And the back-up road coaches can't do anything, because the Princes Highway is closed.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

TONYA ROBERTS: So that region is just out. On the Seymour line, all train services between Melbourne and Seymour/Shepparton are closed. That's because of that large fire between Wandong and Kilmore East. They are actually arranging back-up road coaches there, but it's not happening yet.

V/Line has now closed all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool on the Warrnambool line. That's that grass fire at Colac, which is the problem, and they're getting on to coaches. But V/Line also is letting us know that they've got heat/speed restrictions happening in place, and so all train travellers need at least an extra 30 minutes travel time. On the Williamstown line, because of the extreme weather, the buses are replacing the trains between Newport and Williamstown. And there's a number of metro lines affected now, too. The 4.12 - this is on the Belgrave line - the 412 city-bound from Belgrave has been cancelled. The 4.02 on the Cranbourne line, from Cranbourne, has been cancelled. The 3.32 from Epping, city-bound from Epping, has been - is gone. The 3.29 city-bound from Watergardens on the Sydenham line, likewise. The 3.27 city-bound from Upfield, the same, and, finally, the 3.26 from Werribee. So there are buses now running between Glen Waverley and Burnley stations and as of 3 o'clock this afternoon - so what's that, in the last 37 minutes - Connex says there have been 60 train cancellations.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yes. Things aren't getting better, is

what I'm hearing. They're, in fact, escalating. Tonya, thank you so much. Tonya Roberts with the latest road closures and informations on our railway lines and we'll update you again with that. That's all part of the rolling updates I'll be giving you throughout the afternoon.

If you've just tuned in, 1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon with you as we update our fire situation across the state of Victoria, not just the fire, but also our weather. At the moment, Richelle Hunt is at the Integrated Emergency Control Centre with John Haynes. Hi, Richelle?

RICHELLE HUNT: Hi, Richard, and I think I've actually just seen pretty much - I've never seen so many emergency services personnel walk into one room, around 10, 15 minutes ago, the DSE, the CFA, the police, the power companies, all different sorts of State Emergency Services personnel all walked into a large meeting room to sit down and discuss, you know, how things are - how things are rolling and whether or not what they predicted would happen would - would or have or haven't happened and what they're going to do further on. But you're right, with me I have Deputy Chief Officer John Haynes. John, what sort of conversation is going on in that room beside us there now. Is - is there sort of panic in the air at the moment?

JOHN HAYNES: No, we - we have a strategic planning unit, which is the Office of the Emergency Service Commission, DHS, CFA and DSE, and they've been working the last few days to do the "what if" scenarios. This was in our "what if" scenario, multiple fires across the state. And so they're briefing the other heads of the emergency services about the strategy for the future and possible community impact.

RICHELLE HUNT: While we've just been sitting here, Richard, and we've been listening to all of the road closures as well as talk-back callers, in that short period of time, the screen here in front of us that John works off to keep an update on where fires are hitting, it's just changing constantly, and - and the map, it's just updating now. There's another one that's just come in, it's saying that it's a large fire. The visual screen of all of the - the tag elements of fires and planes, just seems - you can barely sort of see any land mass at all now on the screen.

John, how many fires have popped up in the last 10 minutes alone?

JOHN HAYNES: Well, the last 10 minutes we had about four different fires pop up. Some of those - one of those was a smoke sighting, so it's just looking at another fire, but the other ones are actually live fires, and we had one come up at Nhill, which is still going at this stage as well, which is west of the Horsham fire, and another one at Redesdale, between Bendigo and Kilmore.

RICHELLE HUNT: Now, we heard a caller before with Richard say that, you know, areas of concern around the Horsham area, they've already lost one of the Dimboola clubs and there's a lot of sheds been lost, but you're actually really quite concerned about this area and that there may be more asset losses.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, especially around the area south of Horsham. I used to work at Horsham, and there's a lot of 5-acre allotments, you know, hobby-farm-type things, so especially with the wind change starting to come through, it's starting to - to head sort of a westerly direction, the wind at Horsham now, it's already gone through Coleraine. So that will push the flank of the fire, which becomes your fire front, which causes a fair bit of grief, and that's the - that's why this particular day is so extreme. You have a - very strong northerly winds and high temperatures, and the south-westerly wind, if you look at Coleraine, we're looking at now, or Hamilton, sorry, the wind is a south-westerly but gusting up to, you know, 55 kilometres per hour. So there's no great relief in the wind change.

RICHELLE HUNT: So if we look here across this map and across the state, what are the main fires and the main areas? I know there's probably too many to mention.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah.

RICHELLE HUNT: I - I can't believe that you can actually understand this map here when we look at all of the different symbols that are on here, but take us through across the state, what sort of areas people should be looking out for.

[3.41pm]

JOHN HAYNES: The top six at this - at the moment is: still got the Coleraine fire, which is between Hamilton and Casterton; the Remlaw Road fire, which is south-west of Horsham; the Wandong fire, or the Kilmore East fire, which is on the Hume Highway, north of Melbourne; the Weerite fire, which is west of Colac and it's into the stone country now, and that's a - that's a fair size at the moment, too, I'd have to check that, but it was growing fairly large; the - the fire that's been spewing out of the Bunyip State Park into the - you know, Labertouche, Longwarry, Drouin areas, we're into major asset protection; and the final of the big six is the one at Churchill, which is pretty well north-east of Boolarra, which had the fires last week.

RICHELLE HUNT: It's amazing, Richard, isn't it, when you were talking to one of our reporters on the ground out there and you mentioned it just sounded like, you know, a war-type-like scenario. When I look at this screen here, it's like nothing that I've ever experienced.

RICHARD STUBBS: Oh, there's - Richelle, there's - there's no doubt that we're - this is a war.

RICHELLE HUNT: Oh, yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: There's no doubt that they're fighting it as if they're army, as if they're the ADF.

One of the questions, actually, from that report, was the - the question about whether the water bombers were getting adequate supplies. Do you know - is John able to comment on how happy he is with the supplying of those?

JOHN HAYNES: I'm not sure. We've got - each of the - the helicopters that bomb have got an Air Attack Supervisor - Air Attack Supervisor with them, which is another smaller helicopter. So they normally find them the water and direct them into the water. So I haven't heard any, but, you know, some of these places are going to be pretty dry so they might have to go a bit further distance to find water.

RICHARD STUBBS: And how are your people going at the moment? It's been several hours. Of course, the Dimboola Brigade unit was overrun, and - but all the personnel are

safe, but they've - well, safe enough; they just returned to fight the fire again.

JOHN HAYNES: Yep.

RICHARD STUBBS: John, how - how is the state of your teams?

JOHN HAYNES: Look, we're - we're all pretty good. I think it's going to be pretty extreme, you know, attack on your body, I suppose. I was saying to a - the Horsham crew before, that it was, you know, it's 45-degree heat, you're wearing protective clothing and standing next to a heat source, so it's not going to be too flash [laughs] and especially for, you know, long durations, which they're going to be out there for.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, and fact that adrenaline exhausts you as well. You know, adrenaline can only get you so far and then than runs out and your body shuts down a bit as a result of all of those.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, it's going to be some pretty tired people this evening, I'd reckon.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yeah, absolutely.

RICHELLE HUNT: It's like there's - it's like there's two different emergency services crews out there fighting for us, Richard. There's the guys on the front line, and then if you could see the amount of work and - and bodies in here at the moment, they're fighting a whole 'nother war for us in here as well, just communication and - and different maps being uploaded all the time, saying, okay, this has changed, that has changed, screens updating, you know, more calls going into all different aspects of media all across the state and, you know, it's just unbelievable the amount of leg work that's being done here at the CFA headquarters.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, because everyone is absolutely understanding what they're dealing with.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: And it's something that has to be treated with respect and given this amount of seriousness, because

it is a powerful fire front all around our state.

Richelle Hunt and John Haynes, the deputy chief officer of the CFA, thank you so much. We will go back to you a little later on. But very soon, I'll check in with the SES, we'll get more updates on their fire situation and we'll hear from you, 1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. Quarter to 4, 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

[3.45pm]

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in firefighting for nearly 30 years but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the state in the next few days. With temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria. Your emergency services broadcaster.

RICHARD STUBBS: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, it's 14 to 4.

[2.46pm]

We are, of course, a state under siege. We expected that today's incredibly high temperatures, the lack of - the lack of any kind of moisture in our ground, drying out all the fuel that's there, and of course the gusting winds you've heard about - northerlies and then swinging around south-westerlies - would impact on us, and it's certainly proved to be the case. We have fires burning throughout the state, at least six major fire fronts, and of course they are close to habitations. David Tucek is just one of the people who are flat out today. He is State Duty Officer, because he got the short straw, for the SES. Hi, David.

DAVID TUCEK: Hello, Richard, how are you?

RICHARD STUBBS: Not too bad. But how are you guys going?

DAVID TUCEK: Well, as you have been saying earlier in your show, it's certainly a very busy day for us here at the State Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre. Everyone's got their part to play and a lot of specialised people are here.

For the State Emergency Service, our role predominantly today has been in assisting the fire agencies with their various requests. We've been providing people to do such things as provide staging area support, so to be able to set up those locations where a lot of vehicles and personnel and materials will form up before they go out and get deployed on to the fire ground.

Some of the other actions today, of course, is that it's heading towards a bit of a stormy day. We've got some fairly dirty weather out there, some strong, hot winds. As you've indicated, this cool change which will come, but it's going to provide some squally conditions and we've been seeing our activity slowly grow in that area of storm response. We're up to just across 170 tasks for the day since midnight, but we would expect that to well and truly get up into some higher figures.

We've had 380 volunteers active across the state and it also includes the relocation out of the Bunyip Aged Care Home of some people there, being taken to the Koo Wee Rup Hospital. So we've got some 12 members down there assisting police with the loading up of some of the residents there on to buses. So there's a lot going on, and between that --

RICHARD STUBBS: Certainly is, and it's a wide range, you know, when you have - say when you have a - a storm, the - the likely call-outs fall within a group of activity.

DAVID TUCEK: Mmm.

RICHARD STUBBS: But it seems to me that you've got to be on your toes here, that you're being called out for all sorts of activity, everything from helping people on to buses to avoid a fire front, to retrieving trees across roads and reporting everything else that you see as you head to those areas.

DAVID TUCEK: Absolutely right, and we really have to have

our wits about us, all of the agencies today. Because we really have to effectively triage all those jobs against all the priorities of - of what's important, and, of course, threat to life is our first major consideration then we think about property and infrastructure, of course. But with the conditions out there today, I guess the important thing is that we've got a lot of dust being kicked up now, there are smokey conditions, and with the storm, the heavy wind storm sort of approaching us, we end up with a lot of debris flying around as well. So it's timely to remind people, if they don't need to be travelling, they really shouldn't be. They should be staying at home. If you do have to be on the road for some reason, be very mindful of the conditions and drive appropriately with due care and speed. Use your lights if you need to. And, of course, if you aren't in the middle of the - the wind at the moment it's safe to do so, you really should have done a bit of preparation by now, but perhaps bring in some of that outdoor furniture, put away those loose items around the house. Consider where you're parked. Don't park under a tree. Today's not the day for that.

RICHARD STUBBS: That's actually - you know, that's a simple tip but it's a really good one. We're often busy thinking about the thing we need to do, and we're not mindful of where we're stopping the car. So, yes. Be aware that not parking under trees right today is a good idea.

DAVID TUCEK: Absolutely.

RICHARD STUBBS: The SES number, if people need to get in contact with you?

DAVID TUCEK: Look, certainly if - if it's emergency-related, 132 500. We also have an information line running, 1300 842 737, but, look, I'd just really ask people to certainly stay away from the fire-affected areas if they don't need to be in that area. Stay at home and be mindful, if you see emergency services vehicles on the road, they might not have their red and blue lights flashing but it doesn't mean they're not undergoing serious tasking.

RICHARD STUBBS: No, none of them are off-duty today.

DAVID TUCEK: Correct.

RICHARD STUBBS: David Tucek, thank you so much. State duty officer with the SES. To find out what is the latest regarding our fire situation, let's update with it Steve Martin from ABC Ballarat.

[3.50pm]

STEVE MARTIN: There's still a - still a lot going on. I'm just hearing some initial reports about a fire near Lake Eppalock. I haven't got any further information other than that, but I'm hoping it may come in while I run through some of this other urgent threat message information.

First up, one that's just been refreshed at the moment, an urgent threat message for the communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction, Balook, Le Roy, Jumbuk, Valley View and Budgeree East. If I've mispronounced anything, my apologies.

The Glendonald Road fire is about 600 hectares, burning in a south-east direction and spreading rapidly. The communities that I just mentioned may be directly impacted upon by this fire. So those communities again are: Hazelwood South, Jeeralang and Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction, Balook, Le Roy, Jumbuk, Valley View and Budgeree East. And, like I say, I'm not sure on Budgeree East. I hope I've got that - that right.

The - the next latest urgent threat message - they are all urgent, naturally enough - is in relation to the Camperdown Danedite Road fire. Now, the fire's crossed the Princes Highway between Danedite Road and Johnstones Road, heading north-east towards Pomborneit, Pomborneit North, I should say. Residents between Danedite Road and Lake Corangamite areas are asked to implement their fire survival plans and stay alert for possible embers.

Residents in Scoullers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh communities, you're advised to remain alert for burning embers and to watch out for emergency service vehicles using local roads, because they are moving around in that part of the world.

Kilmore East fire. Four kilometres east of Kilmore,

south of Saunders Road. It's burning in a southerly direction and there's estimated to be approximately 1,000 hectares in size. The community of Hidden Valley may be directly impacted upon by this fire. That was issued just on an hour ago. This advice does say that it may be directly impacted on by this fire within 60 minutes. So there is no later advice in relation to - to that.

The Remlaw Road fire, as we heard a little bit - a little bit earlier, the - the CFA's confirmed the Horsham Golf Club, three houses and several sheds, along with the Dimboola Brigade unit have been destroyed in that fire fighter - fire, although the fire fighters are okay. They're well, they're back on the fire line. The latest advice is that it is burning west of Horsham city, burning in a south-westerly direction. The westerly wind change is due between 3 and 6 this afternoon, so some time in the next two hours, we're into that window. Communities under threat currently, Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally, Green Lake.

When the wind change comes through, the area of the communities on the eastern side of the Western Highway between Drung Drung South and Horsham may come under threat. There are also road closures in place for that fire, and I'm just looking, Richard, I'm just trying to see that I've got them all at - at this stage.

RICHARD STUBBS: Mmm-hmm. Do you want to refresh your screen, Steve?

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: Because if history's anything to go by, while you've been telling us about all these fires --

STEVE MARTIN: Something may else have come in.

RICHARD STUBBS: Something else.

STEVE MARTIN: Look, it, it hasn't at this stage. As soon as I hear anything more in relation to that Lake Eppalock situation, and I may actually have some information for you if that - if the email will actually open that's just come through from the DSE. Yes, I have, actually. Fire is burning nine kilometres west of Redesdale in grassland in the vicinity of Coliban Park Road. It's burning in a

south-easterly direction. It is estimated - well, it's - it doesn't have a size at this stage. The fire's not currently posing a threat to communities. However, communities in the Metcalfe, Metcalfe East, Barfold, Langley and Redesdale areas, or Redesdale areas, should be aware of possible imminent fire threat. That advice has just come through, well, I was opening it as we were on air, Richard. So that advice --

RICHARD STUBBS: We've just got emails saying, "Can you tell us about Redesdale, because I've got family there".

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: So they've just - imminent fire threat advice has just come through for that area.

STEVE MARTIN: That has just popped up. Now, just before you kick me off, can I just say --

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure.

STEVE MARTIN: -- for listeners in Gippsland, there is rolling coverage and detailed advice for fires in that part of the state, 100.7 FM or 828 AM. They are the frequencies.

For the Remlaw fire, as it is known, in the Horsham district, you can tune in to ABC Western Victoria, 594 on the AM band, and Jeremy Lee has begun regular updates on ABC South West Victoria. The frequencies, there's three of them for South West Victoria: 1602 AM in Warrnambool; in Portland, 96.9 FM; and in Hamilton, 94.1, and he's looking particularly at the - the Coleraine district fires.

Now, because of where that fire is, I know that area pretty well, Richard, depending on what side of the hill people are, they may get one transmitter and not the other, so --

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay, so they should try both.

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah. 1602 AM for Warrnambool; but Portland, 96.9 FM; and for Hamilton, 94.1. So on those transmitters, on those frequencies, you should be able to get some local information from Jeremy Lee on ABC South West Vic.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, thank you so much. Steve Martin ABC Ballarat, updating the latest of the fires, and we will continue to do that throughout the afternoon.

[3.55pm]

STEVE MARTIN: Sally - Sally Tregea is from the Whittlesea Country Music Festival, kind of. Sally, that's not who you are at the moment, is it?

SALLY TREGEA: No, I'm packing up my house. So, yeah, we're all a bit - anyway. What I'm saying is, at the moment - I mean, I live a bit out of town. What I'm saying at the moment, tonight's concert has been cancelled. Tomorrow we are looking at having the concert on.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay, so you had the Whittlesea Country Music Festival --

SALLY TREGEA: Country Music Festival, yep, yep.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- concert on tonight. That's cancelled.

SALLY TREGEA: Yep.

RICHARD STUBBS: Because, well, the organiser's fleeing her house. Sally, what can you see at the moment? What's going on at your place?

SALLY TREGEA: Pretty much a lot of dust, wind, smoke, you know, all that kind of stuff. But we're just wanting people to stay - the campers to stay, because I know there's a lot of radios listening. Campers please stay. We've been told by the authorities to keep you there and we will keep you safe. If you are planning on coming to Whittlesea tonight, please do not come tonight. Please come tomorrow, as two of our exits have been blocked because of the fires.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sally, you keep yourself and your family safe, and good luck to all those people there.

SALLY TREGEA: No worries.

RICHARD STUBBS: And we'll of course keep updating you throughout the day. Michelle's been hanging for ages.

Hey, Michelle.

CALLER MICHELLE: Hi, how are you?

RICHARD STUBBS: Good. Thanks so much for waiting. What did you want to say?

CALLER MICHELLE: No problem. It's good to actually get to speak to you. I'm actually a member of Help For Wildlife.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER MICHELLE: And I know that there's going to be a lot of distressed and injured wildlife from the fires. They'll probably start coming out in the next couple of days. If --

RICHARD STUBBS: What should we do there, Michelle? I was suggesting that right now people can put out a water source, at the moment. There'll be animals fleeing the fire fronts all over Victoria.

CALLER MICHELLE: Absolutely, they do need water and they'll be coming down for water. They'll be crossing roads. They'll be absolutely - they'll be really scared. If anyone comes across any injured wildlife, that could be kangaroos, possums, echidnas, anything, I've got two numbers here --

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure.

CALLER MICHELLE: -- that people can contact.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER MICHELLE: The first one is Help For Wildlife. That's 24 hours. The phone number is 0417 380 687. They're also on the Internet. They can be looked up under "Help For Wildlife".

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER MICHELLE: And there's also Wildlife Victoria, which are also 24 hours, they're on the Internet as well. They can be contacted on 1300 094 535. And just for people to keep a look out - they - as I said earlier, they will be

coming out in the next week or so. It can take them two days to actually get out of the area that's been affected.

RICHARD STUBBS: Look, this is devastating for anyone in the area, but everyone has to be aware that it's devastating for our native wildlife. This is their homes that are getting burnt at the same time, and all our birds.

CALLER MICHELLE: Absolutely.

RICHARD STUBBS: And all our, of course - all the ground-dwelling animals as well will have their environment destroyed. There's going to be a lot of - lot of work for you and all your people over the next few weeks.

CALLER MICHELLE: That's right. And if there is anyone out there that's interested in becoming a volunteer for Help For Wildlife, they can contact the phone number that I gave out earlier or they can actually contact the website. We're always looking for people that can assist us in rescue.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Michelle, thank you so much. Those numbers again, Help For Wildlife is 0417 380 687, or Wildlife Victoria - all of these are 24-hour numbers - 1300 094 535.

I've got SMSs coming in, 19 774 774. Burnt gum leaves landing on a dairy farm at Yarragon, 30 to 40 Ks from the Bunyip fire, which gives you an idea of the size of that fire. "Is the Drouin swap meet cancelled tomorrow?" That's from Ernie. Not sure, Ernie. I'll get back to you as soon as I can on that:

> Smoke so dense from Bunyip Ridge the radar thinks it's raining, believe me, it's not raining.

And this SMS:

> Our 23-year-old son is at the Bunyip fires working for the DSE and missing his sister's engagement. We're proud of him and all the crews. Hope they win.

Catherine from Frankston. Yes.

You can be streaming, if you don't have the radio, of course, go on to the ABC website and log into your local Victorian ABC to give you the very latest. But for details about the fires, their location and how to prepare a bushfire plan, if you suddenly realise that yes, you are in an area where you need one --

[News beeps]

[4pm]

MALE SPEAKER: Then call the Bushfire Information Line 1800 2 --

[Music]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good afternoon. Alicia Byrne with ABC news. A blaze at Horsham in western Victoria has claimed three homes and the city's golf club, as well as a fire truck. Peter Lenaghan reports.

PETER LENAGHAN: The fire burning on Horsham's southern outskirts started early this afternoon and has been fanned by hot, gusty winds. The Country Fire Authority's confirmed that three homes have been destroyed as well as the Horsham golf club and several sheds. A Dimboola brigade fire vehicle's also been lost. The CFA says the unit's crew is safe and has resumed fighting the fire. There are more than 300 firefighters working on the blaze. A wind change is now pushing the fire to the east and north east. The Western, Henty and Wimmera Highways are among the roads that have been closed.

ALICIA BYRNE: Residents of the Latrobe Valley have destroyed a huge fire roaring through forest south of Churchill this afternoon. Mark DeBono reports.

MARK DEBONO: The fire tore through 600 hectares of pine plantation in less than an hour and is now headed south-east towards Balook in the Tara Valley National Park. Alerts are out for the towns of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North and Traralgon South. Fire authorities are now concerned a cool change later today will push an extended fire front towards the north east threatening more towns and communities.

The Bunyip State Park fire in West Gippsland is still

burning uncontrolled north of Pakenham, and warnings are out for Labertouche, Jindivick, Neerim and Tonimbuk. Aged care homes at Bunyip and Neerim have been evacuated as a precautionary measure. The Princes Highway's been closed to all traffic west of Warragul.

A fire is also still burning in state forest north of Dargo but is not threatening communities.

Mark DeBono ABC news, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: A grass and scrub fire that started near Kilmore East north of Melbourne is now threatening the town ship of Wandong and the Hidden Valley community. The fire is heading in a southeasterly direction between Kilmore and Whittlesea and has already burnt through more than 1,000 hectares. Stuart Ord from the Department of Sustainability and Environment says the fire poses serious and imminent threat to the residents of Wandong and Hidden Valley.

STUART ORD: People should have already decided whether they're going to stay or leave. If they are going to leave they need to get out now, well - well ahead of the fire. The fire's moving pretty quickly and is gaining size very, very quickly.

ALICIA BYRNE: ABC reporter James Bennett says more fire fighting resources are being brought into the area.

JAMES BENNETT: We're on the western fringe of this blaze. It's moved south and you can probably hear that those water bombing aircraft are extremely close by now, as they try and prevent this blaze jumping any further to the west and affecting property.

ALICIA BYRNE: A fire that's crossed the Camperdown/Danedile Road and the Princes Highway is heading towards homes in Pomborneit north: residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Road Settlement and Swan Marsh communities are being told to immediately implement their fire plans.

And, in Melbourne Eastlink is being closed between the Dandenong southern bypass and Cheltenham Road because of a grass fire.

The fire in Horsham has contributed to a power cut to about 15,000 homes and businesses in the State's west. 6,000

customers have lost power in the Horsham area, while 9,000 are affected in the Ballarat, Hamilton and Geelong areas. Four and a half thousand customers in Melbourne and other parts of the state have also lost - lost power.

The bushfires have forced the cancellation of several V/Line services. There are no services between Melbourne and Bairnsdale, Geelong and Warrnambool and between Melbourne and Shepparton. Buses are replacing trains on some services, except to Gippsland. V/Line is urging people to defer nonessential travel. Connex has cancelled at least 50 services. Trains on the Glen Waverley line between Glen Waverley and Burnley have been suspended and replaced by buses in both directions. The Williamstown and Alamein lines are also affected.

The cool change is expected to hit Melbourne around 6 o'clock reaching the outer eastern suburbs and the airport around 7 before flowing through the State's north around midnight. Temperatures are expected to drop by 15 degrees within half an hour of the change arriving, and gusty winds are likely. Thunderstorms are a possibility in the south-west as are widespread dust storms. Melbourne recorded it's hottest day on record before 2.30, but Terry Ryan from the weather bureau says it may climb again before the change arrives.

TERRY RYAN: We could expect another degrees in our temperature because of the north westerly winds give us our hottest air right before the change. We've got to 46.0; hottest ever day in Melbourne at 2.27. We still think we might have another degree to go.

ALICIA BYRNE: To the weather, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State. For the State, very hot with strong and gusty north to northwesterly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change, extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north east until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust. For Melbourne, dry, mostly sunny with areas of raised dust, windy, a late cool change.

For tomorrow: windy, then a shower or two and 23. Monday, a light shower or two and a top of 21. In Melbourne 46 degrees. This is ABC news.

[4.58pm]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

STEVE MARTIN: Hello, and good afternoon once again, Steve Martin with you. During the news I have been contacted by the CFA and they are issuing an urgent threat message for the Coliban Park Road-Redesdale fire which is burning nine kilometres west of Redesdale south of Lake Eppalock. It's burning in a southeasterly direction and is developing quickly. Now, the CFA spokesman that I had on the phone saying he couldn't get this through quickly enough for the communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East - Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East - maybe directly impacted upon by this fire. You may experience smoke and burning embers reaching your properties. You are advised to patrol houses to find out and put out any burning embers that may be landing. Of course, wear protective clothing is the - is the advice that's coming through.

As the fire front approaches, it will be unsafe to be either on foot or in a car as the heat radiating from the fire will be intense. Buildings will offer the best protection during the passage of a fire front.

They are also advising on road closures that are currently in place. The Heathcote-Kyneton Road between Redesdale and Kyneton is closed, but that is an urgent threat message just issued during the news from the CFA. The Coliban Park Road-Redesdale fire 9 kilometres west of Redesdale south of lake Eppalock. Currently under threat the communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East.

I'll run through the rest of the threat messages in a few minutes time, Richard, but at the moment it's - it's back to you.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, thanks so much. An amazing day and an incredible number of updates, and we will be keeping that throughout the day, keeping you informed as best we can. It is 7 past 4. Good afternoon, it's Richard Stubbs.

[4.07pm]

I know it's a Saturday but I was concerned about you and how you're getting on through this. You can give us a call, 1300 222 774 or SMS 19 774 774. To find out with our

road closures, Tonya Roberts is standing by. Tonya, what have you got?

TONYA ROBERTS: A stack of road closures, a whole bunch of train information and also some new information too from the CFA about a new fire burning 2 kilometres south-east of the Murrindindi. Now it's burning in a southeasterly direction. It is not a threat message this one, but it's an awareness one, and as you and I know, from even the text messages that come filing through while you're there on air, little things are popping up everywhere and that's what we're trying to do, pull the information in a useful way. So, that's the most recent one, the one that's 2 kilometres south-east of Murrindindi.

Now, as far as trains go let me give you the metro list first. Clearly these are not to do with the fire, they are all to do, though, with the extreme heat. There are no trains on the Alamein line. Everything there is bus action at the moment. Between Camberwell and Alamein until further notice there will be buses.

As to cancellations: the 4.12 from Belgrave, the 4.12 from Epping, the 4.32 from Frankston. The Glen Waverley line also has buses replacing trains between Burnley and Glen Waverley until further notice. The 4.01 from Eltham, the 4.01 from Parliament on the Sandringham line, the city bound from Sandringham at 4.54, the 4.09 from Watergardens, the 4.06 from Werribee and on the Williamstown line they will have buses as well as same reason, in fact, for the other couple of lines.

Now Mel has called in to say there's been a crash outbound on the Monash Freeway. So it's at a standstill at High Street. The police are there. They've blocked the two left lanes, so it's incredibly slow going there.

And then if we look to road closures more across the State, the police have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford. There is smoke there from a large fire which is reducing visibility. At the Bunyip State Park, east of Melbourne, there are a whole lot of local road closures which you can get the information about more directly from your local ABC. The Princes Freeway is also closed at the Healesville Koo Wee Rup Road in Pakenham. All traffic is being detoured via the Healesville Koo Wee Rup Road, South Gippsland Highway

to Korumburra, then to Warragul via the Warragul Korumburra Road. If you're not quite sure what's happening with local roads, do get onto the Bushfire Information Line. The whole world is doing this today. Yes, it will be slow and you will have to wait but the number is 1800 240 667.

V/Line services cancelled on the Gippsland line between Melbourne, Traralgon and Bairnsdale. Cancelled on the Seymour line between Melbourne and Seymour and Shepparton. Cancelled between Geelong and Warrnambool. Going between Melbourne and Geelong but there are heat speed restrictions in place, so you need to allow another 30 minutes for travel.

RICHARD STUBBS: Tonya, thank you so much. Tonya Roberts updating you with road and rail closures.

Lisa Maksimovic is our ABC news reporter. Hey Lis?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Hello.

RICHARD STUBBS: Whereabouts are you at the moment?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: I'm actually in the moment at Nar Nar Goon which is one of the staging areas but I've only just arrived back. We have been out there in the ABC helicopter filming around the major fire front, and I can tell you it's one of the most extraordinary bushfires I've ever seen. I was out at Boolarra last week covering it, but this is just out of control, and when it's --

RICHARD STUBBS: So the fire front you flew to was the Bunyip fire?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: That's right.

RICHARD STUBBS: And what could you see? How - how wide is that front?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Look, I can't tell you how wide it is but it's - it's huge and it's already torn through and crossed over some of the powerlines that there were concerns about. But, it is so big and so dangerous that firefighters have been pulled from the fire front. There are no firefighters on the ground apart from where there is spotting in front of the fire, and the spotting is very extensive as well. There are certainly a number of houses

under threat. I know one has been confirmed lost already, but in and around the town of Labertouche, for example, it's impossible to see if there are houses and properties gone because the smoke is so dense and black, and widespread that you just can't get - you can't get a helicopter in there to see it.

RICHARD STUBBS: Lisa, what height were you travelling and - and how high is this fire? Can you sort of tell me what it was you saw?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, look we generally stay higher than the bombers but we had permission to go alongside the fire and have a look. So, we actually travelled alongside the bushfire, probably only about 5 to 10 metres above it.

RICHARD STUBBS: Whoa.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: But further enough away that we were safe but could certainly feel the heat beaming through the helicopter.

RICHARD STUBBS: Was it terrifying, Lis? I would be terrified getting that close to such a big fire.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Yeah, it is - it is terrifying. I mean we were far enough away that we know we're safe but it is - it is terrifying. I was doing an interview this afternoon with a farmer, his wife and daughter who were staying to protect the home, and the moment the fire actually got out of control they panicked and they've left, because you just can't explain - with all the warnings you get, you just cannot explain the fear when you see a fire like this coming over a hill towards your house.

RICHARD STUBBS: How would you like to be one of the CFA fighters who have to get out of the way of the fire by getting their vehicle or on foot? How would you like to be at ground level fighting these fires?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: You just don't want to be on ground level. That's why they've pulled out the CFA crews. It is far too dangerous. The winds - I went outside just to have a look at the smoke, when I got in off the chopper about half an hour ago, the smoke was sort of pluming into the sky but you could see it in a straight line. You could see it - it was a north wind heading south-east and you could

see the black and the orange heading almost in a straight line, but half an hour later I've come outside and I can see grey/orange smoke from - for as far as I can see. So, it is so windy out there, that it's just, the smoke is everywhere.

RICHARD STUBBS: Lisa, thank you so much. Lisa Maksimovic our ABC news reporter, and you'll be able to see her report tonight on ABC news. Thank you so much. She's just returned from the fire front at Bunyip.

I will be updating a little later on with our weather forecast. The cool change is expected between 3 and 6. It won't bring a lot of relief to the firefighters, of course, because it's not carrying any rain with it. It will drop temperatures but the winds are likely to swing around into south-westerlies. Estimated throughout some parts of the state at 55 km/h when the change comes that will not help our fire, unfortunately, even if it does reduce the temperatures to your home in Melbourne.

Barry's - whereabouts are you Barry?

CALLER BARRY: Up at Katamatite, between Shepparton and Yarrawonga.

RICHARD STUBBS: And what's it like where you are, Barry?

CALLER BARRY: Very hot. It's 47.2 out under our back verandah --

RICHARD STUBBS: That's hot.

CALLER BARRY: -- and 44 in the shade.

RICHARD STUBBS: That's incredibly hot. Barry, what can you see at the moment? Is there any smoke where you are?

CALLER BARRY: No, there's no smoke where I am, but I was a firefighter with the Whittlesea fire brigade for 15 or 18 years down there -

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER BARRY: -- and me son got a text message from one of me nephews down there, and there's smoke coming up over the back of Mount Disappointment which is nor'-west from

Whittlesea and that's coming from the Wandong fire and apparently it's spotted over into Toorong which is, Toorong Reservoir which is in the water catchment. That's about 4 ks north west of Whittlesea.

RICHARD STUBBS: Barry, you've seen your fair share of hot days and fire callouts --

CALLER BARRY: Oh yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- how are you - they've all said this is a terrible combination of weather and --

CALLER BARRY: Yeah --

RICHARD STUBBS: -- long drought. Are you looking around --

CALLER BARRY: I can't do it now because I have emphysema and that, but even though you - you think you're prepared for anything, but when you get a day like this and you're in the front line out there, God help you. I don't know how you get back sometimes.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely.

CALLER BARRY: It's that dangerous.

RICHARD STUBBS: Our thoughts are with all of those people who are fighting the fires. If you are a member of the CFA, if you are supporting those people in the CFA you have our thoughts and prayers, but also as you fight to save property and you fight to save lives please keep each other safe. It is quarter past 4.

[4.15pm]

What's been happening on our website? Let's find out. Simon's been desperately doing what?

SIMON BROWN: ABC News has just started a special website for coverage of the fires right across South East Australia. This includes a map, so that you can easily find the stories which are affecting you and your loved ones, whether it be the Woolamai fires in New South Wales or the fires here in Victor or the fires in South Australia. Now there's a link to that from our website,

which is abc.net.au/melbourne. There's also links to the CFA and DSE websites but I would request that those websites are experiencing a heavy load at the moment, and they're - the DSE website particularly is having some troubles keeping up.

RICHARD STUBBS: So it's better to use ours as the mirror?

SIMON BROWN: Better to use ours. I'm working on getting that information, to mirror that information. That's not there yet but hopefully I'll have that up within the hour.

RICHARD STUBBS: Don't know why you're talking to me, you should be typing.

SIMON BROWN: I am about to head off.

RICHARD STUBBS: Simon if people should video from where they are, with their phones or whatever -

SIMON BROWN: People have videoed.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- is there any source that we can post those?

SIMON BROWN: If they have photos - if they video, if they have photos, anything like that, they can upload their video and photos, audio to our website. If you go to that website again - abc.net.au/Melbourne - and click on the "Upload a photo" link, that'll take you to the place where you can actually upload videos as well. You can upload photos.

RICHARD STUBBS: Those people who are texting me, some of you are in view of fires and if you could then film with your phone, we would certainly want to be looking at that and hopefully posting some of it to our website, so everyone can share in what you're seeing.

SIMON BROWN: That's right, and we would be very keen, if anyone has got the time to do that and it's safe to do so, that you can send that onto us.

RICHARD STUBBS: Simon, stop talking to me, go away and type on things that I don't understand. Simon Brown is busily working on the ABC website which, as you heard, you with updating for all sorts of information and it will

connect you through to other sources.

It is an incredibly hot day. It is an incredibly dangerous day in Victoria today and I'm getting lots of SMSes in. 19 774 774.

> The cool change has hit in Ocean Grove. Great work ABC in Melton and 46 degrees and dark. My stepdad has just gone to fight the Bunyip fires from the Emerald CFA. Stay safe.

That's from Catherine in Melton. Absolutely. Can't imagine what it'd be like to heading out there.

> Seering Saturday here in north east Wangaratta area too. Lots of smoke. Are there any reports for us?

I'll find out more information, because we will be updating throughout today, of course, all the fires, all the road closures and any other information you may need.

For information about fires, their location and how to prepare a bushfire plan, call the Bushfire Information Line 1800 240 667. Now, understand a lot of people are calling the Bushfire Information Line, so by all means call it but please be patient. It is a very busy line.

Christopher is in Coolaroo. Hey Chris.

CALLER CHRIS: Hi. How are you?

RICHARD STUBBS: Not too bad. What can you see where you are?

CALLER CHRIS: I can't see much. The sky's like very grey here. You go outside and you can sort of smell a bit of smoke. I think it's from the Wandong fire. But, yeah, quite windy here, and, yeah, hot also.

RICHARD STUBBS: Hot across all the state absolutely. You keep listening to us, Chris and I will update the information with Steve and, in fact, Steve Martin's standing by, so let's go now to update our fire situation.

[4.18pm]

Steve, you have, no doubt, an incredible list of fires at the moment. Let's go through them carefully.

STEVE MARTIN: Okay.

RICHARD STUBBS: What are - what are our most immediate threats?

STEVE MARTIN: Most immediate threats, and the list is growing, unfortunately - the most immediate threat is still that Coliban Park Road-Redesdale fire, which is 9 kilometres west of Redesdale. It's south of Lake Eppalock. It's burning in a southeasterly direction and is developing quickly.

Now, once again we did this straight out of the news, but the communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East may be directly impacted upon which this fire, and the CFA were particularly urgent in wanting that information passed on to those communities. So, it is Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East that may be directly impacted upon by this fire, which is the Coliban Park road and the Redesdale fire.

There's an update on the Remlaw fire, west of Horsham. It's now burned over 2,000 hectares. The expected wind change is currently coming through the Horsham area. Communities that are being impacted or under threat by this fire are the communities of Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally, Green Lake and other communities on the eastern side of the western Highway between Drung Drung South and Horsham. Firefighters are working hard to hold the head of the fire on the Laharum Road, I think it is, between Mackies Road and Reynolds Road.

Road closures in place Western Highway between Dadswell Bridge and Horsham, Henty Highway north of Wonwondah Golf Course Road, Horsham, Noradjuha Road, the Wimmera Highway between Horsham and Noradjuha Road. I'm struggling with that one, I must admit, Richard. Williams Road east of Camerons Road and Laharum Road. So, that's an update on the Remlaw fire.

Another one that's come through, Dargo white timber spur fire. 35 kilometres nor' nor'-west Dargo in East Gippsland. It's - this fire's grown in size today, about

250 hectares in size; burning in the area previously burned in the 2002/2003 fires, burning towards the area from the 2005/2006 fires. So that fire, if you're in that part of the state, is not currently posing a threat to communities.

Now, the Kilmore East fire and Hidden Valley, the CFA has reissued their advice for the community of Hidden Valley. This fire is 4 kilometres east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road heading in a southerly direction, estimated to be around 1,000 hectares. The community of Hidden Valley may be directly impacted upon by this fire. They are saying within the next 60 minutes but that has been reissued; that particular urgent threat message.

The Glendonald Road fire; 600 hectares in size, South East direction, spreading rapidly. The communities of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang and Jeeralang North, Jeeralang Junction, Balook, Le Roy, Jumbuk Valley - Jumbuk, Valley View and Budgree East may be impacted upon by this particular fire.

The Camperdown Danedite Road fire; this is - it's crossed the Princes Highway, the Danedite Road and Johnstones Road - between Danedite Road and Johnstones Road heading north east towards Pomborneit. Residents between Danedite Road and Lake Corangamite are asked to implement fire survival plans, if you haven't already done so. We've already done that threat message a couple of times in the last hour, but you need to also stay alert for possible embers.

Scoullers Road residents, Carters Road, settlement - Carters Road Settlement and Swan Marsh communities, you're still being advised to remain alert for burning embers and to watch out for emergency service vehicles.

And I think - oh, the Bunyip ridge fire --

RICHARD STUBBS: Yeah.

STEVE MARTIN: -- of course, it continues as well.

Now, Richard, can I just say as well, with that list of ABC regional stations, we've got ABC Gippsland on air giving detailed information; 100.7 FM, and 828 AM. We've got the ABC south-west station on with Jeremy Lee 16.02 AM in Warrnambool, Portland 96.9 FM, Hamilton 94.1 for fires in the south west of the State. ABC Horsham 594 on the AM

band. Prue Bentley is there providing more regular updates, and now to throw into the mix, my understanding is Jonathan Ridnell is also in our Bendigo studios, particularly for this Redesdale fire. If you're in that part of the world and you need more regular updates 91.1 on the FM band for that fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: It's an incredible list. Thank you Steven. Can I just ask you about a couple of things? I'm getting lots of SMSes through and I just want to answer some of them.

STEVE MARTIN: Yep.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sorry, where are we?

> Richard, could you give us an update again and just do it quickly for the Gembrook/Cockatoo fire?

That's from Shane who's family there who can't get hold of them.

STEVE MARTIN: Okay. Gembrook/Cockatoo fire is not on the urgent list, or the urgent threat messages at this stage. I'm just scanning down through this particular list and it's actually not coming up. So, you'll have to leave that one with me and I'll get some more information shortly.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay. I've got all sorts of SMSes coming through. So, thank you very much, Steve. Steve Martin updating the fire situation.

Saint Andrews, south of Kinglake escarpment, wind is burning down burnt leaves from the Kilmore fire. Be aware, if you are seeing embers, if you're seeing anything that's smouldering like that, you need to be taking precautions. Go on to the website for a full detail but it's the things like, if you haven't already done it, bring in your front doormat if it's made of flammable material. Bring it in inside. Have a mop and bucket. Go around and put those embers out.

Is there any rain with the change? I'm getting a lot of people reporting cool changes down around the coast. Thank you for that. That came through around 4 o'clock. No. One of our big problems today is that the change will bring

a shift in the wind, it will bring a drop in temperature, it won't carry rain. So, although it'll be relief for us in the city, for all our brothers and sisters who are on the fire front it will just bring more danger. 1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774.

Ivan Smith is incident controller at Bunyip. Hi Ivan.

IVAN SMITH: Good afternoon. (Indecipherable)

RICHARD STUBBS: Mate, how you doing? How's the situation where you are?

IVAN SMITH: Look, it's pretty grim to be honest. We've had probably record fire conditions. For anyone that's got a memory long enough to go back firefighting, we've never seen conditions like this, and the conditions our firefighters are working under are terrible.

RICHARD STUBBS: Ivan, I was chatting to the ABC reporter who flew over the fire in the ABC helicopter, and she said that the CFA crews had been pulled out of the fire front, that it was too dangerous to be in front of at the moment.

IVAN SMITH: Well, we've never attempted at any stage to attempt a frontal attack on this fire. That's why the CFA crews will be on the flanks. The intensity is less there and we can actually attack the edge of the fire. When you get a fire under these conditions with the fuel loads we have got, the dryness of the fuel and the weather conditions, it's just suicide to put people in front of it.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Ivan, how wide is the fire front and how fast is it travelling?

IVAN SMITH: It's travelling very quickly; estimates are somewhere between 7 and 10 kilometres per hour but we've had - the problem we've had with this fire is not only the head fire, but the spots being thrown in front of it, which has occurred up to 20 kilometres in front of the fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: Because we've got a lot of gusting winds, what's the winds like in your area?

IVAN SMITH: Well, the winds in the last hour and a half have turned much more westerly and that's what the weather bureau predicted for us, so we are swinging between

northwest and west. That's not really a good look for us. The longer the fire edge, when we get the south-westerly change later this evening, that means that the whole eastern frank of this fire, with the south-westerly change will become the fire head --

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

IVAN SMITH: -- and it will run for whatever length, and our strategy at this stage is to try and restrict the length of the fire edge that will be active under the wind change.

RICHARD STUBBS: Because you know it's going to shift and that will become the new front.

Ivan, how are your people going? How are you at the moment? How are your people going?

IVAN SMITH: Look, as I said to you, they are very tough conditions for our guys and girls that are out there working, and we'll be looking to change them over later in the day, but I would think that fatigue issues are something we're going to have to really carefully monitor as we get perhaps beyond the change. We'll not have an opportunity prior to the wind change to change crews over. It's just not safe for them and certainly not safe for the communities we're trying to protect.

RICHARD STUBBS: Ivan, what is the - what's the noise that a fire this size makes? How loud is this thing?

IVAN SMITH: Well, these sort of fires, when they really start to build up some pressure in the forested areas, particularly, will sound like a jet plane and it's the noise that really will bring a lot of people undone. In this sort of fire, this fire has run from the forest where it broke away around lunchtime, and it's now running through farming properties. So, there'll be a lot less noise, but the speed of the fire --

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

IVAN SMITH: -- it won't have the intensity of a forest fire, but the speed of the fire will be much, much higher.

RICHARD STUBBS: So, it will be rush to the next big area

of forest or buildings?

IVAN SMITH: Correct, and that will see a lower rate of spread when it reaches that patch of remnant forest but a much higher intensity and then a lot more spotting. So, it will keep leapfrogging along.

RICHARD STUBBS: Ivan, you and your people are doing a great job. You keep yourself safe.

IVAN SMITH: Thank you, Richard.

RICHARD STUBBS: Cheers, mate.

IVAN SMITH: See you.

RICHARD STUBBS: Ivan Smith, incident controller at Bunyip, and as you can hear in Ivan's voice, this is a high stress situation. This is an incredibly dangerous situation, that we have volunteers standing on the sides of the fire. They can't possibly stand in the front of the fire at Bunyip. They stand on the sides of it. And, as you can hear, there is a wind shift predicted by the weather bureau. I'll update you with them very soon. That will shift the flank of the fire to be the new front. They've got to be ready for that.

[4.29pm]

As if we don't have enough, I have reports of a car on fire on the Mulgrave Freeway outbound before Stud Road. Emergency services are in attendance and therefore traffic is banking up. Be aware there is a car on fire on the Mulgrave Freeway outbound before Stud Road.

I just like to repeat too, that as we are in trouble, so are our wildlife. The RACV wildlife connect number is 13 11 11. 13 11 11. They will connect you with wildlife carers in your area.

[4.30pm]

If possible be putting out - and you're in an area that's suitable, be putting out water both on the ground and some supply of water up in the trees for the birds as they're fleeing the fire front.

I will be updating you as we go through the rest of the hour, but right now let's find out what's happening with our news headlines with Alicia Burns.

ALICIA BYRNE: Thanks, Richard.

Three houses, the city's golf club and a fire truck have been destroyed in a fire at Horsham in the State's west. The blaze started early this afternoon and is being fanned by hot gusty winds. A Dimboola fire brigade vehicle's been lost but the CFA says the unit's crew is safe and has resumed firefighting. The Western, Henty and Wimmera Highways are among the roads that have been closed in the area. The CFA says one house has also been lost at Coleraine also in the west of the State.

A huge fire tore through forest south of Churchill in the Latrobe Valley this afternoon. It burnt through 600 hectares of pine plantation in less than an hour and is now headed southeast towards Balook and the Tarra Valley National Park. Alerts are out for the towns of Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Jeeralang North and Traralgon South. A cool change will push the fire front north east, threatening more towns and communities.

The blaze in the Bunyip State Park in West Gippsland is burning north of Pakenham and warnings are out for Labertouche, Jindivick, Neerim and Tonimbuk. The Princes Highway has been closed to all traffic west of Warragul.

A grass and scrub fire that started near Kilmore East, north of Melbourne, is now threatening the township of Wandong and the Hidden Valley community. The fire is heading in a southeasterly direction between Kilmore and Whittlesea and has already burnt through more than 1,000 hectares.

[4.31pm]

Closer to Melbourne, Eastlink has been closed between the Dandenong southern bypass and Cheltenham Road because of a grass fire.

And, Melbourne has recorded it's hottest day on record with the mercury reaching 46.4 degrees this afternoon.

To the weather: the CFA has declared a day of total fire

ban for the entire State. There's a gale warning for waters between Cape Otway and Wilson Prom. and between Mallacoota and Gabo Island. Also for Port Phillip and Westernport. For the State: very hot with strong and gusty north to northwesterly winds ahead of a cooler squally southwesterly change extending from the southwest and reefing the far northeast tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust on the bays, northerlies 25 to 35 knots tending northwesterly this afternoon, and ahead of a 25 to 35-knot south-west change late this afternoon. Squalls to 50 knots possible with the change. Seas to two and a half metres.

For Melbourne dry, mostly sunny this afternoon before a cooler squally southwest to southerly change expected late this afternoon. Sunday: windy with a shower or two and 23.

Right now in Melbourne it's 46 degrees. Next news at 5.

RICHARD STUBBS: Thank you Alicia. Alicia Byrne with our news headlines and we will be updating you with the news at 5 o'clock. I am updating you throughout this hour with everything I can. Details of fire, details of the weather, and details of road closures. 1300 222 774 if you would like to call up and tell me what you are seeing, 19 774 774 if you'd like to SMS. I'm Richard Stubbs in the afternoon and 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Don?

CALLER DON: Yes.

RICHARD STUBBS: Don, how are you mate? Whereabouts are you?

CALLER DON: I'm in Kilmore East.

RICHARD STUBBS: What can you see from where you are?

[4.33pm]

CALLER DON: I'm watching it burn down the ridge toward me still at the moment where it started in Saunders Road. It's travelled a hell of a long way down towards Wandong, but I'm watching it - I don't know - 600 metres from me.

RICHARD STUBBS: Don, I think it's time you moved away from that area. How fast is the fire moving?

CALLER DON: It's still moving away, but it's back burning on itself through these - they planted a lot of blue gums --

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER DON: -- and it's burning through there, and it's burning back down the ridge. I can't move because I breed thoroughbred horses and I got mares and foals in the paddocks, but I got --

RICHARD STUBBS: Whereabouts are they? Have you got them into stables or are you keeping them in the paddocks?

CALLER DON: No, no, I've got them in a paddock where I can put - I've got a big lake --

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep.

CALLER DON: -- and I pump water all the time, and I'm pumping water around them and --

RICHARD STUBBS: How are they so far?

CALLER DON: They got a bit stressed out when Elvis tried to get into me dam, but anyway. But they're pretty good, so really I can't leave them. The wind's still blowing pretty hard from the north. But, it's a pretty frightening and eerie sight to Kilmore East, I can tell you. I feel sorry for the people at Wandong. You can probably hear the wind in me phone where I am outside.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely. Is it - have you got dust in the air as well as smoke?

CALLER DON: Yeah, just started to get a bit dust now. There's no sun. The whole sky's sort of either smoke or dust.

RICHARD STUBBS: Don, you keep yourself safe. You look after your animals and --

CALLER DON: Yeah, no worries. I feel sorry for the people down south of me, you know, around Wandong and Hidden Valley. I just hear that they're pretty - there's an old guy that lives up on the hill from me and I bet his

house is gone because it's right in the path of the fire. But, yeah, it's pretty frightening.

RICHARD STUBBS: It absolutely is. It's more than pretty frightening, I think it's terrifying and I can't stop thinking about our CFA people who are busy at the fire front at this time.

In the weather bureau, because it's one of the questions we are asking, this cool change that seems to have hit the coast, how fast will it come? Where's the wind going to swing to? Are we lucky? Is there any rain attached to it? I don't think there is. Let's find out. Terry Ryan's at the weather bureau. Hi, Terry.

TERRY RYAN: G'day Richard, how's things?

RICHARD STUBBS: It's busy and tense.

TERRY RYAN: It's busy, certainly is. Hottest ever day for Melbourne: 46.4 at 4 minutes past 3. 47.9 at Avalon, which may turn out to be one of the hottest records ever for Victoria, though I think I saw 48 up there at Hopetoun before. So, the change has gone through South Channel Island with the winds there are now 30 knots or nearly 60 Ks. Quite gusty northerly winds, as you heard in that report just then; still about a lot of the metropolitan area, particularly the higher parts. Had gusts to 80 Ks earlier, and some of the gusts around now are still up around the 50, 50/60 kilometres per hour. There could even be stronger ones coming through. I think (indistinct) has a gust to 80 kilometres per hour. So gusty northerly winds are still coming in and the temperatures are right up there in the mid 40s in a lot of places.

RICHARD STUBBS: When the change hits, are you still expecting winds coming from the west, southwest?

TERRY RYAN: They'll come - the change will come in as a southwesterly wind. It's gone through South Channel Island which is right down near the heads. Other places to have experienced it: Geelong the temperature crashed from 48 to - sorry, from 47 to about 38 degrees at Geelong. So, it would feel a lot better there at 38 than it was before.

RICHARD STUBBS: Now, of course, Terry, we're dropping temperature but it's really not doing anything for us.

It's shifting the fire which will swing the front of the fire onto a new flank, the side of the fire, if you like becomes the front of it as we swing to the southwest. There's no rain attached to this cool change, is there?

TERRY RYAN: There's very little. We've seen - most of what you can see on the radar is smoke. We can see a lot of smoke to the east of us from the smoke plumes moving out. There's is a few flashes back in western Victoria from lightning flashes back on the western border, but there won't be too much with this change as it goes through.

RICHARD STUBBS: What about overnight, Terry? Is there a likelihood of lightning overnight?

TERRY RYAN: There is actually with the upper level feature final making it. We could get some flashes of lightning or maybe a thunderstorm overnight/early morning, but it doesn't look like there'll be terribly much around in southern Victoria.

RICHARD STUBBS: It's not so much the rain there I'm concerned about, it's lightning strikes starting more fires.

TERRY RYAN: Yeah, that's true.

RICHARD STUBBS: The weather for Sunday, Terry?

TERRY RYAN: Just a shower or two and 23/24 degrees. So, not - much milder week coming up. We're just saying low 20s for Monday/Tuesday.

RICHARD STUBBS: Again, what about - yeah. What about wind gusts? The temperature will come down, but without rain our fires are still going to be burning.

TERRY RYAN: True.

RICHARD STUBBS: What are the winds going to be doing tomorrow?

TERRY RYAN: They'll be coming in from the southwest, southerly and there'll be a bit of wind around overnight early morning but they'll be easing tomorrow to just moderate to fresh winds. They won't be out of control as

they were today, and the fire danger situation will be much relieved tomorrow with the cooler air going through.

RICHARD STUBBS: All right. Terry Ryan, thank you so much at the weather bureau. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Don't forget for information about the fires, their location and how to prepare your bushfire plan, should you not have done so already, please you can call the Bushfire Information Line, 1800 240 667, but when you do, be aware everyone in Victoria is calling the Bushfire Information Line. It is very busy. The CFA are getting more staff in there to try to deal with the enormously high volume of calls. So, be patient and only dial it if you really need to, otherwise perhaps go onto the website, if it's just general questions. 1800 240 667.

And, while I'm giving out numbers, 13 11 11 is the RACV Wildlife Connect or 1300 094 535 is the Wildlife Victoria, because our animals will be stressed, as are our people. All over Victoria there are fires burning at the moment and we have six major fire fronts. We have imminent threats listed for a lot of areas. I will be updating you as soon as possible with the latest on that.

Richelle Hunt is at the Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre with John Haynes who's the Deputy Chief of the CFA, and a man who is very busy. Hi John. Hi Richelle.

JOHN HAYNES: G'day Stubbsy.

RICHELLE HUNT: Hey there Richard. Yeah --

RICHARD STUBBS: How we looking at the moment?

RICHELLE HUNT: It's pretty solid here, isn't it? Richard, John's just showed me a graph that we've been talking about wind change and how that's going to affect the fires, and John just showed me a graph before that looks at what - it goes from, sort of, low, medium, extreme to, you know --

JOHN HAYNES: Maximum.

RICHELLE HUNT: -- maximum of what the problem can be and when the wind change hits in - which area, was it, John?

JOHN HAYNES: It was just to the west of the Otways, the wind change has gone through there and we just put up the fire danger index and it was off the scale still.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah, we couldn't --

JOHN HAYNES: It was over 100 so --

RICHELLE HUNT: We couldn't see it, Richard, it was actually literally off the screen.

RICHARD STUBBS: I do think it's important that people understand, as they're listening, that the cool change is great in turn if you are sitting in the city. Anywhere else it just brings a heightened fire danger.

JOHN HAYNES: Yeah, it still as strong a wind behind - it's just a different direction and as we explained before, when you've rightly have been explaining, that it makes the fire front a lot wider than what it is.

RICHARD STUBBS: John, I spoke to the incident controller at Bunyip and, you know, he sounded, as he should be, a man who is stressed and under pressure. How are you - how are they handling the Bunyip fires, and what are your thoughts about those fires?

JOHN HAYNES: Well, it's going to be pretty intense out there at - because they are into such erratic fire behaviour that, you know, they're trying their best to protect the assets, and not only them, but all the other five or really six other major fires; we've another one at Redesdale which is getting some legs now, so, you know, it's just keeps on going.

RICHARD STUBBS: I have some SMSes here about Ferntree Gully or Dandenong fires. Do you know anything about those?

JOHN HAYNES: Just - as we speak it was handed to me. The Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont may be directly impacted on fire from a fire we've got at Quarry Road at the moment. So, that's pretty well in the south, southern end of the Dandenongs.

RICHARD STUBBS: I've got that reported to me from Phil in

Upwey and its Burwood Highway closed east of Brenock Park Drive. Thanks Phil.

1300 222 774. You can SMS 19 774 774. You are with Richard Stubbs and Richelle Hunt at the Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre with John Haynes the Deputy Chief of the CFA.

John, what else would you like to tell us about what's going on at the moment?

JOHN HAYNES: Just an update on that Kilmore East fire. Here your caller before with his thoroughbred horses, the fire's still burning southerly direction about 1400 hectares in size now, and it's just where the fire expands to, and we've got the communities Clonbinane, Mount Disappointment, Kinglake, Heathcote Junction, which is actually next to Wandong, Upper Plenty, Humevale, Reedy Creek and Strath Creek may be directly impacted on the fire in the coming timeframe. So, that's just going from worse to worse.

RICHELLE HUNT: And in the Churchill area, we were saying before, Richard, John and I brought up one of the screens here which gives us an indication of wind speed and wind direction and a message came up for the - for the fire around the Churchill area. Now, if the wind change does happen, there's a dirty big power station out there, John. How concerned are you about that?

JOHN HAYNES: Very concerned. The - the Churchill fires are burning in a southeasterly direction at the moment, but with the wind change coming through it may head up towards the Loy Yang power station, not only the power station itself but, you know, with the mine and we know we've had issues with fires in the mines before.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

JOHN HAYNES: And it just saps our resources if, you know, if we get a coalmine fire. So, our guys will be working pretty hard to make sure that doesn't happen.

RICHELLE HUNT: And we've been hearing here throughout the room at the incident control centre here where we've got, you know, lots of - we've got the SES, we've the power corp, we've got police on the phones here handling media

calls, you know, we've got everyone you could possibly imagine. There is talk at the moment that there has been, someone has been injured and quite severely. What - what's the update on that.

JOHN HAYNES: Yes, skill a bit sketchy at the moment. It's down at the Coleraine fire, we've had a - it's either a member of the public helping to fight the fire, or one of our firefighters, we're still yet to confirm, has had some burns, probably about 50 per cent burns. They've been air lifted back into Hamilton at this stage, and once we get more info we'll keep you up-to-date.

RICHELLE HUNT: And one of your staff members has just slipped a note under the door here into the booth saying that there's reports of sightseers around Bunyip and driving in their cars, so the general message here is to please just stay away --

JOHN HAYNES: Yep.

RICHELLE HUNT: -- just don't go near it, there's nothing to see.

RICHARD STUBBS: I think people need to understand the severity of what we're dealing with --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah, completely.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- and if they spoke to the incident controller, as I just did, from Bunyip, they'd be in no doubt that what they're experiencing is intense and something to stay away from. Emergency services can't do their job if the roads are closed or if idiots are walking around injuring themselves in the process.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: I - I got a report too of the Dimboola brigade unit who had its truck destroyed but then just went back into the fire. Do you know much about them?

JOHN HAYNES: No, it actually wasn't their truck. It's what we call a field command vehicle, which is their 4-wheel drive ute.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay.

JOHN HAYNES: So yeah, they would have probably - I haven't talked to the crew there yet, but they would have just jumped off that and jumped on the truck, I reckon, and abandoned it by the sound.

RICHELLE HUNT: Gosh.

RICHARD STUBBS: It sounds easy when you say it.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

RICHARD STUBBS: John, I'm sure you've done modelling on this, and you've looked ahead at the wind change. How are you forecasting these fires, as we move into the evening?

JOHN HAYNES: We've got fire behaviour specialists in one part of the coordination centre here who are mapping each of these fires, and they do a worst case scenario and really the worst case scenario with the wind change is most of these fires are going to head off into a northeasterly direction.

RICHARD STUBBS: And I'm not hearing an end point to that.

[4.45pm]

JOHN HAYNES: Unless you've got four inches of rain in your back pocket, or a bit of fairy dust, we're going to be in a bit of strife I reckon. But, some of the ones will be easier to - to hold. Potentially the ones around Horsham and Coleraine and even to some extent the one at Weerite at - near Colac, but the ones in the hills, you know, around the Wandong ones, especially once it gets in the hills it's going to be a little bit harder to contain and also Bunyip heading for Neerim and Noojee, if - if the wind change comes through.

RICHARD STUBBS: Thank you so much, both of you. Richelle Hunt at the Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre, with John Haynes, Deputy Chief of the CFA, who is as calm as a calm thing on a day where we are seeing extreme temperatures and, in fact, the worst temperatures on Melbourne's record, plus fires across the state, as you heard six to seven main fires.

You're SMSing and I appreciate it, 19 774 774.

Hi Richard, Sue the trainee nurse from Kilmore here.

Hi Sue:

Evacuated earlier. Back home watching the wind. Fires on both sides now. My daughter's best friend has lost their home.

Certainly hope they're all right and I'm glad you've evacuated and got out.

We have burnt bark landing in our backyard.

That's in Garfield, from Dean. And I received a couple of SMSes about this, so I will mention it. Knox basketball are still playing their games for the rest of the day. Every other basketball association cancelled the night before. Just like to be - you ought to be aware, that even if the games are still on, you don't have to play. It is the hottest day on Melbourne's record. You must be mindful of the health of your kids as well. Sometimes forfeiting is the better option.

[4.46pm]

1300 222 774. Let's find out what is happening with our roads and also we'll update the fire situation next. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in firefighting for nearly 30 years, but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the State in the next few days, with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria. Your emergency services broadcaster.

[4.47pm]

RICHARD STUBBS: 13 to 5, 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC

Victoria. Richard Stubbs in the afternoon. Tonya Roberts has got the latest in road closures, Tonya what have you got there for us?

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, in the latest updates as far as urgent fire threats go too, Richard, because just in the brief time that has elapsed since we last heard about them we've heard of an urgent threat. This is the Murrindindi mill fire, so, we are talking in the Mount Despair state forest. The fire's moving in a southeasterly direction now, so the community of Narbethong can expect to come under direct ember threat. So, that is the Murrindindi mill fire. There is now an urgent threat status on that particular fire.

Just a moment ago, Richard, you were encouraging people to ring on the 1300 222 774 number and, of course, we want them to, but we don't want them to ring to say "We can't get through to the Bushfire Information Line, we're just receiving a recorded message". If you ring the Bushfire Information Line you will at the moment get a recorded message prior to speaking to somebody, because that is how they've had to set it up to cope with the volume of traffic.

RICHARD STUBBS: What they're trying to do is get a rid of a lot of their frequently asked questions so they can get the emergency calls through that they need.

TONYA ROBERTS: And we are good for frequently asked questions. We are up for the FAQs here at the ABC.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure.

TONYA ROBERTS: But, not unnecessarily harassing our producers who, as you and I can see through the screen, right here are trying to do everything humanly possible. We don't want people blocking the phone lines just to say to us "We can't get through to the Bushfire Information Line" because they may be blocking the DSE or the CFA getting to us.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure.

TONYA ROBERTS: That's the status there.

Now, traffic situation: the - on the railway side of the

Burwood Highway, police have closed it entirely from Forest Road to Tourist Road. They are also telling us you can only get into the township of Whittlesea from the north because of poor visibility. They have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford. That's because of the smoke from that big fire there. There is an alternate route. You probably know it if you are local, but it's via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the northern highway and the Broadford Kilmore Road.

In the Bunyip state park east of Melbourne there are many, many local road closures, and you just shouldn't be anywhere near the Bunyip state park if you can possibly avoid it. The Princes Freeway is also closed at the Healesville Koo Wee Rup Road in Pakenham Road. If you are unsure, you can call that line. You're just going to have to be patient and get through the recorded message first. This is the Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667.

And, there is no change with regard to all the earlier information that I have repeated a couple of times now with the trains. Essentially there are no trains going down to Gippsland. So Melbourne, Traralgon, Bairnsdale, no. Melbourne, Seymour, Shepparton, no trains there either. V/Line have closed all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool but they're still running them between Melbourne and Geelong.

V/Line says that tomorrow services they can now confirm, Richard, will most definitely be affected. So you are going to need to call 136 196 before you even think about travelling.

Then, we have the metropolitan train service cancellations. On the Alamein line, the Williamstown line and the Glen Waverley line it's buses all the way. On the Craigieburn line, the 4.48 and 5.28 have been cancelled. Cranbourne wise the 4.42, the 4.15, the 5.55 and the 6.35 leaving the city are all cancelled. On the Epping line the 4.32 and the 5 - 5.12 are not running. On the Frankston line the 4.32 and the 4.52 and the 5.32 are not running. Hurstbridge line the 5.21 is cancelled. Sandringham 4.34 and 4.54. The Sydenham line 4.49 and from Werribee the 4.46 and the 5.26 have all been cancelled.

RICHARD STUBBS: Tonya Roberts, thank you so much. Of course, I'm getting lots of your SMSes including things

like "How come we haven't heard - how come we haven't heard anything about properties being damaged and what's been lost", and the simple answer is everybody's busy still fighting the fires. You need to get a handle on just how intense this is. To help you do that - just before I cross to Steve Martin, South Gippsland Freeway grass fire, there is a grass fire there between Cranbourne and Dandenong.

Steve Martin is updating the fire situation. Hi, Steve.

STEVE MARTIN: Just flicking through some of the different information that is - is coming through at the moment. I've got a few updates on the urgent threat messages as issued by the CFA. We'll start with the Glendonald Road, Womerah and Macks Creek fire, the latest on that is it's currently burning in a southeast direction and spreading rapidly. The communities of Womerah and Macks Creek may be directly impacted upon by this fire. So, that's for the Glendonald Road, Womerah and Macks Creek fire.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, I'm getting quite a lot of SMSes asking about the fires between Gembrook and Cockatoo. Have you got any information on those fires?

STEVE MARTIN: Just got to work through this at the moment.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sorry, I'm jumping - sorry about that.

STEVE MARTIN: I'm just trying to work out because some people are calling fires by the local district. Others are calling fires by the names they have been given by the CFA, and it's leading to a little bit of confusion when I'm getting different names. So, just bear with me. I'm running through the threat messages.

The Upper Ferntree Gully fire has also now got an urgent threat message. Grass and scrub fire is burning on the southern side of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully. Estimated to be 4 hectares in size. Quarry Road Upper Ferntree Gully residents and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont may be directly impacted by this fire. That is the advice for the Upper Ferntree Gully fire. That one's already been updated.

Now this is where we are getting, it's getting a bit confusing for me, Richard, because things are being updated

so rapidly. The Remlaw fire, which is the fire near Horsham, it's burning west of Horsham city. Expect wind changes currently coming through the Horsham area. I can tell you it's come through Ballarat as well in the last 10 minutes and Snake Valley also. Communities currently being impacted are under threat by that fire are Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally, Green Lake and other communities on the eastern side of the western Highway, between Drung Drung South and Horsham. There's some new areas been added to this. Firefighters are trying to hold the fire on the Laharum Road between Mackies Road and Reynolds Road.

The Redesdale-Coliban Park Road fire, for that the fire has crossed the Heathcote-Redesdale road, in the vicinity of Barfold. It's burning towards the Campaspe River. Now communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East may be directly impacted by this fire. The fire does not pose a direct threat to the communities of Sidonia, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton. However, people in these communities need to remain alert and put your fire plans into action, because this fire is moving rapidly. So, that's the advice on that fire.

Glendonald, we've done.

The alpine fire is burning 35 ks north west of Dargo. I just mention that one because they've issued some information. That fire is still not currently posing a threat to communities.

I'm just going around all these different pages at the moment.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, just update and refresh us up there, and I'll have a look at a couple of these SMSes.

STEVE MARTIN: Okay.

RICHARD STUBBS: 19 774 774.

> Cool change has crossed the Mornington Peninsula. Dropped 12 degrees in 10 minutes in Hastings.

That's from David. Thank you for that. I've got reports of a house on fire in Labertouche. Also the Robin Hood Hotel. This is again an SMS, not a CFA report. Fires are

very close to Drouin West Primary School apparently, they've heard from three various sources.

1300 222 774 or you can SMS 19 774 774. Steve, have you any further updates just before I move on?

STEVE MARTIN: Look there is just one, and because I've so many pages open on this computer, I can't print anything out because it's all changing so quickly. So, I found the page I was looking for.

Whittlesea and surrounds urgent threat message. Bushfire burning in the Mount Disappointment area, is burning in a southeasterly direction, Whittlesea, Humevale, Arthurs Creek, Nutfield, Eden Park and Doreen may be directly impacted on by this fire. So, there is an urgent threat message for those communities as well.

RICHARD STUBBS: Steve, thank you so much. Steve Martin updating you with the fires.

Kim's - whereabouts are you Kim?

KIM: I'm in Maryknoll just up from Tynong, about 1 kilometre up from Tynong.

RICHARD STUBBS: And whereabouts is your dad?

KIM: He's at Bunyip fighting the fires.

RICHARD STUBBS: Have you heard from your dad?

KIM: No, not at all. But he's out for the whole night. He's got the night shift.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay and how you - how you're going, how you feeling?

KIM: Good, it's - mum's making sandwiches for all the fire brigade blokes up there and it's just me and my sister here.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay. You feeling okay?

KIM: Yeah. We're feeling fine. We're going to stay and fight our house, me, my mum and my sister.

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure. What did - what did your dad say say? When did he leave? This morning or this afternoon?

KIM: He left about 2 o'clock today, and he won't be home until the early hours of this morning.

RICHARD STUBBS: What was he saying? What did he say before he left?

KIM: He just said that they are really, really bad. But, yeah, but he's happy we're going to fight our house. He's planned this for years now, to fight our house and now it's actually come. But, the cool change is not going to bring good news for us, because of the fire coming through it will come through our direction.

RICHARD STUBBS: So of course, the wind shift --

KIM: Yes.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- will change the front of the fire.

KIM: Yeah, it's going to come straight for us. so, we're going to fight it like during the night it will come through.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, Kim, you look after yourself and your family --

KIM: Thank you.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- and we'll be thinking of your dad.

KIM: Thank you.

RICHARD STUBBS: And thanks for letting us know.

KIM: Can I just say something to all the fire brigade blokes that are listening?

RICHARD STUBBS: Sure.

KIM: Good luck to all you guys at Maryknoll and Nar Nar Goon. You doing a really, really hard job.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely are. Thanks, Kim.

KIM: Thank you, bye.

RICHARD STUBBS: I hope your dad comes home safe. It's a couple of minutes before five o'clock. We're going to continue our special programming after the news at five, of course, and remember your local ABC stations are broadcasting localised information. If you need to get some more information try them as well. Obviously understand that all the lines you try will be busy. But, however, the Bushfire Information Line, if you have specific requests as opposed to just a general question, perhaps try their website for that, or try us. 1800 240 667. Everyone is trying to ring them.

And I've given them out before, but the Wildlife Victoria number 1300 094 535. Our wildlife will be terrified. Their environment will be destroyed and they'll be fleeing the front of the fire. If possible put out some water, both in trees in some way, hanging it from a treetop, and also on the ground.

Romney's, whereabouts are you Romney?

CALLER ROMNEY: I'm actually calling from Melbourne, but I've been in regular contact with my mum who's on a farm in Clonbinane.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yep. How's that - how's she going?

CALLER ROMNEY: Not very well. The farms actually on fire right now. Sorry. So, I just wanted everyone to know that actually, yeah, Clonbinane actually is on fire right now.

RICHARD STUBBS: And is your mum okay?

CALLER ROMNEY: I don't know. I don't know. I mean, I'm in regular contact with her but I've actually limiting it now because I'm worried about her mobile phone battery.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely.

CALLER ROMNEY: Yeah. So, I'm just calling up and just making sure - yeah, but her --

RICHARD STUBBS: And what did she tell you her about the fire that was burning?

CALLER ROMNEY: Well she's - it's totally destroyed her vineyard. She's quite a big vineyard and it's - it's on fire right now. And, yeah, she's got an angora goat stud as well, and I don't know what's happened to them, the animals, but it's not looking very good.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, I certainly hope your mum's okay and that the animals are okay as well, Romney --

CALLER ROMNEY: Thank you very much.

RICHARD STUBBS: -- you get off the line and try to look after your mum. Sue, you've been waiting for so long.

CALLER SUE: Hi, yes. We're calling from the Yarra Valley and we just wanted to say that if there's anybody who urgently needs somewhere to take their horses for safety, we'd be happy to help out.

RICHARD STUBBS: Okay. Thank you so much. I'll put you on hold and see if you can leave your number. So, how much pasture have you got?

CALLER SUE: About 20 acres.

RICHARD STUBBS: Thank you, so much. This is going to be a great need, once we pass the critical moment of these fires, for us to pull together and help all those people and animals who've been so distressed and injured during this day and I'm afraid this night, and I think tomorrow as well. I'll be updating you throughout, as will ABC. If in doubt, tune to your local ABC stations as well. Our 5 o'clock news is next.

[Music]

[5pm]

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: And I can tell you it's one of the most extraordinary bushfires I've ever seen. I was out at Boolarra last week covering it, but this is just out of control.

BYRNE ALICIA: ABC reporter Lisa Maksimovic describing the fires burning in the Bunyip State Forest. That fire is just one of several burning out of control across Victoria. Good afternoon. Alicia Byrne with ABC news.

Authorities have issued an emergency warning that the Glendonald fire in Gippsland is heading towards the coast, and the town of Yarram. Mark DeBono reports.

MARK DEBONO: The fire is racing through the eastern end of the Strzelecki Ranges faster than expected and warnings have been issued for communities in a line to Devon North and Yarram. Authorities believe the fire could cross the South Gippsland Highway. There's real concern now that a strong southeasterly change this afternoon could push a huge fire front east through tinder dry forest towards Sale and cross the Princes Highway east of Rosedale. That will depend on the strength of the change.

Fire alerts are still being issued for the fire in the Bunyip state forest and towns of Warragul, Drouin, Tonimbuk and Labertouche. Aged care homes in the areas have been evacuated and the Princes Highway is shut west of Warragul.

Mark DeBono, ABC news, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: The ABC's Lisa Maksimovic flew over the Bunyip State Park fire in a helicopter earlier this afternoon.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: I can tell you it's one of the most extraordinary bushfires I've ever seen. It's just out of control, and it's - it's huge. So big and so dangerous that firefighters have been pulled from the fire front. Certainly a number of houses under threat. I know one has been confirmed lost already. But, in and around the town of Labertouche, for example, it's impossible to see if there are houses and properties gone because the smoke is so dense and black and widespread that you just can't get - you can't get a helicopter in there to - to see it.

ALICIA BYRNE: State Fire Coordinator John Haynes says the CFA is worried about the Churchill fire's possible impact on the Loy Yang Power Station.

JOHN HAYNES: The Churchill fires are burning in a southeasterly direction at the moment, but with the wind change coming through it may head up towards the Loy Yang Power Station. Not only the power station itself but, you know, with the mine and we know we've had issues with fires --

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yeah.

JOHN HAYNES: -- in the mines before.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yeah.

JOHN HAYNES: And it just saps our resources if, you know, if we get a coalmine fire.

ALICIA BYRNE: Three homes, a golf club and a fire truck have been destroyed by a blaze at Horsham in western Victoria. Peter Lenaghan reports.

PETER LENAGHAN: A wind change is now pushing the fire to the east and northeast towards the Western Highway between Horsham and Drung Drung South. The Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally and Green Lake areas remain under threat. Crews are concentrating on trying to control the head of the fire on Laharum Road, south of Horsham. The Country Fire Authority's confirmed the loss of three homes, the Horsham golf club and a fire vehicle from the Dimboola brigade. The CFA says the brigade's crew is safe. The Western, Henty and Wimmera Highways are closed.

A 770 hectare fire at Coleraine, in the State's southwest, has also destroyed one house.

Peter Lenaghan, ABC news, Horsham.

ALICIA BYRNE: And just in the fire at Horsham has now crossed the Western Highway southeast of Horsham. The fire is now expected to threaten the communities of Drung South. Longerenong, Dooen and Riverside. Horsham's Mayor, Bernard Gross says an emergency relief centre has been set up at the town hall.

BERNARD GROSS: I understand that they're providing emergency help; of course, meals and they will be looking at the needs of the people who have lost their homes or who are unable to get back to their homes in the timeframe that they need to.

ALICIA BYRNE: Residents of Wandong and Hidden Valley, north of Melbourne, are being warned to prepare for a fire that's heading towards the communities. The fire has burnt through 1400 hectares of scrubland and is moving in a

southerly direction between Kilmore East and Whittlesea. Dick Merton, at Kilmore's Red Lion Hotel, says locals have fears for the safety of fellow residents.

DICK MERTON: We're extremely worried up here. The fire's all around Kilmore, and we're extremely worried for everybody. There's supposed to be houses wiped out and all that. The township of Kilmore and, indeed, all the other townships around us are very, very worried for everyone's safety and concern.

ALICIA BYRNE: The CFA has issued an urgent warning to the residents of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East near Bendigo. The fire that's burning on Coliban Park Road 9 kilometres west of Redesdale, south of Lake Eppalock, is moving quickly in a southeasterly direction. Authorities say residents in the area need to watch for embers and activate their fire plans.

Meanwhile, a 250 hectare fire is burning northwest of Dargo in East Gippsland. The fire is not currently posing a threat to communities but drivers are being urged to avoid the Dargo High Plains Road.

Ben Rankin, from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, says fire crews will continue to monitor the blaze throughout the evening.

BEN RANKIN: We're obviously monitoring very closely the interface of the communities here. We still have extreme weather conditions, as everybody is aware. So, we hope everyone's very, very careful for the both of the days.

ALICIA BYRNE: About 25 firefighters are battling a grass fire in Narre Warren North. The blaze is in the Crawley Road area, and began around half past 3. The CFA says another 25 firefighters are heading there.

Fire has closed the Burwood Highway into Ferntree Gully between Forest Road and Dawson Street, while the Maroondah Highway in Coldstream between Hill Road and the Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway intersection is also closed.

A fire in Peats Ridge on the New South Wales Central Coast is threatening several homes. Alma Mistry reports.

ALMA MISTRY: The fire is burning in the Brisbane Waters

National Park at Peats Ridge. Ground crews and aircraft are responding to the fire which is threatening homes in Nardoo Road and Wisemans Ferry Road. The Rural Fire Service says residents should follow instructions and work with firefighters to protect their properties.

Temperatures peaked at 33 degrees in Sydney today, but reached 41 degrees in the west. RFS spokeswoman Rebel Talbot says conditions have been tough.

REBEL TALBOT: We are seeing fires travel very quickly under these hot and dry conditions.

ALMA MISTRY: Crews are still trying to contain very large fires in the State's south in the Bega Valley and to the north in the Wollemi National Park.

ALICIA BYRNE: The fires have forced the suspension of V/Line trains between Melbourne and Bairnsdale, Geelong and Warrnambool, and Melbourne and Shepparton. Buses are replacing trains on some country rail services, except for Gippsland. Connex has cancelled more than 86 services and buses have replaced trains on the Glen Waverley, Alamein and Williamstown lines. Services on the Cranbourne line have been cancelled between Cranbourne and Dandenong.

[5.06pm]

Melbourne has sweltered through its hottest day on record reaching 46.4 degrees just after 3 o'clock. At Avalon temperatures reached a record 47.9 degrees. The weather bureau is awaiting confirmation of reports that the mercury reached 48 at Hopetoun about 400 kilometres northwest of Melbourne.

Some relief from today's record breaking temperatures is on the way with a cool change expected to hit Melbourne in about an hour. Terry Ryan, from the weather bureau, says the seering heat will suddenly plummet when the change arrives hitting the outer eastern suburbs and the airport around seven o'clock.

TERRY RYAN: We're going to be around the 45/46 degree mark when it hits. I think it'll go down 15 degrees within the first half an hour, probably down to 30 by about 8 o'clock at night and then slowly falling to the mid 20s by about midnight.

ALICIA BYRNE: The cool change is expected to reach the State's north around midnight with the mercury falling to a relative low mid 30s in Mildura tomorrow.

About 12 and a half thousand homes in the State's west remain without power. 5,000 homes and businesses are effected in the Wimmera, Mallee and the bulk of them are in Horsham due to a bushfire in the area. The remaining outages are in Ballarat and Hamilton. A further 5,000 customers scattered across metropolitan Melbourne are also affected.

A 747 loaded with supplies is on its way to Queensland's flooded north. Waters are rising again at Ingham which has already been flooded for most of the week. The Herbert River is expected to peak at Ingham this afternoon or this evening at around the same levels as on Tuesday when 50 homes were evacuated in the wake of ex tropical cyclone Ellie.

The main points again: the Gippsland fires race towards the town of Yarram. Houses and a fire truck lost in a blaze that's also burnt the golf course at Horsham and Melbourne swelters through its hottest day on record.

To the weather, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of Victoria for today. There's a gale warning between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom, also between Mallacoota and Gabo Island and for Port Phillip, Western Port and the Gippsland lakes.

For the State very lot with strong and gusty north to northwesterly winds ahead of a cooler squally southwesterly change extending from the southwest, but failing to reach the far northeast until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust, isolated showers that will be fairly light over the southwest and near the coast during the morning, and also in the south near the change. For tomorrow, light isolated showers mainly on and south of the ranges. Moderate to fresh southwesterly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the northeast, otherwise cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne: windy with a cool - a late cool change and areas of raised dust today. For tomorrow, a light shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, a top of 24. For

Monday, a light shower or two and 21. Tuesday, a light shower or two, a top of 20, and Wednesday, a light shower and clearing or two in the - or two clearing in the morning, 20. In Melbourne 45 degrees. ABC news.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

[Music]

[5.10pm]

STEVE MARTIN: Steve Martin here on ABC local radio across Victoria and we - we have some fire - [Music] - I've just got rid of the music so hopefully I'll be able to concentrate my way through this.

Now, we - we do have a couple of updates that have come in during the news for the Remlaw fire. This is the fire near Horsham and also for the Glendonald Road fire. Firstly, the Remlaw fire: due to the wind change over the Wimmera the Remlaw fire is now burning in a westerly direction and will soon change to a southwesterly direction. Firefighters have reported that the fire has jumped the Western Highway and is currently impacting the Drung Drung South area. Communities within the Dooen, Riverside and Longerenong areas can expect to see increased fire activity over the next two hours and you are being urged to implement your bushfire survival action plan. So, that has just come in during the news.

For the Glendonald Road fire, it's currently burning in a southeast direction and spreading rapidly. The communities of Woodside, Alberton, Tarraville, Manns Beach, Robertsons Beach, Woodside Beach, McLoughlins Beach may experience heavy smoke and ember attack from that main fire.

There is also the Redesdale-Coliban Park Road, which is a grass fire burning 9 ks west of Redesdale, south of lake Eppalock, burning in a southeasterly direction, estimated - well the last estimate was around 400 hectares in size. It's crossed the Heathcote-Redesdale Road in the vicinity of Barfold, burning towards the Campaspe River. Communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East may be impacted directly by this fire. It doesn't pose a threat

at this stage to the communities of Sidonia, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton. However, if you are in those communities you should be alert and you should have your fire plans in action because this fire continues to move rapidly.

Some of the other ones around the place: the Murrindindi mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is burning in a southeasterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The community of Narbethong can expect to come under direct ember attack from this fire.

We've done Redesdale. We've done Glendonald. I'm just working through the websites here.

Upper Ferntree Gully, the grass and scrub fire burning on the southern side of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully, it's estimated still relatively small. However, the residents of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont may be directly impacted upon by this fire, so - so be aware of that.

The Whittlesea fire, burning in the Mount Disappointment area, burning southeasterly direction, Whittlesea, Humevale, Arthurs Creek, Nutfield, Eden Park and Doreen may be affected by this fire as well.

The Kilmore fire: the latest we have on the Kilmore fire is that - just get back to this particular page for Kilmore if I can - grass and scrub fire burning 4 ks east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road. Hidden Valley is still the community that may be directly impacted upon by this - this fire.

Now as far as the Camperdown fire is concerned, I don't have a more current update than more than an hour ago. But again that fire is for the residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Road Settlement and Swan Marsh communities, you should have your - your bushfire plans implemented, be alert for burning embers and looking out for emergency service vehicles.

Others in the Lake Corangamite areas are being asked also, and have been asked, to implement their fire survival plans and stay alert for possible embers.

And, Tonya, I think I've got through the main threat messages as they stand at this stage.

TONYA ROBERTS: It does reach a point, Steve, I think where you are just grappling to get all the information organised into some sensible way. Thank you.

STEVE MARTIN: I - I did make myself a new list during the news hoping it would be clearer, but then it wasn't necessarily because it's all happening so quickly and changing so quickly.

[5.15pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah. I mean, to give people some idea, I know this is a while ago now, but between half past 3 and half past 4, four different fires popped up.

STEVE MARTIN: Mmm.

TONYA ROBERTS: So, we're scrambling.

STEVE MARTIN: And look, I've just had another one actually come in as you were speaking on the email: grass fire burning the vicinity of Bracewell Street, Eaglehawk, burning in a southeasterly direction. Residents in the Maiden Gully area are being advised to put their fire plans into action. CFA and DSE units are currently responding to the fire. It could be generating large amounts of smoke. So, if you're in and around Eaglehawk, that fire is in the vicinity of Bracewell Street heading in a southeasterly direction. So, in Maiden Gully you're advised to put your fire plan into action.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thanks, Steve. We should point out too that the fires in Gippsland are now burning very close to the ABC's FM transmitter on 100.7. So, if you're in Gippsland and you're looking for your local fire updates, can you please go onto the AM band and stick around with 828. That's the thing to do.

[5.16pm]

Now Stubbsy's here, just gone a quarter past five. Yes, Tonya Roberts back in the studio here with you, through until six. And then Jon Faine, who I think fancies himself either as a telephonist or a caterer, Richard, judging by

what he's been up to in the last hour.

RICHARD STUBBS: He's certainly been busy behind the scenes. That's right.

TONYA ROBERTS: Will come in after that. But, you are now, Mr Traffic.

RICHARD STUBBS: I am. Lord help us all. It is, of course, a very complex list but bear with me, and due to the fire in Upper Ferntree Gully on the railway line side of Burwood Highway, police have closed Burwood Highway from Forest Road to Tourist Road. Police are also saying you can only enter Whittlesea from the north because of poor visibility. The Maroondah Highway, Coldstream is blocked between Hill Road and the Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway. Police have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to the smoke from a large fire reducing visibility. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the Northern Highway and the Broadford-Kilmore Road.

At the Bunyip State Park east of Melbourne, well there's an enormous number of local road closures. Be aware that there is a huge number of road closures in place because of the fire and the Princes Freeway, south of Bunyip State Park in Bunyip is also closed. Princes Freeway is also closed at the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road-Race Course Road in Pakenham. All traffic is being detoured via the Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road, South Gippsland Highway to Korumburra and then to Warragul via Korumburra-Warragul Road.

Motorists expecting to travel between Pakenham and Warragul should not; should plan their trip and expect to be detoured at short notice. I think we'd have to say that driving anywhere throughout regional areas at the moment, unless you specifically really, really need to do it today and tonight, because Tonya, as it's now 18 past 5, a little later on the visibility's going to become even less as our daylight starts to fail and people really need to think to themselves "Is this a necessary trip I'm undertaking?".

[5.18pm]

V/Line services, all of the ones we've reported earlier are still in place. All train services between Melbourne and

Seymour/Shepparton are closed due to the Wandong and Kilmore East fires. All train services between Melbourne and Traralgon and Bairnsdale are closed due to the grass fire. The Princes Highway is also closed in that back up area. And, of course, all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool on the Warrnambool line are closed as well.

If we have any more we will let you know as soon as we possibly can, but as I said earlier, if you can avoid driving for any length of time, that would be the thing to do be doing right now.

TONYA ROBERTS: We just got a message in from Lyn White from Whittlesea. She needs to be driving right now. She's driving to Werribee because she's evacuating horses from her property. So, we get that. But there's a message from Russell. He says "Everyone in the house fine", so that's good news.

All right, Stubbsy, we'll have more --

RICHARD STUBBS: Cheers.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- traffic in a little while. Thank you. Just to give you some sense of the weather and the change that is moving across, a few quick text messages.

> The cool change just hit Cheltenham like a train.

One of the ones that is running presumably. Severe winds.

> Five minutes ago it was 50 degrees and now it is 34.

Eliza from St Kilda has just told us. There are burnt leaves and bark falling from the sky at Yarra Junction, but it's not hot. The cool change has reached Sandy Point and Waratah Bay. We're getting some rain in Wyndhamvale in the Werribee area. It felt like a freaky change at Chelsea. It has hit Altona. It's moving fast. So, you get the sense that it is on the hustle and we will have more weather details for you as we go ahead with this next stage of our special emergency services broadcast that we are organising here from you today - for you today from 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria.

Now there is power out in some places. Certainly in Mill Park, we've just received a message and I know earlier in portions of Ballarat as well. Paul Bird's on the line. He's the spokesman for NEMMCO and he can update us on the power situation right across Victoria. Hi, Paul.

PAUL BIRD: Yes, good afternoon, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: What's the status?

PAUL BIRD: The status at this stage is that there is around 20,000 customers off supply in different parts of the State. Now, the main areas that are affected at this stage, and I would emphasise that they're local areas, they're distribution areas, not - it's not a statewide impact. The areas include Ringwood, Greensborough and Lilydale. We also have some customers offline in Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill, and that is the status at this point in time.

There's also some outages in northern areas of Melbourne and I'm getting an update on that. Most of the customers are in the western areas of Melbourne and also in the CBD but primarily in the west of Melbourne. Now, I would imagine that with the winds that have come through in the last hour or so, that would be affecting those distribution lines in that part of the State.

TONYA ROBERTS: And Paul, I don't know if you were tuned in what, it was probably about 20 minutes ago when we were hearing from the CFA headquarters about their fears for the direction of the Churchill fire and the threat there potentially to the Loy Yang Power Station, if the wind changes. I mean that must be sending spikes of horror through you.

PAUL BIRD: Indeed, it is and we have had word through, as I've been speaking to you, that the fire has crossed the transmission lines between Hazelwood in the Latrobe Valley, Hazelwood Power Station near Morwell and South Morang there's two major transmission lines into Melbourne. One of those transmission lines has been affected and is out of service, as we speak. That leaves one major transmission line on that easement.

There's also a southern easement into Melbourne with two additional transmission lines, but certainly if we were to

lose the second transmission line in that northern easement that would affect - potentially affect customers in different parts of Victoria.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, what's the likelihood that it won't be affected? I mean if that first one has been affected, is it just a matter of time?

PAUL BIRD: Well, I'll certainly need to get a further update on the status of that fire and that transmission line. I'll certainly keep listeners updated throughout the evening. That - that certainly is a cause for concern, the fact that that one powerline has - has gone offline, and clearly with the second line in the easement, there is the possibility for that to go offline as well.

TONYA ROBERTS: And given that one has now gone offline, will we get an immediately - an immediate effect? I mean will there be people instantly without power?

PAUL BIRD: Well, the information I've been handed is that we may need to reduce customer load across Victoria by anything up to 2 or 300 megawatts. If we were to do that, that would impact on a large number of customers, potentially across the State. Looking at the numbers at this stage, it's probably in excess of 100,000 people if we do loose that second transmission line.

TONYA ROBERTS: So, are you saying, I mean suggest to us what we should do. I mean if the cool change has come to you, do you run around now and turn your air conditioners off?

PAUL BIRD: Certainly energy conservation is - is a good measure at this point in time. If we can reduce the load, the power load on the system it will greatly enhance our ability to keep the transmission lines running and the power grid across the State.

I would also advise people that if they do lose people either at a local level or more broadly, to maintain an ear to the radio, which I'm sure they've been doing, either in the car or a battery-powered radio, and also with candles if they do lose power this evening, to make sure that they keep those candles well away from curtains and other fabrics and so on, so that there isn't any danger of - with those candles burning.

TONYA ROBERTS: We certainly do not need any extra fires.

PAUL BIRD: Indeed we don't, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Now, I know that you are going to go off and get more updates. We will too, obviously. But, Paul, the minute that you know something else can you call us back?

PAUL BIRD: I will, indeed.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you. Paul Bird, the spokesman for NEMMCO there. I mean we've just heard too that Wantirna South, the suburb, has lost power there. So that's very significant news that that major transmission line near Hazelwood, between Hazelwood and South Morang has been affected by the fire. This is the Churchill fire. It was just roaring through a pine plantation earlier today. I believe it took out 600 hectares in one hour and was headed south. So unfortunately that power transmission line has been affected. The second one may yet be. But we will keep you across that. 25 minutes now past 5.

[5.25pm]

Darren Skelton is with me. He's a spokesperson with the DSE. He's got a new urgent threat message. Which part of the State is this one in, Darren?

I can't hear Darren. He's gone. We'll have to get that back, because we do not know which part of the - the area that and, look, we may find that Richelle Hunt can update us on that anyway. Richelle, are with you?

RICHELLE HUNT: Hi, Tonya, I am indeed. And I'm down still at the CFA headquarters and with me now - we've had a bit of a staff turnover. A lot of these staff members here at the moment are sort of pushing onto 12 hours and there's been a staff changeover. Deputy Chief Officer Greg Esnouf joins me now. Now, Greg, you've been in this industry for, you know, well over 30 years. Have you ever seen anything like this? Is this, sort of, just above and beyond what we were expecting today?

GREG ESNOUF: Oh look, it was unfortunately what we were expecting on the forecast but it's just an absolutely

horrible day. I was outside about an hour ago and it just sucks you dry. It's just so hot and so windy. And, unfortunately, with - with all of the fuel so dry, the fires are just - the fire behaviour is quite uncontrollable at the moment.

RICHELLE HUNT: No, we're sitting here, Tonya, if you could see the amount of maps in front of us, as well as the screen which flicks and rotates, it gives us instantaneous updates. With these maps and info that you have here, Greg, what are some of the main areas that you're focused on at the moment?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, look the major fires we have got, we've had a number of rolling through the day and John would have kept you on board on those, and some of those with cool wind change coming through, the Coleraine fire and the fire at Weerite near Camperdown are either under control or, sorry, they are getting control lines around them and so they'll be - we'll be able to start to focus in on the bigger ones, and the bigger ones we've got running at the moment are right through central Victoria and running, sort of, northwest to southeast. There's one at Redesdale that's well over 400 hectares and we're getting unconfirmed reports of some houses lost there.

And then there's the Kilmore-Wandong fire that's been going for a number of hours now and that's quite substantial in size. I think last report that was well over 1,000 hectares in size; 1400 hectares or something of that order.

There's another one at Murrindindi just to the east of that, that's probably north of Yarra Glen, so's issues with spotting from both of those fires because they're getting into the tall mountain ash forest and there's doing a fair bit of spotting to the southeast under this horrendous wind that we've got at the moment.

Then the Bunyip fire --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

GREG ESNOUF: -- that's being going for two or three days, and that's well out of the paddock now, unfortunately. We were hoping we could hold it in the paddock and that's obviously got out today and it's pushed right down towards Drouin and Longwarry.

RICHELLE HUNT: And that major wind change that was coming in there, around the Bunyip area, has that hit yet or is that still to come? Is it still going to get worse?

GREG ESNOUF: No, look it's for - I'm not sure of the latest forecast to that one, but it's probably around about 8 o'clock tonight was on the forecast, but there's some reports the wind changes are pushing in a little bit earlier than the forecast.

Then you have the - going further southeast, you've got the Churchill fire that that last person was just talking about, that has got potential to basically go right through the Strzeleckis, and then on the southwesterly wind change it will push on the eastern flank, it could push quite comfortably to the east quite awhile on the easterly - on the southwesterly wind change, which was the same sort of conditions we had in Ash Wednesday and in the 1977 grass fires. When the fires run from a north west to a southeast direction and then all of a sudden when the wind changes to the southwest, the whole flank just opens up and firefighters have got to be very wary of it. We teach all of our people to be careful of it but it can become a very dangerous situation for people.

RICHELLE HUNT: And do we have enough manpower to cover these fires? I mean it just seems like the entire State is burning down. I mean do we have enough manpower out there to try and control what we can?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, I don't think on a day like today you're ever going to have enough manpower. We will try and do the best we can in the positions that we can but the fire intensity is such that none of our tactics will have any effect at all on the head fire in most situations. So, it's really a matter of asset protection of houses where you can, or trying to pick up flanks where the fire behaviour might be a bit more moderate. But, a day like today, it's just impossible. Our aircraft, some of our aircraft can't even get off the ground at the moment --

RICHELLE HUNT: Gosh.

GREG ESNOUF: -- because of the wind and the dust. Other ones it's just ineffective. You're just "spitting into the wind" is a polite way of putting it, and our fire crews the

same. So, it's - it's just a real tough gig until - until the wind moderates and the temperatures drop.

RICHELLE HUNT: And, Tonya, before we had a number of us here at the CFA sort of standing around just really wanting to push home the fact that people are still getting out and driving around in these areas; whether they be locals or sightseers. So, look the CFA just want us to stress, as hard as we possibly can, when we're talking about these kind of things we are talking to you. You know, a lot of the times people don't think, "this doesn't affect me". And, I think the cool change is starting to come into some areas so people are thinking "You know what, I can jump out in the car and go and have a bit of a look around and see what I've been listening to", but the wind is still far too erratic and the CFA don't know what's going to happen to these fires and it's just far too dangerous to get out there in your cars. So if --

TONYA ROBERTS: Hang in there, I mean the tele news, some of them have started now anyway, but come 6 o'clock everybody is going to have pictures. So heaven's sake, stay home and look at it on the screen.

RICHELLE HUNT: That's exactly right. So, and earlier Tonya, we were talking about whether - that a person was burnt and we weren't sure whether it was a firefighter or a civilian, but it turns out that it actually - it was a civilian, so they were out in shorts and thongs.

TONYA ROBERTS: This is the person who's been taken to Hamilton Hospital with 50 per cent --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- burns to the body.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yep. So --

TONYA ROBERTS: And they were wearing shorts and thongs.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: I don't suppose, Greg, there would be a polite way of saying what the fire crew thought of that.

GREG ESNOUF: Look, I couldn't comment on that. I mean he

may have been out trying to rescue something at the last minute, so I mean you'd have to know the circumstances of that person. But we do ask people, please wear - wear the appropriate clothing.

[5.30pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: But you sort of kit up at the start of the day, if you're wise, don't you?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, you do, and so I don't know the circumstances; whether they got caught out and they had to do something in a hurry but, yeah, look it's just a matter of staying indoors as much as you can. Do not get out on the roads. The roads will be busy. There'll be trees over the roads. There'll be potentially powerlines over roads. There'll be fire trucks on roads. There could be new fires. Even after the southwesterly wind change comes through, with the wind we've got and the fact that the fuels are so dry, they'll still push fires and fires will still behave quite erratically for quite sometime after the wind change comes through.

RICHELLE HUNT: And you've lost a --

TONYA ROBERTS: And --

RICHELLE HUNT: Sorry, Tonya. You've lost a tanker too, haven't you, in the Whittlesea area?

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah, look we've got an unconfirmed report that we've lost a tanker up in the Whittlesea area, but the that the crew were safe. So, we'll follow that up and check on that, and we believe we lost another one of our vehicles earlier in the day but once again the crew were safe as well, too.

TONYA ROBERTS: I did want to ask that, because we'd had a text message from someone saying they had heard a mayday call from a tanker in Whittlesea --

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah, yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- but that the crew were okay, but injured but I needed to confirm that with you.

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah. The report we've got is that the crew

were safe so we're okay. So, we'll follow that up.

TONYA ROBERTS: That's great. All right, thank you, Greg, and thank you, Richelle, we'll be back with you shortly.

RICHELLE HUNT: Ta.

TONYA ROBERTS: We will take some news headlines now with Alicia Byrne, who can tell us a bit more about what has been going on across this extraordinary day across Victoria.

ALICIA BYRNE: Thanks, Tonya. The fire at Glendonald in Gippsland is heading towards the coast and the town of Yarram. It's burning through the eastern end of the Strzelecki Ranges and warnings have been issued for communities in a line to Devon North and Yarram. There's concern that the strong southeasterly change this afternoon could push a huge fire front east through state forest towards Sale and across the Princes Highway east of Rosedale.

Fire alerts are still being issued for the fire in the Bunyip State Forest and towns of Warragul, Drouin and Tonimbuk and Labertouche. Three homes, a golf club and a fire truck have been destroyed by a blaze at Horsham in western Victoria. The wind change is pushing the blaze to the east and northeast towards the Western Highway between Horsham and Drung Drung South. The Haven, McKenzie Creek, Bungalally and Green Lake areas remain under threat. The fire at Horsham has now crossed the Western Highway southeast of the town. The fire is expected to threaten the communities of Drung south, Longerenong, Dooen and Riverside.

Residents of Wandong and Hidden Valley, north of Melbourne are being warned to prepare for a fire that's heading towards the communities. The CFA has issued an urgent warning for the residents of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East near Bendigo. A fire that's burning on Coliban Park Road, 9 kilometres west of Redesdale near Lake Eppalock is moving quickly in a southeasterly direction.

An urgent threat message has been issued for residents in the train track area of Yarra Glen due to a 30-hectare blaze. The towns of Drouin, Jindivick - and Jindivick are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to

containment lines being broken and heavy spotting.

Also fire has closed the Burwood Highway at Ferntree Gully between Forest Road and Dawson Street. The Maroondah Highway at Coldstream between Hill Road and the Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway intersection is also closed.

[5.33pm]

Melbourne's endured its hottest day on record with the mercury peaking at 46.4 degrees this afternoon.

To the weather: the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the state today. For Melbourne windy with a late cool change and areas of raised dust. Tomorrow a shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, 24. In Melbourne 27 degrees.

Next news at 6.

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in fire fighting for nearly 30 years but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the State in the next few days with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[5.34pm]

TONYA ROBERTS: 26 minutes now to 6. Tonya Roberts here with you on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria too.

Now Darren Skilton who was just about to update us on a new urgent threat message from the DSE, his line dropped out earlier, but he's back with us. Darren, hi.

DARREN SKILTON: Tonya, how you going?

TONYA ROBERTS: Now, which part of the State is this new threat in?

DARREN SKILTON: Yeah, this - this is the Murrindindi mill fire which is burning in Mount Despair State Forest near Narbethong in the Marysville area. So, we've got an existing threat message out for the community of Narbethong which came under ember attack this afternoon. We've now extending that threat message to include the communities of Marysville and Buxton which we also expect to come under direct attack from this fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: And so, just the same message that's applied to all the other new urgent threats today really applies?

DARREN SKILTON: Look it absolutely is. And we have had reports that this fire is actually burning on both sides of the Maroondah Highway at Narbethong. So, there will be road closures obviously in place which the police are dealing with at the moment and again, if you don't need to go into those areas stay - stay well away.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes. I think we have just about decided that we've reached the point where we simply cannot read out the road closures across the state of Victoria, because it's got to that point.

DARREN SKILTON: That's right and look I think most people would use some commonsense and understand that there are multiple fires burning across the state and, look, the best place to be today, if - you know, if you're not in danger is - is in your house and - and to stay well clear and let emergency people do their job.

TONYA ROBERTS: We've been so focused on Victoria for all the right reasons, of course, but New South Wales is ablaze too, and yet we've got these floods in Queensland. It is an astonishing country.

DARREN SKILTON: Certainly is. It's a bit crazy at the moment, isn't it?

TONYA ROBERTS: Completely. Thanks, Darren.

DARREN SKILTON: I would add - add also Tonya --

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

DARREN SKILTON: -- that Healesville, we - we're asking Healesville residents just to remain on - on high alert. We have had some reports that they may be getting some - some spotting potentially from that Kilmore fire, or - or potentially from this Narbethong fire, so they - they need to remain on - on alert for the prospect of some ember attacks.

TONYA ROBERTS: That's - that's a far way, isn't it, for fire to travel from either of those two to Healesville?

DARREN SKILTON: Certainly is, and - and the other testament to the conditions that we've got today and the - the country that this fire is burning in.

TONYA ROBERTS: Certainly. Thanks Darren.

DARREN SKILTON: Thanks for the opportunity. Ta.

TONYA ROBERTS: Darren Skelton there. He's from the DSE. He's done a great job of keeping us updated all day.

Now, Jim, who is in Tanjil South is on the line. He's just given us a call. Hi, Jim.

CALLER JIM: Hello.

TONYA ROBERTS: Tell me about what's happening in Tanjil South.

CALLER JIM: Well, I've been on hold for about half an hour, and we're having embers from - not burning embers, but you know, black embers from the Bunyip fire landing in the pool, but now, I tell you what, in the last about 20 minutes it's almost like midnight and we can smell the fire from, I would assume, it's the Churchill area.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, well it would have to be, wouldn't it, if you're there at Tanjil South? I mean, it was - they were talking about it when the wind changed potentially happens it heading closer to Neerim and Noojee, but that might suggest that the wind change has been a bit early, Jim?

CALLER JIM: Well, it certainly has. Look, we can hardly see here. We're still in the pool, but we're just about to hop out because we can't see, it's so dark. And, as I

said, we were copping embers from the, sort of, our sort of, what would you say? Our south - southwest of where we are which is the Bunyip fire, but now we've had some cracking lightning and we're copping smoke and dust and God knows what from sort of the - what would you say, the --

TONYA ROBERTS: From the north?

CALLER JIM: North --

TONYA ROBERTS: East would be from you.

CALLER JIM: East, yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

CALLER JIM: Of course.

TONYA ROBERTS: As I see the map. And see that's - that echoes a little bit what we were just hearing from the DSE. I mean, they're getting reports of spotting fires at Healesville but they're actually not sure whether that's from the Bunyip fire or the Wandong one.

CALLER JIM: Where we are we are copping it, as you said, the - the - the Churchill fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

CALLER JIM: We can smell it. The smoke is terrible. We can hardly see. In fact, we are going inside because we can't - we can't see any more it's so dark. We've had cracks of thunder and lightning, but my God it's - I lived in Ferntree Gully in the early 60s and we had some shocking fires back then, but my God it was never as hot as this.

TONYA ROBERTS: No, exactly right. Well, look I think it's a night to have the batteries, the candles et cetera all happening Jim, so we'll let you go and get organised. Thanks for staying on hold.

CALLER JIM: We've got everything organised and I tell you what, we are not - we are prepared to leave.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, good. Thanks Jim.

CALLER JIM: Thank you.

TONYA ROBERTS: Bye bye now. Alan's in Woodend. Hi, Alan. Alan.

[5.38pm]

CALLER ALAN: It's just near - hello.

TONYA ROBERTS: Go ahead.

CALLER ALAN: I'm just near Tylden which is between Woodend and Trentham and it just rained. A rain squall came over and the wind has just - it's still high in the trees, but it's abated on the ground, so it's just a shower came from nowhere and sort of stopped now, but the road's all wet and the paddocks are wet. So --

TONYA ROBERTS: And so you got more than three drops?

CALLER ALAN: Got more than three drops, but I hoped it would continue but there's some dark clouds, so it looks sort of improved everything dramatically. So, I don't know whether it's just a brief thing, or whether it will continue.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh well, the promise we hope is still there, Alan. You just want to keep believing that it can rain, don't you?

CALLER ALAN: Yes. Okay.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thanks, Alan.

[5.39pm]

CALLER ALAN: Just letting you know, because there's no fires around here. The closest ones are over at Redesdale --

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah, right.

CALLER ALAN: -- which is some distance away.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, appreciate that, thank you very much.

CALLER ALAN: Okay.

TONYA ROBERTS: Lots of reports about power going out, power now having been lost in Emerald. It's been lost also in - as the screen just refreshes - Cockatoo and across Kilmore as well. So, people trying to listen via the Internet, they hope their battery in their PC lasts. We know part of the reason for that, probable reason anyway for the power dropping out, that Churchill fire, the very ferocious - one of the other ferocious fires which the CFA has said this afternoon could go right through the Strzeleckis is - has affected already one of the major transmission lines to Melbourne near - or between the Hazelwood Power Station there in South Morang. There is a second one. It is possible that it will be affected as well, and if so, no-one's quite willing to predict precisely what would happen with power supply. So, we will keep you across that evolving situation.

[5.40pm]

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

STEVE MARTIN: Thanks, Tonya. Hello and good afternoon, Steve Martin with an update of the urgent threat messages. Now, there is an update on the Redesdale-Coliban Park Road fair that started at Redesdale, south of Lake Eppalock. It burnt in a southeasterly direction; about 2,000 hectares in size already. The fire has cost - crossed the Heathcote-Redesdale Road in the vicinity of Barfold, and has now crossed the Campaspe River as well. The head of the fire is currently approaching Sidonia. The communities of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton may be impacted directly by this fire. Advice for residents in the Pipers Creek, Carlsruhe, Woodend North, Newham, Cadello and Carboor areas are advised to be on alert and to an implement your fire plans. This fire is continuing to move rapidly.

Communities Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria, and other communities to the east of Kyneton may be impacted directly. If your in Pipers Creek, Carlsruhe, Woodend North, Newham, Cadello and Carboor implement your fire plans, because that fire is still well and truly on the move.

The Glendonald Road fire: to that and the latest information from the Glendonald Road fire is that it's currently burning in a southeast direction and also spreading rapidly. Communities of Woodside, Alberton, Tarraville, Manns Beach, Robertsons Beach, Woodside Beach, McLoughlins Beach may experience heavy smoke and ember attack from the main fire.

There is another one which has popped now on the urgent threat message list. The Train Track Vineyard fire: around 30 hectares at this stage. Currently burning in Train Track Vineyard area of Yarra Glen. Residents in the area will experience ember attack and you are being advised to implement your bushfire plans for - for that particular fire.

Working our way down the - down the list: the Murrindindi fire, Murrindindi mill fire, the Mount Despair State Forest burning in a southeasterly direction. It's spotting well ahead of that fire. Communities of Narbethong, Marysville and Buxton can expect to come under direct attack from this fire. Healesville residents, as we've just heard, are advised to remain on high alert for the prospect of ember attack.

Update to the Bunyip Ridge fire, the towns the Drouin and Jindivick are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke due to containment lines being broken, and heavy spotting. So, that is a threat message for the communities of Drouin and Jindivick with the Bunyip Ridge fire.

There is an update on the Camperdown-Danedite Road fire, in the Weerite district. Residents in the area of Harlocks Road are advised to remain on full alert. If you're between Danedite Road and Lake Corangamite, in that area, you're asked to implement fire survival plans and stay alert for possible embers. Residents of Scoullers Road, Carters Road Settlement and Swan Marsh communities are advised to remain on alert for burning embers and to watch out for emergency services vehicles. So, we have an update on - on that particular fire.

The Redesdale-Coliban Park fire is currently burning - no, that's the Glendonald fire. Once again, I'm getting myself caught out here. We've done the Redesdale-Coliban Park fire, Tonya. So, I'm going to go onto the Upper Ferntree

Gully fire. Grass and scrub fire still burning on the southern side of Quarry Road, residents of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully, and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont may be affected by - by that fire.

The Remlaw fire: now the latest advice if I can just get that up. Firefighters have reported - this is the fire near Horsham - have reported the fire's jumped the Western Highway, currently impacting on the Drung Drung South area. Communities within the Dooen, Riverside and Longerenong areas can expect to see increased fire activity over the next two hours, and are being urged to - to implement their - their bushfire plan.

[5.45pm]

There is - there is one more to - to go to, if you'll bear with me for a second, Tonya. I've just got to find the - the latest on the Whittlesea fire. That advice remains to be burning in the Mount Disappointment area, burning in a southeasterly direction. Communities of Whittlesea, Humevale, Arthurs Creek, Nutfield, Eden Park and Doreen may be directly impacted upon by this fire. So, there is also an urgent threat message for those communities as well.

TONYA ROBERTS: Have you done a count lately, Steve, because I've so many handwritten notes here --

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah, I know.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- I'm unsure. I think I've got - I mean there are a dozen I've got listed at least.

STEVE MARTIN: Well, look I've - the main ones that I'm working with at the moment, and this is where I'm getting a little bit confused because some of it is on the web, some of it is email advice that I'm getting, and trying to flick backwards and forwards in some sort of order between what - what is coming through as the most updated and most urgent threats.

I've got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and there's a couple of others around that I haven't necessarily mentioned because at this stage they're - the urgent threat messages are more than a couple of hours old.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

STEVE MARTIN: They haven't been updated. So I'm trying just to go with the latest information that is at least in some way sort of 60 minutes old at the most because, well, with this wind swirling around as well, fire doesn't necessarily always travel as fast as everyone thinks; sometimes it's faster, sometimes it's a bit slower.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, absolutely. Do you know where Strathewen is, Steve?

STEVE MARTIN: Strathewen?

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah.

STEVE MARTIN: No.

TONYA ROBERTS: I've just received this text message a couple of times now, it's the same one and they're obviously still worried. They're saying:

> We've heard from a mate. His house is under threat in Strathewen.

Do we have any info for them? They can see flames but they have heard nothing from the ABC.

STEVE MARTIN: Right. Okay. No, well, this is - this is here it's also getting a little confusing with some of the information that is coming in from listeners where they are using their - their local knowledge or district name.

TONYA ROBERTS: Almost village name in some cases.

STEVE MARTIN: Yeah, indeed.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes.

STEVE MARTIN: What - what we are working from is the overall name of the fire such as the Train Track Vineyard fire, for example, as it's - it's been posted.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yeah. Or the Delburn Complex, yes.

STEVE MARTIN: Or the Delburn Complex which then has a whole lot of small communities within it.

TONYA ROBERTS: Attached, yep.

STEVE MARTIN: And - and those communities that are - we are being advised are the ones under attack are the ones that I guess we - we know about and know are within the realm of that fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: And need to focus on at this time.

STEVE MARTIN: And, indeed, yes. So, that's what we're doing, focussing on those ones.

TONYA ROBERTS: And we will keep doing our best in that regard. Thank you Steve.

STEVE MARTIN: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Steve Martin. He's actually sitting in the studio in Ballarat and, as you can hear, grappling with these constant updates to information and bringing it as clearly and with as much clarification as possible to us all. 12 minutes now away from the latest news at 6 o'clock.

[5.48pm]

Jonathan Ridnell is a colleague of mine. He's at the ABC radio station in Bendigo. Hello, Jonathan.

[Jonathan Ridnell is a colleague of mine and he's ...]

Jonathan's pressed a funny button, because there's some delay going on there, but I think we've just snapped out of it. Hi, Jonathan.

JONATHAN RIDNELL: Sorry about that, Tonya, called listening predelay. Look, I've just been speaking to the Country Fire Authority about that Maiden Gully fire. It started on Bracewell Street and is heading in a southeasterly direction and has crossed the Maiden Gully Road. It is threatening to cross the Sparrowhawk-Empire Road and so people living in the Maiden Gully and Long Gully area are being asked to please implement their fire plans. We also have a report, and the Country Fire Authority is responding to a report of a fire in the area of Thistle Street, not far from the Saint Gon - Saint God -

Saint John of God Hospital. So, the other thing to be aware of for everybody in Bendigo is that fire units are travelling at speed from north of Bendigo to attend these fires, so please take care on the roads.

TONYA ROBERTS: So, it's literally in the CBD, Jonathan?

JONATHAN RIDNELL: Not quite the CBD. It would be a couple of kilometres to the south and to the west of the CBD, but it is certainly approaching built-up parts of Bendigo.

TONYA ROBERTS: Goodness me. And, everybody is obviously doing what they need to do, but I mean was this level of threat anticipated right in town?

JONATHAN RIDNELL: I - I believe from speaking to the CFA over the past month that it's always been a concern that a city surrounded by forest was going to be under threat during a day such as today, and a lot of community education has been going on in recent months to - to really make sure that everybody, not just our blockies, are prepared for - for an approaching fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, we'll let you go off and continue playing your part locally there. Thank you.

JONATHAN RIDNELL: Thanks, Tonya.

TONYA ROBERTS: Jonathan Ridnell there, and Jonathan just spoke about the fire trucks belting down, as they need to do right now, to this part of Bendigo where that fire is. A message just letting us know that there are fire trucks zooming along the Melbourne-Geelong Road at the moment. Get out of the way please, says our informant. Thank you to everybody who's told me about Strathewen. Eight kilometres west of Kinglake, just near Arthurs Creek, west of Whittlesea, south of Kinglake. So I now understand a bit to be able to at least tell our previous texter that it's likely to be the Yarra Glen fire that is affecting that area, and the latest that we knew from that Whittlesea area was the bad news, in fact, about the fire truck being destroyed, but the crew on it all being safe. So, there's certainly a great deal of front line engagement going on there.

Simon lives in Narre Warren. Hi Simon.

CALLER SIMON BROWN: G'day Tonya, I'm standing on my roof watching two houses burn up, potentially three. It's right on the edge of civilisation. They back right onto the easement to the powerlines and I figure a grass fire has got into the back of their houses and the firies putting out one house and there are a series of explosions going off, which I imagine are gas bottles or something. There's a car out the front of it that's probably going to get wasted. That's directly behind me, 100 metres away, and further to the southwest I can see another house going up.

The cool change has come through. We've had a few spots of rain but it's very, very thick smoke and most of my neighbours have left to safer areas. We're not particularly under threat where we are except for the people that back onto the grassland of the easement.

TONYA ROBERTS: And so, apart from being able to give us a terrific eye witness account, what are you doing on the roof?

CALLER SIMON BROWN: Just making sure that I don't have any embers coming into my place and down on the street, I felt anonymous not seeing anything, and I was speculating and I climbed up on the roof. I'm a builder, it's all right, it's easy for me to get up here. And, I can see it all happening and it's - yeah, pretty ugly for some people. They've - their lives are being shattered, I reckon.

TONYA ROBERTS: Yes, well I think you're right. I mean it's just a hard thing to grapple with. We all have to come to grips with it, but it's in suburbia everywhere. I mean it's no longer --

CALLER SIMON BROWN: Yeah.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- a case of thinking "Well, we're in Melbourne, gosh we'll support those - those blokes out there as much as we can", it's here and it's now.

CALLER SIMON BROWN: Yes. And apparently the fire's gone down, cut a strip through Narre Warren and through the grassed area, and it's - I can see two, potentially three houses that have gone up. So I don't know how many others have been picked off by the fire and whether it was an accidental fire or a deliberately hit fire.

TONYA ROBERTS: Oh well, there's not much point speculating on that right now, is there?

CALLER SIMON BROWN: No.

TONYA ROBERTS: We just have to get through today as safely as we can. Simon, thank you.

CALLER SIMON BROWN: That's okay.

TONYA ROBERTS: See you later.

CALLER SIMON BROWN: Right, bye.

TONYA ROBERTS: Andrew, in Traralgon, meanwhile has been listening and has called in to let us know about what he can see in the Traralgon direction. Hi, Andrew.

CALLER ANDREW: Hi, how you going?

TONYA ROBERTS: Really good. What can you see?

CALLER ANDREW: I just phoned mainly to let you know that we're in Traralgon, pretty much in the CBD area. I've got a direct line of sight through to where the fire started at Churchill and watched that go through all day. We can actually see the flames flaring up on the eastern side, coming back down the Loy Yang side of the Jeeralang area.

It's very strange weather conditions at the moment. We had real strong, blustery winds all day. At the moment it's like it's created its own change, weather front that's come through. All the street lights are on. It's pretty black like it was with the big fires a couple of years ago. We've got embers falling. They're not live, but they're about the size of whole leaves are falling on us at the moment. And there's a lightning storm going through north of us. It's as black as the middle of the night, and there's fire trucks heading back out towards the Sale direction, so whether there's been lightning strikes have started other fires, I'm not sure, but there's a lot of fire trucks going back in the other direction to what they were today, with sirens and horns going.

TONYA ROBERTS: So, the scope of this Churchill fire now is just enormous. I don't know if anybody's had time to

stop and try and estimate it, measure it, but it must be of enormous scale.

CALLER ANDREW: Well, it was just absolutely amazing how quickly it run over the hills. Like, it started probably around about 1.30 to 2 o'clock this afternoon and it was just up and gone over the hills through Jeeralang that quick.

TONYA ROBERTS: What, the pine plantation helped I suppose.

CALLER ANDREW: Oh yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: Unfortunately.

CALLER ANDREW: Definitely and, of course, the winds out in that area are quite different to what it is on this side of the ranges.

TONYA ROBERTS: Mmm-hmm.

CALLER ANDREW: The winds actually died down a fair bit. We had - at 4 o'clock today we had a temperature here of 49 degrees. That was on the - in the shade on the new side of the house and it is currently dropped down to 39 degrees and just with a slight breeze.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, it just all to some extent beggars belief, doesn't it, but we're living right through it. Somebody described it earlier today, Andrew, as apocalyptic and I wondered at the time whether that was overly dramatic but the picture you've just painted for it, for us, no it wasn't overly dramatic. Stay safe, won't you?

CALLER ANDREW: Yep, no worries, thank you.

TONYA ROBERTS: Thank you very much.

[5.55pm]

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in fire fighting for nearly 30 years but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across

the state in the next few days, with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

TONYA ROBERTS: Today, Saturday, the 7th of February has been declared a day of total fire ban. The Country - oh, right across the State of Victoria. The Country Fire Authority reminds you that now is the time to implement your personal bushfire plan. If you're planning to leave your property, leave early. If you're planning to stay and defend your property you should be properly prepared. A total fire ban means, of course, that there can be no fires in the open and you must not allow a fire to continue to burn. Don't work with machinery like angle grinders or welders. It's banned. Tractors, chainsaws and lawn mowers all should only be used if absolutely necessary.

And I can now say to you, for more information ring the Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667. It is back up and running. They ferried a truckload more operators in to man the - staff the telephones, and they are now up and running full scale. 1800 240 667 if you need to talk to them and, of course, keep listening to us, 774 ABC Melbourne ABC Victoria, because we are your emergency services broadcaster and your emergency traffic information broadcaster. Richard Stubbs.

RICHARD STUBBS: You bet. I've got closures an Eastlink affecting in and out bound between Cheltenham Road and Greens Road. Power is out in Ringwood, Greensborough, Lilydale, Ballarat, Horsham, Nhill and a listener just spoke to John Faine, who's taking calls, and told him that the power was out at Cranbourne North as well. Police are also saying the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway intersection. Police have closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to smoke and fire. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the Northern Highway and Broadford to Kilmore Road.

Princes Freeway is closed at Pakenham to Warragul. The Princes Highway is closed at Sale for the westbound traffic and at Stratford in both directions. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster.

Traffic affecting south of Horsham is the following: the Western Highway at Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road, also Horsham-Drung South Road is closed; Wimmera Highway at Natimuk Road and Glenelg Highway at Coleraine; Princes Highway between Camperdown and Colac; Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite due to poor visibility; Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake; Burwood Highway is closed between Glenfern Road, which is Upwey, to Dawsons Road which is Upper Ferntree Gully.

The Bushfire Information Line is your line and, of course, just quickly on V/Line, Gippsland line train services are closed between Melbourne and Traralgon and Bairnsdale; Seymour line all train services to Seymour-Shepparton are closed. There is a back-up coaches but you will be delayed. V/Line have closed all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool on the Warrnambool line due to the grass fire at Colac.

Anything else that is running is running slowly because there are heat restrictions in place still and everything is slow or closed.

TONYA ROBERTS: And will continue to be so tomorrow. They've already flagged that.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yeah and --

TONYA ROBERTS: So don't think you're going anywhere fast tomorrow, because you're not.

RICHARD STUBBS: Well, that's right. And we have already pointed to this, but we should again; as our visibility falls as night comes this won't get any easier. So be aware, if you do need specifically to travel, start now. Otherwise don't.

TONYA ROBERTS: And power's going down everywhere. Probably partly because Jon Faine's being burning up phone lines like you wouldn't believe. But across the state Seymour, Hopetoun, I just got a message it's still

40 degrees there and they've got no power.

JON FAINE: Yes, Tonya, good evening Richard too, and people calling in saying "Did you just say that street or that road? That's where I live, can I just check with you? Oh sheet, I'm on my way, that's not what I wanted to hear". This is vital information. We'll keep it going as long as we need to right through the night.

RICHARD STUBBS: Absolutely.

TONYA ROBERTS: And tomorrow morning too --

JON FAINE: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- locally, because there will be mop-up operations which are immense.

RICHARD STUBBS: Yes.

TONYA ROBERTS: -- and we just don't know what the wind change is going to be.

RICHARD STUBBS: And to be honest we hope they're mop-up operations.

TONYA ROBERTS: Well, that's right. Because there could still be fires burning here, there and everywhere. See you later, Stubbsy. I'm out of here tonight and I will be back tomorrow morning. Jon Faine taking over the air waves now. Thanks, Jon.

JOHN FAINE: My pleasure and congratulations to the ABC staff who have worked long and hard.

TONYA ROBERTS: They certainly have. News time now it's 6 o'clock.

[6pm]

GREG ESNOUF: The fire intensity is such that none of our tactics will have any effect at all on the head fire in most situations.

ALICIA BYRNE: CFA Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Greg Esnouf, describing the intensity of bushfires burning around the State. Good evening, Alicia Byrne, with ABC News.

Fire crews are fully stretched across Victoria, fighting blazes on multiple fronts that are threatening homes and townships. Although no deaths have been reported, one man has been flown to Melbourne with burns to 50 per cent of his body after being caught in a blaze near Hamilton in the State's west. He was reportedly moving stock on a neighbour's property dressed only in shorts and thongs.

Dozens of homes have been destroyed near Kilmore and at Horsham, and the CFA says some of its tankers have been destroyed. The CFA's Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Greg Esnouf, says the sheer volume of the fires and the breadth of the fire activity is putting enormous pressure on emergency crews.

GREG ESNOUF: I don't think on a day like today you're ever going to have enough manpower. We'll try and do the best we can in the positions that we can, but the fire intensity is such that none of our tactics will have any effect at all on the head fire in most situations, so it's really a matter of asset protection of houses, where you can, or trying to pick up flanks where the fire behaviour might be a bit more moderate. But a day like today - it's just impossible.

ALICIA BYRNE: Bushfires in Gippsland have burned from the Latrobe Valley over the Strzelecki Ranges and are spotting towards coastal towns near Yarram. Mark DeBono reports.

MARK DEBONO: Spot fires are appearing well ahead of the main fire fronts, and the towns of Devon North, Yarram, Calrossie, Alberton, Tarraville, Port Albert, Manns Beach and Robertsons Beach are being told they could be affected. A south-westerly change is expected through after 7 o'clock tonight and will push the fire towards Sale.

Authorities say the fire could cut the South Gippsland Highway and possibly the Princes Highway east of Rosedale. The highway is already cut at Warragul. Residents of Warragul are being warned their homes could soon be under threat and the fire is approaching the ABC's transmitter sites at Mount Tassie. The AM transmitter at Longford will continue to operate. Smoke blocked the sun in a huge bank from the Latrobe Valley through to the coast this afternoon. Mark DeBono, ABC News, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: It's feared the Glendonald fire will impact on Latrobe Valley's biggest power station. Water sprays have been activated in the open-cut coalmine at Loy Yang. Power generation and coal supply has not been affected at this stage.

A wind change has turned a big fire towards communities to the east of Horsham. Peter Leneghan reports.

PETER LENEGHAN: The fast-moving fire's burned more than 2,000 hectares and has crossed the Western Highway south of Horsham. The fire's threatening communities to the east and south of the city, including Drung Drung South, Longerenong, Riverside and Dooen. The deputy incident controller, Graham Parkes, says strong winds are hampering efforts to control the blaze.

GRAHAM PARKES: Aircraft are on the ground at the moment. We've got one spotter up. The bombers are not effective at this stage, with this wind.

PETER LENEGHAN: Earlier this afternoon, the fire swept through the city's southern outskirts and destroyed three homes and the Horsham Golf Club. The blaze also claimed a fire truck, but the CFA says the unit's crew from Dimboola is safe. Crews are yet to confirm any further damage. Peter Leneghan, ABC News, Horsham.

ALICIA BYRNE: Fire has destroyed homes and is threatening others at Wandong, Heathcote and Upper Plenty. The fire which started east of Kilmore has burned through 4,000 hectares of scrubland and is moving in a southerly direction between Kilmore East and Whittlesea. The ABC's James Bennett says about 30 houses have been lost.

JAMES BENNETT: The estimate which the CFA's incident controller for the Kilmore blaze is putting on the property losses for the fire so far is somewhere around 30 homes and quite a number of other buildings, like sheds, which have also been destroyed.

ALICIA BYRNE: Fire crews are trying to respond to a number of smaller fires that are threatening homes across Victoria. Gus Goswell reports.

GUS GOSWELL: A grass fire burning west of Redesdale, near Bendigo, has now crossed the Heathcote Redesdale Road. The CFA says the fire may reach the communities of Barfold, Langley and Metcalfe East. Unconfirmed reports say houses have already been lost.

Spot fires are breaking out ahead of a fire at Murrindindi in the Mount Despair State Forest. The community of Narbethong is also being told to watch for embers. And a grass and scrub fire burning on the southern side of Quarry Road has provoked the CFA to issue a warning for residents of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont in Melbourne's south-east.

ALICIA BYRNE: A fire has started in the outskirts of Bendigo. The blaze started in Bracewell Street in Maiden Gully and is approaching built-up parts of the city. The CFA says people should implement their personal bushfire plans.

More than 20,000 customers around Victoria are without power, about half of them in bushfire-ravaged areas. Around 8,000 customers in the Coleraine and Horsham areas are affected, along with a further 3,000 in the Kilmore and Bunyip areas. Power companies are warning those who have lost power in the fire-affected regions that they are likely to be without power overnight, while those who have lost power in metropolitan areas should have it restored over the next few hours.

A man has been arrested for allegedly starting a bushfire at Peats Ridge on the New South Wales Central Coast. Police say the 31-year-old was arrested on the Pacific Highway and was taken to Gosford Police Station. Fires in Peats Ridge have been threatening homes nearby and firefighters are carrying out property protection.

Connex has cancelled more than 110 services today because of high temperatures. Buses have replaced trains on the Glen Waverley, Alamein and Williamstown lines, while a grass fire at Ferntree Gully has suspended services between Ringwood and Belgrave. Services on the Cranbourne line have been cancelled between Cranbourne and Dandenong. Connex spokesman John Rees does not expect any of the services cancelled today will be back in action tonight.

Meanwhile, bushfires have forced the suspension of

V/Line trains between Melbourne and Bairnsdale, Geelong and Warrnambool and Melbourne and Shepparton. Buses are replacing trains on some country rail services, but Gippsland isn't one of them. V/Line is urging customers to defer non-essential travel to fire-ravaged regions.

The cool change has arrived in Melbourne almost an hour earlier than expected. It arrived in the CBD just after 5 o'clock and temperatures dropped by 10 degrees in as many minutes. The cool change is expected to have reached most of the metropolitan area by half past 6, before reaching the State's north by midnight.

A woman has been killed in a car crash near Stawell in western Victoria. Police say the woman, aged about 50, died when her car crashed into a tree on the Stawell, Halls Gap Road about 4.30 this afternoon.

The North Queensland town of Ingham is preparing for its second flood peak this week, which could have a devastating impact on the town's infrastructure. Kim Lyle reports the peak is expected to be about the same level as on Tuesday.

KIM LYLE: Flood forecasters are now expecting the Herbert River to peak at 9 o'clock tonight. Peter Baddeley from the Weather Bureau says it'll come up at a rate of around 5cm an hour to about 12.4 metres.

PETER BADDELEY: Another rise of maybe 10 to 20cm during the next several hours.

KIM LYLE: The Mayor, Pino Giandomenico, says the town's infrastructure, such as roads, are still saturated from Tuesday's flood peak.

PINO GIANDOMENICO: This next rise could take out the infrastructure altogether, so they're the concerns we have. If that happens, then we're in for a massive disaster.

KIM LYLE: Forecasters say there'll be moderate to heavy falls in the region tonight.

ALICIA BYRNE: In sport, Australian cricket captain, Ricky Ponting, will play in tomorrow's third One Day International against New Zealand at the SCG. Ponting missed yesterday's six-wicket loss to the Black Caps in

Melbourne after the national selectors decided to rest him for two matches. But with Australia trailing two nil in the five-match series, Ponting has gained permission from the selectors to cut short his break.

In women's tennis, Australia has defeated New Zealand three rubbers to nil in the final of the Asia/Oceania Fed Cup Group 1 playoff in Perth. Jelena Dokic and Samantha Stosur won their singles matches in straight sets. Then Casey Dellacqua and Renae Stubbs won the doubles 6-2 6-2. Australia will now progress to the Group 2 playoff in April.

In golf, Australia's Katherine Hull has a three-shot lead after three rounds of the Ladies Masters on the Gold Coast. Hull is 12 under par after shooting a 68 today. Fellow Australian Tammy Durden is 9 under with American Mollie Fankhauser a shot further back on 8 under.

[6.08pm]

The main points again: fire crews stretched as blazes burn across Victoria; bushfires in Gippsland spotting towards coastal towns near Yarram; a man suffers burns to 50 per cent of his body in a fire near Hamilton; and Melbourne deals with its hottest day on record, with the temperature reaching 46.4 degrees.

To the weather: the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State today. There's a gale warning between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom, between Mallacoota and Gabo Island and for Port Phillip and Western Port and the Gippsland Lakes.

For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust, isolated light showers over the south-west and near the coast during the morning and also in the south near the change.

Tomorrow, isolated light showers mainly on and south of the Ranges, moderate to fresh south -westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south, and mild to warm in

the north.

For Melbourne, windy with a late cool change and areas of raised dust today. For tomorrow, a shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm and a top of 24 degrees.

For Monday, a light shower or two, 21. Tuesday, a light shower or two and 20. Wednesday, a light shower or two, clearing, and a top of 20.

In Melbourne, 26 degrees. This is ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

[6.10pm]

STEVE MARTIN: 6.10 is the time. Hello and good afternoon. Steve Martin here with you on ABC Local Radio across Victoria, and just with some of the urgent threat messages as they are being issued by the CFA this afternoon. There is quite a few to work through, so we might as well just get stuck straight into it, as we have been doing all afternoon.

The communities of Devon North, Yarram, Calrossie, Alberton, Tarraville, Port Albert, Landsborough, Manns Beach, Robertsons Beach may be directly impacted by the Glendonald Road fire.

Additionally to that, campers in the area - or the coastal area between Port Albert and Woodside Beach are being advised to seek shelter and not to try to outrun this particular fire. That advice has come in in just the last little bit. So communities of Devon North, Yarram, Calrossie, Alberton, Tarraville, Port Albert, Landsborough, Manns Beach and Robertsons Beach may be directly impacted. Campers - seek shelter; do not try to outrun that fire if you're in the area between Port Albert and Woodside Beach.

The Coliban Park Road fire: the latest advice is that fire is burning in a south-easterly direction, estimated to be over 2,000 hectares. It's crossed the Heathcote Redesdale Road in the vicinity of Barfold and has also crossed the Campaspe River and Watchbox Road.

A strong wind change from the south-west is expected in the area between 6.30 and 7pm, so that is coming, getting close to those times. The head of the fire is currently in the Sidonia area. Communities of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton may be impacted directly by the fire. If you're in Pipers Creek, Carlsruhe, Woodend North, Newham, Cadello and Carboor, you're advised to be alert and implement fire plans.

Now, when this wind change arrives at the fire, it will run in a north-easterly direction, so residents in the following locations need to be alert and implement their fire plans: that's in Redesdale, Glenhope, Baynton and Baynton East. Residents in the areas between Glenhope, Baynton, Redesdale and Heathcote, Tooborac and Pyalong need to be aware that these communities may also be under threat when that wind change passes through.

There is a downgraded message for the Quarry Road fire in Upper Ferntree Gully. It says here the scrub fire's burning on the southern side of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully. Residents of Quarry Road and Acacia Road, Upper Ferntree Gully and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont are no longer under direct threat from this fire. However, you still need to remain alert due to a high level of activity in that area.

For the Kilmore East fire - 4 kilometres east of Kilmore, south of Saunders Road, burning in a southerly direction, estimated to be 4,000 hectares. The communities in the area of Kinglake to Flowerdale may be directly impacted by that particular fire.

Murrindindi Mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is burning in a south-easterly direction, spotting well ahead of the fire still. That fire is now directly impacting on Narbethong. Communities of Marysville and Buxton can expect to come under direct attack from this fire. Healesville residents are advised to remain on high alert for the prospect of ember attack.

Bunyip Ridge, the towns of Brandy Creek, Buln Buln, Rokeby, Tarago, Jindivick, Jindivick West, Jindivick North, Neerim Junction, Neerim, Drouin, Rosworth, Neerim East, Neerim South, Crossover, Shady Creek, Nayook and Nilma

North are currently experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke as well.

Residents in the area may experience smoke and burning embers reaching their properties. You are advised to patrol your house to find and put out any burning embers that may be landing in that area.

And just finally, the Camperdown Danedite Road fire - fire crews working hard to complete control lines. Residents in the area of Harlocks Road are still advised to remain on full alert. Residents between Danedite Road and Lake Corangamite areas are asked to implement their fire survival plans and stay alert for possible embers.

[6.15pm]

Scollers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh communities are also advised to remain on alert still for burning embers and watch out for emergency service vehicles using local roads. And, I think, Jon --

JON FAINE: Yes. Good morning, Steve - good afternoon, Steve.

STEVE MARTIN: Well, good afternoon. Look, I'll just throw one more in, because the fire advice is still fairly current. This is the Train Trak Vineyard fire: 30 hectares currently burning, Train Trak Vineyard area, Yarra Glen. Residents in the area will experience ember attack. You are advised still to implement bushfire plans.

And once we get past that, a lot of the updates are getting a little bit of time on them. But I will, Jon, as I've done with Richard and with Tonya - I'm just going to hit "refresh", and, no, nothing else has happened while I've been speaking.

JON FAINE: Steve Martin, you've done a sterling job. Jon Faine here in the studios in Melbourne, and we thank you and we will continue that work throughout the evening --

STEVE MARTIN: Thank you, Jon.

JON FAINE: -- and for as long as it needs to be done. Thank you, Steve. Steve Martin, who's been working in our

studios now for a continuous shift that defies belief.

Jon Faine with you in the Southbank studios. We have 11 fires under observation across Victoria, and the ABC will continue to bring you information throughout the night continuously and into tomorrow, and we would appreciate your assistance in keeping everybody alert on the situation. The phone number's 1300 222 774.

Text messages come through directly to our studio on 19 774 774. Spot fires in Yarra Glen and Healesville. 47 degrees in Nagambie. The power's gone off, and also in Beechworth. We will bring you information from the power supply companies shortly.

We have the situation being monitored in Yarram, Heathcote Junction, Kilmore, Bendigo, Upper Ferntree Gully, Traralgon, Narre Warren, Mount Despair, Bunyip Ridge, Camperdown and the Yarra Glen area.

By contrast, it's raining in the city, Footscray, St Kilda and East Melbourne - many people sending in text messages, and thank you for that. It's providing some relief but also some hope for people who desperately need it as that cool change comes across.

If you have a quick look at the Bureau of Meteorology website, you'll see that there's in fact a band of showers heading east of Mount Dandenong through the Warburton and Warragul areas and a band going all the way from Kinglake - and it'll be very welcome there - all the way down to behind Korumburra.

We will be talking to the Weather Bureau imminently, but I do request that you continue to provide us with information. We have a full team of ABC staff answering your calls, and if you're just ringing to give us information, I do hope you understand if you're put on hold while people who are desperately trying to pass on direct threat messages are given priority.

And if you're ringing to inquire - and I've been answering the phones for the last two hours and there are some people desperately unhappy and desperately worried, and we do understand your need to call, but I can assure everybody that information is broadcast as soon as it comes to hand, and if you're calling the studios to try and get

some extra information, I'm afraid we don't have it. We pass on everything we've got as soon as we have, and, really, by calling up the studios, you're in fact making it harder for us to get some of that information to air, and we'd appreciate it if you kept the lines free for those who are calling in.

As I'm speaking, the DSE are issuing an urgent threat message for the Murrindindi Mill fire, which is burning in the Mount Disappear [sic] State Forest. The fire is burning in a south-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the front. The fire's now directly impacting on Narbethong, and the communities of Marysville and Buxton can expect to come under direct attack from this fire, and Healesville residents are advised to remain on high alert for the prospect of ember attack.

We'll bring you some local information, or if you're in that situation and you can provide it to us, call us on 1300 222 774.

There's also information about power and transport coming to you in a moment. Terry Ryan is on duty at the Weather Bureau. Good morning, Terry.

TERRY RYAN: Yes, good day, Jon.

JON FAINE: Good evening, Terry. I have to break that habit.

TERRY RYAN: It's an old habit, isn't it, yes.

JON FAINE: Can you tell us - I'm having a look at the radar, but where is the front at the moment and what relief is in sight?

TERRY RYAN: I guess the radar is a little bit deceptive. What you can see there to the east of Melbourne - most of that is just plain smoke. We saw smoke and debris from the fires. We saw it start off earlier when the fires kicked off. It's quite deep into the atmosphere. There are some shower echoes moving up towards it, which is confusing the issue a bit, so you do see some shower echoes moving closer towards that fire area, but most of those - the big, broad echo you can see to the east of us is the smoke plume and all the stuff from the bushfire, basically, being picked up on the radar. And it goes a long way, as you can see.

JON FAINE: We're getting reports of some rain. Where is it?

TERRY RYAN: Yes, there is some rain. As you said, it went through the city area and just out towards the east a bit. We have some lightning flashes around to the north-west on our lightning indicator.

I guess today, we often talk - I often talk about records to you, Jon, but today was the record of all records, 46.4, hottest day ever in Melbourne, at 15.05. Broke the previous record of 45.6 on Black Friday 1939, 13th of January 1939. 45.6 was the record then. We're now - 46.4 is the current record. It broke the February record by 3 degrees, which was dust storm day. Ash Wednesday was only 43.0.

JON FAINE: Terry, I just need to interrupt you for one moment, please.

People in Gippsland looking for information from ABC Radio - our transmitter at 100.7 FM has been affected by fire. Could you change your transmission to 828 AM. We are transmitting and broadcasting the same information now on 828 on the AM band. If you're looking for the ABC's Gippsland service, it's no longer at 100.7 FM, as the transmitter's been affected by fire. The same service is now being broadcast on 828 on the AM band.

Terry, back to you.

TERRY RYAN: So we think it was the hottest day ever for Victoria - 47.9 at Avalon, nearly the magic 48-degree mark. It was just heat that you - you know, you could work here your whole lifetime and not see anything like it. But it's been today, and it's a day we won't forget, basically, with these temperatures the way they were.

The models picked it up a few days ago as being possible and we were forecasting 44, which was a record for February. It's hard to get up higher and forecast degrees above the old record, but that's what happened - 46.4.

JON FAINE: The wind speed, Terry, reports of trees down and damage, and, of course, that's blowing embers.

TERRY RYAN: The winds were up to 90 kilometres per hour this afternoon. Avalon had 90 kilometres per hour gusts. We still have that warning out. Dunns Hill had gusts to 90Ks a little bit earlier, but the winds are coming around from the south-west. Even at Dunns Hill, it's moved through there. They've had gusts of 50, nearly 60Ks, just recently.

So the change is moving quite rapidly now. It was a bit slow to get going this morning, but it's picked up speed and it's probably pretty close to moving through the fire sites just east of Gembrook. They're well prepared for it. The winds will be swinging round to the south-west, and quite a rapid cooling has taken place, probably 10 degrees straightaway. The next lot of cooling is taking a little bit longer, but it's a lot different atmosphere to what it was earlier.

JON FAINE: And that will continue?

TERRY RYAN: Certainly will, keep cooling into the evening, and the wind will slowly drop off over the next several hours. And the wind change should be throughout - through Mallacoota, Gabo Island, by about midnight, into the early hours. It's moving rapidly up into the Mallee. It's through Hopetoun, it's through Walpeup, heading towards Mildura, so it's not a weak one only affecting the south, Jon; it's pushing right through the whole State, to give us temperatures tomorrow in the low 30s. So 33, Mildura, and just the low 20s in the south, so much --

JON FAINE: Text message is saying, "Rain in Mornington and seven drops in Burwood", says Andrew, so there's a little bit of rain out there, but not a lot, yes.

TERRY RYAN: There's a little bit around. And the disturbing factor is we're getting lightning strikes from that cloud --

JON FAINE: Yes.

TERRY RYAN: -- from the top of the bushfire.

JON FAINE: Yes.

TERRY RYAN: So it's feeding lightning strikes back into

underneath where the fire is.

JON FAINE: Lightning in the Bunyip Forest. I have a text message saying exactly the same thing. So, Terry, the southerly change is sweeping through and that's up, you said, at Gembrook area at the moment?

TERRY RYAN: It's very close to the Gembrook area, looking at the way things are on the radar and how the observations are looking. It's swept right through. Melbourne's 28.6 now. The airport's down to 31.6. The temperature rose dramatically this morning. We were 40 well and truly by midday.

JON FAINE: Yes.

TERRY RYAN: It's a day you just hope you're never going to see again.

JON FAINE: All right. And tomorrow and beyond?

TERRY RYAN: Well, just temperatures tomorrow - low 20s in the south. It's saying 24 in the city, shower or two, chance of a thunderstorm overnight, early hours of the morning, but just a shower or two to follow tomorrow. And just one or two showers the rest of the week, 21, 20, 20, 25 on Thursday, so much cooler next week, much better firefighting conditions.

The rest of the State - only about 33 Mildura tomorrow, and then even cooling off a little bit after that, so much milder conditions to come and much less wind.

JON FAINE: Terrific. Thank you, Terry. We'll be in touch as we need to through the evening.

Traffic information coming shortly, but there are problems with power across the State. Paul Bird from NEMMCO, good morning - good evening.

PAUL BIRD: Yes, good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: What can you tell us, the latest?

PAUL BIRD: Just to give you an update. I spoke on air around about an hour ago. The situation has worsened since then in terms of the State-wide grid. At that stage, we

had one transmission line down between Gippsland and South Morang. Since that time, we've lost - there's two more transmission lines that have been affected by fires. Both those lines are between South Morang and Dederang in the north-east of the State. When I say they're - they've been taken offline due to the fires which affect the power flow through those lines.

Now, the status at this stage is that the single line that's remaining between Gippsland and South Morang, if we lose a second line there, we are likely to have customer load shedding.

JON FAINE: Are you talking about that in a large scale or --

PAUL BIRD: It does look at this stage, unless the situation improves, we may lose well over 100,000 customers, and possibly many more than that, so we're just assessing the situation at this stage. We are trying to keep that line intact to ensure that the power is available across the State, but that's the critical point in the network at this point in time.

JON FAINE: When you said transmissions lines affected in the South Morang area, is the damage easily repaired or difficult to repair?

PAUL BIRD: It's all associated with bushfires, both in the north, north-east and in the Bunyip State Forest. The problem, when those fires go close to a transmission line, is that the smoke and the fire does affect the power flow through those lines.

JON FAINE: But is the actual infrastructure damaged?

PAUL BIRD: No, it's not, no.

JON FAINE: That's good news, as I understand that, then.

PAUL BIRD: So what often happens is that they trip and they come back online. But having said that, we lost the first power line two hours ago now and that hasn't been returned to service. So we are keeping a close watch on the amount of power that's available.

JON FAINE: So we're just tottering on the edge at the

moment?

PAUL BIRD: Well, we want to keep customers and Victorians informed that the power supplies are very close to the level where we would shed load. I would like to also add that there are two fires within generators. There's one at Loy Yang in Gippsland and one of the Hazelwood Power Station units has been taken offline due to a fire as well.

JON FAINE: All right.

PAUL BIRD: So there are multiple issues that we're dealing with at the present time.

JON FAINE: I'm getting texts from people in Yea saying, "We're off power and we're ringing to try and report it, but we can't get through to even tell them."

PAUL BIRD: Yes, I can give an update on the localised outages as well, Jon. We have - as of about an hour ago, I was advised that there's 20,000 customers currently offline in different parts of the State. I would emphasise that they're distribution-level outages; they're the local power lines and poles around the streets and suburbs of the State.

The update is that there is around 4,000 customers off supply in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, around Ringwood and Lilydale. There's about 13,000 customers off supply in the west of the State, places like Ballarat, Horsham and Nhill, and there's around 3,000 customers in the north and north-east of Melbourne.

Now, the distribution businesses are attending to those faults as quickly as they can. They are aware of many of those faults, so we ask customers to remain calm, and they will be attended to as soon as they possibly can.

JON FAINE: All right.

PAUL BIRD: Can I also give a quick message: if people do lose power, please, this evening, you may well be lighting candles and getting torches out. If you are lighting candles, please keep them well away from curtains and other fabrics, and also stay tuned to ABC Radio and we'll provide updates throughout this evening.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Paul. And our teams will continue to liaise with yours, and we'll get information and updates as soon as we can. Thank you.

PAUL BIRD: Thanks, Jon.

JON FAINE: Paul Bird from NEMMCO.

News headlines, CFA and DSE updates, more information. Also, your calls. I've got several people waiting to speak. But, all importantly, traffic and transport information. Mary-Jane Fenech is here and she's been trawling through all the databases that we have access to. Mary-Jane?

MARY-JANE FENECH: Good evening, Jon. There are closures on EastLink affecting inbound and outbound between Cheltenham Road and Greens Road. Police are also saying that Maroondah Highway, Coldstream is blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway/Maroondah Highway intersection. Police have closed the Hume Highway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to smoke and fire. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford, using the Northern Highway and the Broadford Kilmore Road.

The Princes Highway is closed at Packenham to Warragul - sorry, the Princes Freeway is closed at Packenham to Warragul. The Princes Highway is closed at Sale for the west-bound traffic and at Stratford in both directions. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster, and traffic affecting south of Horsham, the Western Highway at Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road are also closed, as well as Horsham Drung South Road.

We also have closures at Wimmera Highway at Natimuk Road, and Glenelg Highway at Coleraine, Princes Highway between Camperdown and Colac, Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite due to poor visibility, Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake. Burwood Highway is closed between Glenfern Road, which is in Upwey, right through to Dawsons Road, which is in Upper Ferntree Gully.

Now to our V/Line services. On the Gippsland line, all train services between Melbourne and Traralgon and Bairnsdale are now closed for the rest of the day and it is unlikely bus services will be able to get through.

[6.30pm]

On the Seymour line, all train services between Melbourne and Seymour Shepparton are closed and will remain closed for the rest of the day. V/Line is arranging back-up road coaches where they can get through. And V/Line has now closed all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool on the Warrnambool line due to a fire at Colac, which has burnt the sleepers. Now, it is unlikely that this line will return tomorrow.

Buses are now in place running between Geelong and Warrnambool, and they will be in place tomorrow as well. And I'll have updates for you throughout the evening.

JON FAINE: Terrific. Thank you, Mary-Jane. Sid, in Harkaway. Good evening, Sid.

CALLER SID: I see you're back at work today on Saturday afternoon.

JON FAINE: Lots of people are, Sid. What can we do?

CALLER SID: I'll give you an update on the Harkaway Village fire. It's on the north side of the village. Luckily, it hasn't gone further. It's in a property known as Wandean Farm, which is about 12 acres. I believe it is in there. I'm looking straight into the fire, the last half an hour. Elvis has been there four times, but every time he goes away, the red flames come up again within a short time. But I think now maybe they've got on top of it.

JON FAINE: All right.

CALLER SID: This is a very dangerous place. We could have had a terrible disaster if that fire had gone further south and got into the hall, and we would have had to evacuate Harkaway down what's known as the fire escape road.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER SID: But, luckily, we might have kept it out of most of the village. It's only in the north side of it.

JON FAINE: All right. Good on you. Thank you for that

update, Sid.

Victoria Police have just alerted us that in Wallan, in Bentnick Street, the Multi-Purpose Centre has been established as a relief site. So a relief centre has been set up in Wallan in Bentnick Street at the Multi-Purpose Centre. If you're one of those affected, that's where you can head.

No power in Seymour. There's some rain in South Morang. These are text messages coming through. In Woodend, the temperature's just dropped and they're experiencing some relief there. At Tallarook, no power. Upwey, the power's gone out. Some rain in Jindivick - another text message. And we're trying to get an update for you. There's problems in Drouin with some assets and property being burnt, according to some information we're getting here, and we'll try and confirm that with CFA and DSE as soon as we are able to get that information to you.

There's news headlines in just a moment. Natasha, in Doreen. Natasha, go ahead. Yes, are you there, Natasha? No, that's not Natasha. We'll work out where she's gone and we'll get some information for you about what's happening in that part of the State in a moment, too.

Give us a call. The lines are very, very busy, and please understand if you can't get instant responses from us, but keep us informed. 1300 222 774.

The text service doesn't get blocked, so that may be easier. If you're just wanting to send us information, send us a text on 19 774 774.

It's 28 minutes to 7 here on 774 ABC Melbourne, broadcasting right across the State, with some ABC services affected by local transmitter problems. If you're used to getting information from 100.7 ABC Gippsland, I'm afraid our transmitter itself has been fire affected, but you can either listen to us or 828 AM, on the AM band, 828 AM for local Gippsland information.

Alicia Byrne in the newsroom has the latest headlines. Alicia, good evening.

ALICIA BYRNE: Good evening, Jon. Fire crews are stretched across the State as blazes burn near homes.

There's an urgent threat message for residents of Scollers Road, Carters Roads Settlement, Swan Marsh and Lake Corangamite areas. The fire crews there are working to complete control lines. Residents in the area of Harlocks Road are asked to remain alert for possible ember attack.

Also, an urgent threat message for the communities of Alberton, Tarraville, Port Albert, Langsborough, Manns Beach and Robertsons Beach due to the Glendonald fire. Campers in the coastal area between Port Albert and Woodside Beach are advised to seek shelter and not try to outrun the fire. It's feared the Glendonald fire will also impact the Latrobe Valley's biggest power station. Water sprays have been activated in the open-cut coalmine at Loy Yang.

The towns of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton are also under threat. A grass fire that started 9 kilometres west of Redesdale, south of Lake Eppalock, has burnt in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be over 2,000 hectares in size.

Three houses have been destroyed at Horsham in a blaze that's also destroyed a fire truck. One man has suffered burns to 50 per cent of his body while trying to move stock near Hamilton. He was wearing a T-shirt and thongs at the time.

And Melbourne has endured its hottest day on record, reaching 46.4 degrees this afternoon.

To the weather, the CFA has declared, of course, a total fire ban today for the whole of the State. For Melbourne, windy, areas of raised dust. Tomorrow, a light shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, and 24. In Melbourne, 28 degrees. Next news at 7.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: Homes are confirmed destroyed in the Darlimurla and --

MALE SPEAKER: I've lost everything, and I don't know where to start.

MALE SPEAKER: Victoria's Gippsland region has been affected by fire and some of the people of the region have been left with nothing after losing their homes and personal belongings to devastating bushfires. 774 ABC Melbourne is encouraging all listeners to help victims of the recent bushfires by making a donation to relieffund.org.au. That's relieffund.org.au. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

[6.35pm]

JON FAINE: 25 to 7. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, broadcasting State-wide, with some local ABC services also providing detailed information as fire is affecting the entire State. Your emergency services broadcaster will continue to bring you information as it comes to hand, with a full CFA and DSE rundown of all the 12 or 13 affected areas of the State coming your way in a moment or two.

Fran is on the line. Morning, Fran - good evening, Fran.

CALLER FRAN: How are you?

JON FAINE: I need to break that habit. Go ahead.

CALLER FRAN: Yes, I was just wanting to phone. I've got quite a few family members in the fire brigade. My brother-in-law's the chief fire ranger in Bunyip State Forest.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER FRAN: My twin sister is fighting the fires. She's in the Beaconsfield fire brigade, and my niece is with the DSE. They're all fighting the same fire, and I just want to, you know, just say how proud I am of them and --

JON FAINE: And your thoughts are with them. And I've had people calling up saying, "I've made some sandwiches. Where can I take them?"

CALLER FRAN: Yes.

JON FAINE: And we've had people calling in saying, "I've got a first-aid certificate. Can I do anything to help?"

CALLER FRAN: That's exactly right.

JON FAINE: It's --

CALLER FRAN: My sister also - she lives in Gembrook. She's been making sandwiches and all that sort of thing to help out. I just think it's - we really have to give - and we are thinking of all the firefighters out there, but perhaps maybe thinking of volunteering. I'm also a fire volunteer for Berwick.

JON FAINE: Yes

CALLER FRAN: Just joined a couple of months or a month ago, can't be in the action yet. But it's just such a brave, brave thing to do.

JON FAINE: Well, it's community spirit, and, yes, it sometimes takes an incident like this to get people, well, thinking --

CALLER FRAN: Yes.

JON FAINE: -- about it all. Good on you.

CALLER FRAN: Yes.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much for that, Fran. Good to talk to you.

CALLER FRAN: Thanks.

JON FAINE: Thank you for calling.

Peter Batchelor is the State Government's Minister for Energy. As we heard from Paul Bird from NEMMCO, the transmission lines to Melbourne's main power supply may be affected by the current problems in Gippsland. Peter Batchelor, what's the latest?

PETER BATCHELOR: Well, our latest is that power is still coming into Melbourne to meet the demand. The cool change has been very welcome from our particular perspective. It's meant that demand for electricity dropped 1,000MW in one hour, and that's a great relief.

The problem for the power supply to Melbourne and other parts of the State is largely bushfires, wind and falling trees, and all of these are having an impact. For example, we have a couple of transmission lines where they have actually gone down and power cannot get through those at the moment.

I'll just give you a bit of a summary, Jon.

JON FAINE: Yes, please do.

PETER BATCHELOR: Most of our power, as you would understand, comes from the Latrobe Valley. We've got three easements coming all the way from Latrobe Valley into the outskirts of Melbourne. They've got multiple lines in them. One of those lines at the moment is down. That's been tripped out. That's a 500KV line. That's a lot of power. We can't test that to see whether it'll go back into service through flicking the switch at the control area --

JON FAINE: Yes.

PETER BATCHELOR: -- because there may well be firefighters in or around those transmission lines, so we have to carry out a manual inspection where we send along power workers from SP Ausnet and firefighters from the CFA to protect them to see if anyone's within the easement before we can actually turn that back on.

JON FAINE: That's a very difficult thing to do, especially as darkness is approaching. How long will it take?

PETER BATCHELOR: Well, I can't advise you on that, because it's such a difficult task. We don't know what problems they will encounter.

JON FAINE: Okay.

PETER BATCHELOR: But there is - but a number of other easements tripped during the course of today automatically when fire went through them, but they were - there's a device within the system where it tries again almost automatically, and they came back on as a result of that.

The problem that we've been experiencing with these

fires that are essentially coming from the Bunyip Forest is that they're not crossing the easements; they're burning along the easements, and it's a very difficult situation from a power perspective.

JON FAINE: All right. So --

PETER BATCHELOR: The other line coming in from the Snowy, from New South Wales, bringing power into Melbourne has tripped. We don't know what the problem with that is, and that has to be undertaken - a manual inspection. We've tried two occasions, and it hasn't come back automatically. There are still fires actively within the easements, and there's a lot of smoke, and that causes arcing, so we'll have to wait till the fires die down a lot there.

The really big threat, however, is that as the cool change comes through and the wind directions change, the Churchill fire could actually change direction and head towards the Loy Yang Power Station.

JON FAINE: In the Latrobe Valley?

PETER BATCHELOR: In the Latrobe Valley. There's two power stations there. They're some of our biggest suppliers of power, and they're serviced by an open-cut mine. And if these fire spots or advances on, it could affect both the power station and the open-cut mines. They're taking steps. I just heard on your news that they've got sprinklers going --

JON FAINE: Yes.

PETER BATCHELOR: -- to dampen the coal.

JON FAINE: Yes.

PETER BATCHELOR: They've got teams on standby, and we won't know whether we're through that serious threat till later on this evening --

JON FAINE: All right.

PETER BATCHELOR: -- when the cool change has impacted at that location.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you very much, Minister, and

we will keep in touch with your office and staff and NEMMCO and everyone else and provide information as soon as it comes to hand. Thank you.

PETER BATCHELOR: Keep up your good work, too, Jon.

JON FAINE: To the ABC collectively, not individuals. The Minister for Energy and Resources in the State Government, Peter Batchelor.

Listeners in the Bendigo region, you can either listen to us here on 774 ABC Melbourne, but for local updates on specifically the Bracewell fire in Long Gully and the Redesdale fires, you can go to 91.1 FM for Bendigo ABC, on 91.1 FM, although we will continue to provide a State-wide service, and I know the signal is well received across the region, but there are specific updates on the Long Gully and Redesdale fires on 91.1 on the FM band.

My colleague, Richelle Hunt, is putting on a marathon. She is, in fact, with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer at the Information Control Centre. Greg Esnouf is with her. Richelle. Good evening.

RICHELLE HUNT: Good evening, Jon. Look, we're all putting in a marathon effort, and the amount of work that's being done down here at the CFA today is just extraordinary. Christine Nixon I saw arrive probably around, sort of, 45 minutes ago. And between the police, the SES, the DSE, the power companies, the water - Greg, when they go into meetings here in the room next to us, what sort of things are still being discussed at this point of the day?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, we're talking about how we can coordinate between all the emergency services, so they - generally you get a quick update on what the situation is, where the fires are, where they're expected to go and then what the likely impacts might be on critical infrastructure, like power or transport or roads. So each of the agencies can then make a decision on how they can best assist in keeping the community safe and keeping those infrastructures going.

RICHELLE HUNT: It's amazing and wonderful to see all of those organisations together and making those decisions and being a part of the community. It does actually make you

feel, I guess, a little safer. But, Jon, we've been listening to our callers and to some of the information that's coming through --

GREG ESNOUF: Yes.

RICHELLE HUNT: -- and when I sit here and I look at all of the maps that Greg has out in front of us, as well as the screen here at the moment, Greg, what are some of the main areas of concern still at the moment?

GREG ESNOUF: Look, the main areas of concern, probably running from north-west to south-east, are still Redesdale. It's over two and a half thousand hectares. We've got reports of property loss there. Then you get the major fire at Kilmore. It's run through Wandong, Mount Disappointment. We think that fire's spotting well ahead of itself, so we think we're getting quite a number of spot fires out of that fire in the Kinglake, Saint Andrews, possibly even into Yarra Glen area. There's a number of new fires coming up on our boards all of the time from that fire.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yes.

GREG ESNOUF: There's a fire just to the east of that that's run through Narbethong and there's been some structure losses, we believe, in Narbethong, and that fire is now heading down towards the Warburton area.

Then there's the Bunyip fire that's been going for a few days. It's got out of the paddock again, and that's gone right down towards Drouin. We're getting unconfirmed reports of losses right down into Drouin and Longwarry and areas like that at the moment.

A new start down at Lynbrook, down near Cranbourne. We understand we may have lost three houses there. And then you get the one at Churchill that's gone up over Mount Tassie and knocked out the ABC transmitter, by the sounds of it --

RICHELLE HUNT: Yes.

GREG ESNOUF: -- and is heading towards the coast and --

RICHELLE HUNT: Now, we were talking about that fire

earlier with Jon, with John Haynes, your colleague, and we were concerned that it may be heading towards the Loy Yang Power Station. Is that still a concern?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, certainly, it's got the south-westerly wind change coming on it now, so it'll turn back towards there. So I'm not sure exactly where the fire is, but certainly that sort of area would be of major concern. And any coal fire, particularly as dry as it is at the moment, is a real concern.

So a south-westerly wind change has pushed through much of southern Victoria, so a number of those fires have got the south-westerly wind change, but firefighting is still very difficult. It's gusty. It opens up a whole new flank for firefighting, which is quite dangerous for us. So even though eventually at the end of the day it'll cool down, at the moment it's probably the most dangerous time for us to fight fires.

JON FAINE: Richelle, can I get a few questions that our listeners are asking us?

RICHELLE HUNT: Sure.

JON FAINE: Greg, can you tell us anything about Traralgon itself?

GREG ESNOUF: No, I don't have any information on Traralgon, I'm sorry, Jon.

JON FAINE: Narre Warren?

GREG ESNOUF: Look, there's been a number of reports of fires at Narre Warren, but I can't see anything large on my book - on my board at the moment.

JON FAINE: We've had eyewitness accounts of, well, houses burning in Narre Warren.

GREG ESNOUF: Yes - no, and I've been trying to find that and I can't see anything on our record books.

[6.45pm]

So unless that's the Lynbrook one, which is really more towards Cranbourne than Narre Warren - it could very well

be the same fire, I guess. It probably is the same fire, when I think about it. So that's the one I referred to as Lynbrook that's got three houses lost.

JON FAINE: Yes, that may well be the same. Bendigo. There were reports, eyewitness reports, of fire at the back of the Schweppes Sports Stadium there.

GREG ESNOUF: I'm not a local of Bendigo, but I do know that there is a fire that you mentioned at Eaglehawk, which we've had on our books for a little while now, and that's been causing quite some concern.

JON FAINE: And the Yarra Glen fire - is that the same as the Narbethong fire?

GREG ESNOUF: We think that the spotting into Yarra Glen is probably coming from the Kilmore fire. So we think that there's been a number of new fires at Yarra Glen, as I said, Saint Andrews, Kinglake, which are all listed as small on our books at the moment, but we think they're all spotting activity out of one of those other fires.

JON FAINE: And, of course, people who are in the path of it don't think they're small at all.

GREG ESNOUF: No, I know, and they'll get big very quickly. The bush is darned dry at the moment, and, of course, our resources are obviously stretched. We've got a lot on the major fires at the moment, so the normal response that you'd get to any one of those fires is a bit more difficult at the moment.

JON FAINE: And, finally, the Horsham fire, Camperdown - is that now dealt with?

GREG ESNOUF: They're still listed as going. The change went through Camperdown quite some time ago. It's in difficult country. But I think it's pretty well - they were saying it's almost under control, so they're a bit hopeful they can get that one soon. Horsham --

JON FAINE: Horsham.

GREG ESNOUF: -- I think could take a little bit of time, but --

JON FAINE: So that's still going?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, but the vibes are getting better on the reports that I'm getting.

JON FAINE: All right.

RICHELLE HUNT: Jon, when we stand around here with all of the members from the CFA and the DSE and we're all just watching the 6 o'clock news, you know, the main thing that we're wanting to get across at the moment is for people just to keep off the roads and to think sensibly. We're still seeing reports and hearing about people, you know, in T-shirts and thongs and people driving around in areas. So the CFA are really, really pushing that this does affect you personally.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RICHELLE HUNT: There's always that thing of, oh, it's for someone else, and not. And because the wind is still changing and anything could happen, there's spot fires all over the shop.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RICHELLE HUNT: You might think that it's okay to jump in your car and have a bit of a look as to what's been going on. It's just not. It's just not okay.

JON FAINE: Yes. It's not okay, and I've been answering phones for a couple of hours here, and I can tell you, Richelle and Greg, there are people ringing up saying, "I live in such-and-such an area, and I don't know what to do."

RICHELLE HUNT: Gosh.

JON FAINE: And we have, of course, for years now been telling people, "You can't wait until you're in the middle of an emergency in order to formulate an action plan." And if you don't have an action plan, what's the advice then, Greg?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, the advice is either stay in your house, certainly, either leave very early is our usual advice, but at the moment, unless you're sure there's no

fires around, with spot fire activity around, that's going to close roads very rapidly if you're in a fire area, so stay in your house and wear appropriate clothing, get some water, close it up, or if you're not sure that your house is okay, if you've got a neighbour who you can move to who has already made preparedness efforts, go and say hello to the neighbour and introduce yourself to them if you don't know them, and seek shelter with them.

RICHELLE HUNT: What an introduction that would be.

JON FAINE: We need to remind people, Greg, that there will not be a fire truck or a CFA representative or DSE or a police officer coming and knocking on your door and saying, "We think you should leave." That does not happen.

GREG ESNOUF: No, it will not happen and --

JON FAINE: And you should not wait for it.

GREG ESNOUF: And there won't be any trucks in the shed tonight at CFA. So there won't - if there's new fires, it might take some time before we can even get the first truck to some of those. So that's the other issue that we've got.

JON FAINE: So if you are unsure, the advice then, Greg, is: if you're not confident about your preparedness and this is catching you a little bit by surprise and you're concerned and worried and your area is being mentioned as one of those affected, the advice is, again?

GREG ESNOUF: Either prepare your area as best you can, because it's unsafe to be on the roads, or try and find a neighbour that you can get to that has already made those preparations.

JON FAINE: All right. Richelle, anything else?

RICHELLE HUNT: No, look, that's it, Jon, for the moment. We'll cross back to you later, but they're serving up some food here to try and keep their energy levels up here at the moment.

JON FAINE: Well, that's important too.

RICHELLE HUNT: Yes.

JON FAINE: We need to keep in touch with absolutely everybody. Thank you very much for that, Richelle. Richelle Hunt with Greg Esnouf, Deputy Chief Officer.

A very upsetting text message. "Kinglake. Fires. Our house has burnt. Everyone's hiding at the pub. No fire trucks anywhere." That's very upsetting. We'll just see if we can get through to those people and see if they are able to have a chat to us. Kinglake situation sounds very grim.

Three houses on fire listed in Healesville. The electricity, though, has come back on in Seymour.

A text message. There's a thunderstorm in Warragul, which is very good news. And the South Gippsland Highway is now listed as closed in both directions at Cranbourne North.

Now, there's some threat messages, updating threat messages, coming your way in a moment or two, but the Premier, John Brumby, has just released a statement literally a moment ago:

> Today, Victoria has experienced the worst fire conditions in history, even worse than Ash Wednesday or Black Friday.

Says the Premier, and he would like to thank DSE, CFA and SES firefighters and volunteers who have fought tirelessly throughout the day to protect Victorian people and property, and the Premier says:

> My thoughts are with them while they continue fighting these fires. I would like to particularly thank those firefighters who helped save my parents' property from the fire at Coleraine, which they stopped literally on their doorstep.

Says the Premier:

> The firefighters have done a magnificent job, but it is not yet over.

And the Premier has apparently been activating his own fire

plan on his own farm up in the Harcourt area, and he's out visiting affected areas.

But we'll see if we can get you some information from Kinglake in just a moment on the air, too. 10 minutes to 7 on 774 ABC Melbourne.

[6.50pm]

Jon Faine with you right through the evening, with the ABC continuing to provide you with emergency updates for as long as we're required on this dreadful Saturday, February the 7th.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

JON FAINE: Trevor Chappell has the latest threat messages for us. Trevor.

TREVOR CHAPPELL: Thanks, Jon. The Alpine fire burning 25 to 30 kilometres nor-north-west of Dargo near East Gippsland is burning in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be approximately 650 hectares in size. Even though the fire is not currently posing a threat, the communities of Bullumwaal, Mount Taylor and Clifton and Sarsfield need to be aware that fire activity in the area has increased and has the potential to impact directly. There may be burnt leaves falling in these areas ahead of the fire.

Spotting has occurred near the junction of the Dargo High Plains Road and Ritchies Road. The Dargo High Plains Road has been closed between Dargo and the Great Alpine Road. And the Glendonald Road fire is currently burning in a south-east direction and still spreading rapidly.

The predicted south-westerly wind change is imminent, and the communities of Willung South, Willung, Stradbroke, Stradbroke West, Gaffield [sic] - sorry, Gaffard [sic] West, Durrimal, Hambale [sic] and Gormandale may experience heavy smoke and ember attack from the main fire when the wind does change.

The Murrindindi Mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is burning in a south-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The fire is directly impacting on Narbethong. The communities of Marysville and Buxton can expect to come under direct attack from this fire. Healesville residents may - are advised to remain on high alert for the prospect of possible ember attack there. Yarraville residents are advised to activate their bushfire plans immediately.

A relief centre is available at the community centre at Ingram Road in Coldstream. That's for the Yarra Valley fire.

For the Camperdown fire, if we take a look at that - VicRail, as we've just heard, the rail service between Geelong and Warrnambool has been suspended due to rail damage caused by the fire. Fire crews are continually working to complete control lines.

Residents in the Harlocks Road area are asked to remain alert for possible ember attack. Residents between Danedite Road and Lake Corangamite areas are asked to implement their fire survival plans and stay alert for possible embers. Residents of Scollers Road, Carters Roads Settlement and Swan Marsh communities are advised to remain alert for burning embers and watch for emergency services vehicles in that area.

For the residents around the Quarry Road fire, the grass and scrub fire is burning in the south-east of Quarry Road, Upper Ferntree Gully and it is estimated to be 4 hectares in size. The residents of Quarry Road and Acacia Road, Upper Ferntree Gully and the communities of Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully and Tremont are no longer under direct attack, apparently, from the threat from this fire, but still need to remain under alert due to a high-level activity in that particular area.

As we scroll down, in the Coliban Park Road, a grass fire that started 9 kilometres west of Redesdale, south of Lake Eppalock has burnt in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be over 2,000 hectares in size. The fire has crossed the Heathcote Redesdale Road in the vicinity of Barfold and has also crossed the Campaspe River and the Watchbox Road.

A strong wind change from the south-west is expected in the area close to where we are now. When the wind change arrives, the fire will run in a north-easterly direction, and residents of the following localities need to be under alert: Redesdale, Glenhope, Baynton and Baynton East. Residents in the areas of Glenhope, Baynton need to be aware that these communities may also be under threat when the wind changes pass through.

And more to come, Jon.

JON FAINE: We will keep listening. Thank you, Trevor, as you keep across the latest threat messages.

A full ABC News bulletin just a bit more than 5 minutes away, and after the news, we will continue with the latest information, with the head of the CFA, Russell Rees, speaking to us, and other emergency services continuing to provide us with information, as well as you. Often the most up-to-date and reliable information, once we can corroborate it, comes from you, our listeners. 1300 222 774. The text messages, 19 774 774.

No power in Elsternwick. It's raining in Narre Warren. A thunderstorm not good news for everyone, says Lester. A cool change here in Wallan. It's spitting. Fingers crossed. Why is EastLink closed? We'll get that information for you in just a second. Peter in Wantirna, good morning - good evening.

CALLER PETER: Good evening, Jon, yes. I just thought it was starting to spit here in Wantirna, and I thought, oh, this is good news. You know, the wind change has come through here, the south-westerly, and there's been a dramatic drop in the temperature. It's down to about 32 out here now, so --

JON FAINE: So it's trying to do the right thing but not making much of a fist of it, by the sound.

CALLER PETER: No, no.

JON FAINE: All right. Well, we'll keep our fingers crossed collectively, Peter. If 5 million Victorians cross their fingers, it's got to make some sort of a difference. Natasha, good evening.

CALLER NATASHA: Good evening.

JON FAINE: You're on air, Natasha.

CALLER NATASHA: Thank you. Hi. I was just calling in - I come from Doreen. My husband's in the CFA and he rang me a little earlier to tell me to get out of Doreen as quickly as possible, that the fires at Whittlesea were sending embers in our direction. So I packed up, and all my neighbours were packing up at the same time, loaded all the, you know, valuable prized possessions, and the cat, of course.

JON FAINE: The worst-case scenario. What's happened?

CALLER NATASHA: Well, it was - I didn't hang around to find out, but as I was driving down Yan Yean Road past the Promenade Estate, I've got a friend who lives there, and I looked over at where her house is and I could see a plume of smoke coming maybe 500 metres to a K from behind her house.

JON FAINE: Well, let's not assume the worst, Natasha, but let's stay safe first and sort it out after that. Best wishes to you and your neighbours and your family.

CALLER NATASHA: (Indistinct) much.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much for calling through. The CFA have just advised us there have been calls to 000 about fires in Healesville, and we here at the studio have also received similar calls. The CFA say they are aware of those fires. Units are either there or on the way.

For the latest transport information, Mary-Jane. For the latest information, Mary-Jane, do go ahead.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you, Jon. There are closures on EastLink affecting unbound and outbound between Cheltenham Road and now the Dandenong Southern Bypass. Police are also saying that the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream is blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway/Maroondah Highway intersection. Police have also closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to smoke and fire. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford, using the Northern Highway and the Broadford-Kilmore Road.

The Princes Freeway is closed at Packenham to Warragul. The Princes Highway is closed at Sale for the west-bound traffic and at Stratford in both directions. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster.

Now, the traffic affecting south of Horsham. The Western Highway, Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road are all closed, and also at Horsham Drung South Road. And we also have closures at Wimmera Highway at Natimuk Road, Glenelg Highway at Coleraine, Princes Highway between Camperdown and Colac, Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite due to poor visibility, Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake, Burwood Highway is also closed between Glenfern Road, which is Upwey, to Dawsons Road, which is Upper Ferntree Gully.

Now, just a quick update for you. John Rees from Connex has called through to tell us to reconsider your travel tonight. Power companies have advised of ongoing disruptions across the network. That will be affecting our train services and our trams.

JON FAINE: Metropolitan trains and trams.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Yes.

JON FAINE: They are not confident that they'll get through the night with full services.

MARY-JANE FENECH: That's right.

JON FAINE: So if your travel is inessential, if it's not essential, you might not want to in fact embark upon it at all.

MARY-JANE FENECH: That's right.

JON FAINE: Anything else?

MARY-JANE FENECH: We do have some changes on our V/Line services. The most updated one is that V/Line has closed all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool on the Warrnambool line, and that will be in effect tomorrow as well.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you very much for that,

Mary-Jane.

And coming up after the news, we'll cross to various CFA organisations. We will speak to the head of the CFA, Russell Rees, for an update on all of those fires as we continue to monitor the situation, and we'll speak again to the power companies and also to the public transport and other organisations and the various firefighting and emergency services.

If you can assist us, please continue to keep the information coming. 1300 222 774. Text messages to 19 774 774. And the ABC will continue right through the evening for as long as it takes. If we need to continue with the emergency broadcasts, I can assure you that we are ready and will continue to broadcast throughout the evening. It's news time, 7 o'clock.

[7pm]

[Music]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good evening, Alicia Byrne with ABC News. The CFA says a wind change that's brought relief from the heat to Melbourne could pose a serious bushfire threat to towns and properties across the State. Emergency crews are stretched to the limit and new warnings are being issued to residents whose homes may be threatened if the fires change course. The extent of the property damage won't be known until tomorrow, but dozens of homes are believed to have been lost. A man's been flown to Melbourne after suffering severe burns near Hamilton. The CFA's deputy chief fire officer Greg Esnouf says fire crews are preparing for the threat posed by the wind change.

GREG ESNOUF: When the fires run from a north-west to a south-east direction and then all of a sudden, when the wind changes, to the south-west, the whole flank just opens up and firefighters have got to be very wary of it. We teach all of our people to be careful of it, but it can be become a very dangerous situation for people.

ALICIA BYRNE: A number of communities are under threat from two fires burning in the Gippsland region. Alison Price reports.

ALISON PRICE: The fire burning on the eastern fringe of

the Strzelecki Ranges is making its way towards the township of Yarram. The communities of Willung, Willung South, Stradbroke, Alberton, Giffard West, Darriman and Gormandale may experience falling embers. Emergency relief centres have been set up in Yarram, Traralgon and Sale and the South Gippsland Highway has been closed at Yarram, Welshpool and Longford. There are also fears the fire will reach the open-cut coal mine at Loy Yang. Meanwhile, towns near the fire in the Bunyip State Park including Drouin, Jindivick, Brandy Creek, Neerim Junction, and Nilma North have experienced falling embers. Residents in Warragul have been warned to be vigilant. The fire has forced the closure of the Princes Highway before Warragul. The ABC's FM transmitter in the region has dropped out because of the fire, but ABC Gippsland is broadcasting on 828 AM.

ALICIA BYRNE: Crews say they're slowly getting on top of a big fire that's destroyed three homes and a golf club at Horsham. Peter Lenaghan reports.

PETER LENAGHAN: The fire that started early this afternoon has grown to about 5,500 hectares in size. Residents in the Drung Drung South, Longerenong, Dooen and Riverside areas remain on alert. But the deputy incident controller, Graham Parkes, says crews are making good progress on the fire.

GRAHAM PARKES: I'm saying that very cautiously, because, you know, we've got some really tough weather conditions out there and I'm not wanting to give the impression that we've got this contained yet.

PETER LENAGHAN: The gusty winds that have fanned the blaze are easing and it's hoped water-bombing aircraft will be able to take flight soon. Earlier today the fire claimed three homes and a golf club on the city's southern outskirts. A fire crew's vehicle was also destroyed but the members from Dimboola weren't hurt. Peter Lenaghan, ABC News, Horsham.

ALICIA BYRNE: The Kilmore fire is spotting into the Healesville, Yarra Glen and Kinglake areas. The blaze has burnt about 4,000 hectares and about 30 homes have been destroyed in Wandong. A relief centre has been established at the multi-purpose centre in Bentnick Street in Wallan. The ABC's James Bennett describes the fire.

JAMES BENNETT: What we're seeing so far today is some incredibly high walls of flame as they've come up some of the hills in the Wandong area towards some houses and they've cut off roads with incredible speed. It's been really some pretty dramatic scenes as people have fought to defend their homes as the blaze has come up, laps at the verge of some properties before being beat back by the residents. Certainly at the moment there's still a distinct amount of unease.

ALICIA BYRNE: The forecast wind change is expected to turn the fire that started at Redesdale south-east of Bendigo towards more homes. The head of the fire is currently in the Sidonia area and the towns of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria, and other areas east of Kyneton are being threatened. Residents of Redesdale, Glenhope, Baynton, Baynton East, Heathcote, Tooborac, and Pyalong are being warned to prepare for the wind change. And a fire is burning on the edge of suburbs in Bendigo. The blaze started on Bracewell Street in West Bendigo and is about 400 hectares in size.

Power authorities are warning of possible random power losses after three transmission lines were damaged in the bushfires, forcing the importation of power from South Australia and Tasmania. At least 17,000 customers in the Horsham and Bendigo areas are currently without power.

[7.05pm]

To the weather: the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State today. For the State: a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust. Tomorrow: isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges, moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne: windy with a late cool change in areas, and areas of raised dust for tomorrow. A shower or two. The chance of a thunderstorm, 24, after a low of 20. Monday, a light shower or two and 21. In Melbourne 28. This is ABC News.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your

emergency services network, bushfire information.

JON FAINE: Trevor Chappell with information on urgent threats coming your way in just a moment. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, broadcasting throughout the evening here as the ABC, your emergency services broadcaster. We'll keep across all the latest information. We'll bring you the very latest from the control centre in a moment as well, and keep your information coming to us as well. We have staff answering the phones as quickly as we can. They're pretty much usually available. On the other hand, just as I said that, I had a look down and the entire switchboard is completely jammed. 1300 222 774 is the number. You ill be able to get through as we take calls and clear the board. Text messages may be a little easier, because the text service can cope with any number of received messages simultaneously - 1977 4774.

[7.07am]

At the moment the CFA are monitoring as many as 12 fires simultaneously burning. A handful of those, three or four, are regarded as extremely serious, and the latest information is coming to you now from Trevor Chappell. Thank you, Trevor.

TREVOR CHAPPELL: Three new messages, John. Chum Creek residents are advised that they are now under direct threat, Chum Creek of course just being near Healesville. Also a new fire has started east of Walhalla township near the Thompson Dam. The communities of Rawson, Erica and Walhalla may be directly impacted by this new fire, and the Delburn Complex fire has increased in activity due to weather conditions. The community of Driffield may also be impacted by these smoke and embers. More to come, Jon.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much. Trevor Chappell, bringing you the latest threat messages. Threat messages are available through the CFA website. If you do have the internet and you're just interested in friends or family, we're happy to help you when we can. We're not able to help you if that's done at the expense of dealing with the emergency broadcast. If we have time and the situation allows and affords us the opportunity to help you with your phone inquiries, and we do get many of them and we understand that is a genuine concern, we will help you when we can. But you'll understand, I'm sure, if we give

priority instead to the situation of keeping people informed on the fires just first.

The situation at Kinglake has been reported as serious and Peter Mitchell is at the fire station in Kinglake. Peter, good evening.

PETER MITCHELL: Oh, g'day, John, how are you?

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

PETER MITCHELL: The whole of Kinglake is ablaze, mate. I live a couple of Ks out of towns and I heard explosions, so I just went to the end of my road to see what was going on and by the time I got to the end of the road there were fires everywhere, and I just bolted back and there was - I mean, I've got a fire pump, but no way, I just thought, no, we won't fight this. We went to the - initially to the pub, back into the pub and now a whole bunch of us have moved across to the fire station.

JON FAINE: What can you actually see now?

PETER MITCHELL: Flame everywhere. Trees exploding, gas tanks exploding, buildings on fire. It's very, very, very serious. It reminds me of Cockatoo.

JON FAINE: Which buildings can you see on fire, Peter?

PETER MITCHELL: Well, I'm sheltering at the moment, so it's a bit hard to see across the road from the pub. The shop's on fire. I can't quite see down into the main stretch of town, but there's a lot of flame coming up from there, so I presume, you know, most of the town's going up. There'll be multiple houses gone, including mine, I would imagine. Yeah, it's worst case. It's like Cockatoo back at Ash Wednesday.

JON FAINE: Are you safe, Peter?

PETER MITCHELL: The ones at the fire station I think we'll be fine, yes. There'll be others trapped, poor souls, I don't know.

JON FAINE: Are the emergency services in evidence?

PETER MITCHELL: Very little, because they were all out

fighting other fires. We've got - we do have a water tanker here. We don't have a fire truck but we've got a couple of pumps from the fire station, and the ones that are here, we'll be fine, I'm sure, but what we'll find when it all passes, I don't know.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you for that information, Peter.

PETER MITCHELL: Okay. But --

JON FAINE: Of course the highest priority is for people to remain as safe as possible, and to deal with physical assets after that, as has been determined over many, many years of experience. But that's distressing information, and thank you for your on-the-spot report. The situation at Kinglake, as Peter's just reported there, very grave indeed. Alex Conrad at DSE has an urgent threat message. Alex, good evening.

ALEX CONRAD: Hi, John. Yes, an urgent threat message for residents of Beechworth and surrounding townships. We've got a fire that's burning 4 kilometres south of Beechworth and it's moving in a south-easterly direction. The fire, John, is spotting well ahead of the main fire, and the communities of Stanley, Barwidgee Creek and Mudgeegonga should prepare for direct ember attack from this fire.

JON FAINE: So that's heading down east of Myrtleford?

ALEX CONRAD: Yes. And at the same time, John, I just wanted to reiterate the urgent threat message for Marysville. The fire, as we understand, is actually on the edge of the township. Crews are working hard to contain it. Also, the --

JON FAINE: Sorry, which edge of Marysville, are you able to tell us, Alex?

ALEX CONRAD: I'm not. It's quite fluid, but we have - I understand it is now on the urban fringe of Marysville. Additionally, the township of Buxton to the north of Marysville is now subject to an urgent threat --

JON FAINE: Up towards the Cathedral Ranges, Buxton-Taggerty area.

ALEX CONRAD: That is exactly the area, John, and it is --

JON FAINE: Beautiful bushwalking area, but not at the moment.

ALEX CONRAD: Not in the short term, yes. And it's expected to come under direct attack within the hour, so an urgent threat message for Buxton as well as Marysville.

JON FAINE: All right. Are you able to update any of the other fires that we've been hearing about throughout the evening, in particular the situation in the valley that the CFA are dealing with?

ALEX CONRAD: Not at the moment, John. As you can appreciate, it's very fluid and information's coming in thick and fast.

JON FAINE: All right. And Healesville, are you involved in that one?

ALEX CONRAD: Yes. We're hearing reports of spotting at Healesville from the Kilmore fire, and also --

JON FAINE: Sorry, in Healesville from Kilmore?

ALEX CONRAD: Yes, quite a distance, so --

JON FAINE: It's more than a distance - that's extraordinary.

ALEX CONRAD: Yeah, it really is, so we're just urging residents of Healesville to be vigilant and just be on high alert for the prospect of ember attack.

JON FAINE: Is there anything, Alex?

ALEX CONRAD: No, that's the lot, Jon.

JON FAINE: That's more than enough. It's very distressing information. Thank you very much. Alex Conrad at DSE with an urgent threat message for Beechworth, a fire in the south-east heading towards Stanley and then across to Mudgeegonga, heading towards the Kiewa Valley Highway north of Myrtleford - that's on the outskirts of Beechworth, not on the Yackandandah side, but on the south-east corner. And, also, the situation as you heard

in Marysville and Healesville also extreme, and information will continue to come your way throughout the evening here. Dawn in Doreen. Good evening to you, Dawn.

CALLER DAWN: Good evening. I'm just calling about the woman who called in about the fire at Doreen. It's not in the Promenade Estate, which is a housing estate in our back paddock at Doreen. The fire is actually to the west. It's between the Promenade Estate and Ivanhoe Grammar. It's in open paddocks, there's about four or five trucks there, and my husband has just been down to the fire and it's - it's - it's coming towards Bridge Inn Road, but he said they seem to have it under control.

JON FAINE: All right, thank you very much for that, Doreen [sic].

CALLER DAWN: So there's no need for people to evacuate Doreen at all.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much for that. Thank you, Dawn, in Doreen. Getting some text messages here, people saying that they're unable to get through on 000 and asking us by text to pass on urgent information about people who are at risk and unable to call for help in Kinglake. If you're listening to us, we have passed on that information to the emergency services in Powers Road, Kinglake, and we've passed on that information, and you can continue to listen to the radio and we will see what can be done through the emergency services. So thank you for your message.

I have a text message saying that the winery at Domaine Chandon in the Yarra Valley, the vineyard is affected at St Huberts by the burning spot fires. The power's back on in Kilmore. That's good news. And we're looking for good news.

Mary-Jane Fenech can bring us some more information about roads and transport. Good evening.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Perhaps not so much good news. Advice from Connex is reconsider your travel tonight. Power companies have advised of ongoing disruptions across the network, and David Maloney from V/Line continues to update us with their services. Warrnambool line won't return to service until Monday at the earliest - around 2,000

sleepers have been burnt. Gippsland and Seymour lines will be closed until midday tomorrow at the earliest - could be longer, as they have not been able to assess the damage. Buses will be running where possible.

Some areas have road closures. There will be no replacement services tonight in Gippsland. Bendigo and Ballarat are unaffected at this stage. Geelong line is also running half hour delays across the board. So that's not a bad effort.

Also we have road closures: one on EastLink affecting inbound and outbound traffic between Cheltenham Road and the Dandenong Southern Bypass. Also, police are saying that the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream is blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway intersection. They have also closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to smoke and fire. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the Northern Highway, and the Broadford-Kilmore Road. The Princes Freeway is closed at Pakenham to Warragul. The Princes Highway is closed at Sale for the west-bound traffic and at Stratford in both directions. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster. Now the traffic affecting Horsham south of Horsham.

[7.15pm]

JON FAINE: Please, please.

MARY-JANE FENECH: The Western Highway at Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road, also Horsham Drung South Road. Woomera Highway at Natimuk Road is closed as well as Glenelg Road at Coleraine, Princes Highway between Camperdown and Colac, Fox Hill Road at Lake Corangamite due to poor visibility. Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake, and Burwood Highway is closed between Glenfern Road Upwey to Dawsons Road in Upper Ferntree Gully. And we'll continue to update you with all those road closures and our transport system.

JON FAINE: Thank you. Mary-Jane Fenech with the latest. And some information in Marysville. Apparently the fire may be affecting communications, and mobile phone towers may be affected. So if you're struggling with mobile telephony, that could be an explanation there, and more information coming your way from DSE and CFA in a few

moments with a full update and Trevor Chappell monitoring the urgent threat situation for us, and as soon as there's any change, that will be broadcast here on 774 ABC Melbourne. Broadcasting, and we know we're being heard State-wide, but broadcasting in conjunction with ABC regional radio right across Victoria, and local transmitters in a few places have been affected, and in Gippsland 100.7 FM, ABC Gippsland can now be heard on 828 on the AM band, and local information will be provided there, and as you have heard, the situations in Horsham and Camperdown are better. In Bendigo we'll get some information for you shortly, but the ABC in Bendigo is broadcasting much more specific and precise local information, although we will continue to cover it along with all the other situations in the State.

Angie Laussel is recovery manager with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council with some information on recovery centres for people in that local government region. Angie, good evening.

ANGIE LAUSSEL: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

ANGIE LAUSSEL: We have two relief centres open for those people that want somewhere safe to go, again reiterating the messages earlier: please make sure people leave early rather than leave it to the last minute, and I think your messages are coming through nice and clear. If people are seeing flames, that's too late, so they need to leave now if they're wanting to. The Mt Alexander Shire has a relief centre open at their Castlemaine town hall, and we have one open in our Kyneton town hall. People are welcome to come along there. There'll be resources, support staff there, and a safe place to be until the threat of the fire has passed.

JON FAINE: So Kyneton town hall and Castlemaine if you're affected by the Redesdale fires.

ANGIE LAUSSEL: That's right.

JON FAINE: All right. And that will be open all night, will it, Angie?

ANGIE LAUSSEL: It will until all the fires are safe and

it's safe for people to return home.

JON FAINE: And what's available there for people and what, if they can, should - if people are wanting to help, what do you need?

ANGIE LAUSSEL: At the relief centre people will have access to some support staff there, so obviously people are often a bit distressed when they're leaving home under such circumstances. There's first-aid teams if that's needed, tea and coffee, essentially information coming through as soon as we get it, which is probably about the same time you get it about what's going on in relation to the fires, and, most importantly, they will have information about when it's safe for them to return home.

JON FAINE: Is there food available there, Angie?

ANGIE LAUSSEL: There will be if it's starting to head towards meal times. There's certainly some great people that are making a good cup of coffee, I can tell you that. If people are leaving, we would encourage them, if they have time, to take important things such as their prescription medicine if they have any - anything they will need for a new hours and possibly overnight.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Angie. That's support services available at Kyneton town hall and Castlemaine town hall in the Macedon Ranges provided by the council there. Angie, thank you. Angie Laussel, recovery manager with the Macedon Ranges shire council. 19 minutes past 7. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster.

At the coordination centre, the emergency coordination centre, Richelle Hunt is with Greg Esnouf, deputy chief officer with the CFA again. Thank you, Richelle. Thank you Greg.

RICHELLE HUNT: Thanks, John. Well, look, as we speak now, it's always changing here at the moment and these guys are so on top of it and all of these new maps have been printed out and popped up on to a wall. Every piece of wall here has some kind of information on it at the moment, but they're circling the areas of concern and, John, basically every area has been circled. It's more about sort of circling the tiny bits that aren't areas of

concern. Now, Greg, what are the latest predictions and which areas in particular are under threat at the moment? Are there - like major areas, or is it just across the board?

GREG ESNOUF: Oh, look, we've still got the major fires of concern. About the only good news is the Coleraine fire has been listed as contained and so that's about the only good news I think we've had all day so far, but certainly, look, the fires I've talked about before - Redesdale, 6,000 hectares still going, and quite strongly, Maiden Gully, we've got reports of 10-plus houses and possibly threats to a lot more - that's just near Bendigo, Eaglehawk Bendigo, so there's concerns there. The fires out at Horsham, 5,700 hectares, three houses lost there - that's got the south-west wind change on it now, but that's a massive fire to pull up.

But then you get into the real heart of Victoria, if you like, into the mountain ash country, into the forested areas, where that Kilmore fire from earlier in the door has now pushed right up into Kinglake, Whittlesea, and is spotting into the Yarra Valley, so we're getting reports of fires into Saint Andrews and Yarra Glen and the like; a fire next door just to the east of it in Murrindindi has pushed through Narbethong and I believe is threatening Marysville, so you've got fires in those high forest areas that are going to be of significant concerns for us into the night.

JON FAINE: Just on that one, if I could please jump in, Greg, that's the one that's also threatening Healesville?

GREG ESNOUF: Possibly. If I got my map out, I think I would have to agree with you, that that one would be the one that would push down to - into Healesville. Well, Healesville could be - could be getting from either of them, because it could be pushing in from the long distance spotting off the --

JON FAINE: The Yarra Glen fire.

GREG ESNOUF: -- off the Yarra Glen.

JON FAINE: You wouldn't want those to join up, would you?

GREG ESNOUF: No, and the wind change could give potential

for that to happen. So, look, those two fires are - as I said, they're in the mountain ash country, it's as dry as at the moment, and it only burns when it's dry and it's really dry at the moment. So that's the 1939 scenario with the whole high country going, so that's not a good scenario for us.

JON FAINE: Bunyip and Drouin? .

GREG ESNOUF: Bunyip is still of concern. I mean, it's pushing into Drouin. We're hearing - getting reports of asset losses in Drouin, so that one's still causing us significant concern, and the one in the Strzeleckis, once again in the high country, into the mountain ash country, it's gone up over Mt Tassie, we understand knocked out your transmitter and the like.

JON FAINE: That's the one also threatening Churchill and Loy Yang.

GREG ESNOUF: That's correct; that's correct. So they're the big fires I'm talking about. And my hand runs out trying to scroll down the computer screen and look at all of the small fires that we've got. We've just got the board lit up at the moment, so I'm only talking about the big fires.

JON FAINE: So eight simultaneous major threats to the State.

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah, eight running fires of significant concern at least.

JON FAINE: And you haven't even mentioned the one that DSE just told us about that started up south-east of Beechworth that's heading off towards Stanley at the moment.

GREG ESNOUF: No, no. I know that country well and that will be another tough gig for us, because the trouble is that the south-westerly wind change won't push through until well into tomorrow.

JON FAINE: That's much further north.

GREG ESNOUF: So they've had about 10 or 11 days of 40 degrees plus already, and that fire will run tonight on a

very hot night.

JON FAINE: So we've got nine, at least, major fires.

GREG ESNOUF: If that one has potential, which I'm not across obviously, but yes, that's right.

JON FAINE: All right. Port Albert and Yarram, what's the situation there?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, that'll be the ones getting affected by that Churchill fire, so there's threat warnings out for those areas, so --

JON FAINE: So you regard that as one fire, do you?

GREG ESNOUF: I would expect that that is activity off that main fire that's come over the top of Mt Tassie.

JON FAINE: All right. To the west of the State?

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah. Look, as I said, the Coleraine fire is listed as contained - one house lost that I'm aware of.

JON FAINE: Horsham?

GREG ESNOUF: Horsham is still listed as going at 5,700 hectares.

JON FAINE: Caramut?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, I'm not across that one. The Weerite one, which is Camperdown, but I think that's different to Caramut.

JON FAINE: Yes, that is, that's --

GREG ESNOUF: I know my geography reasonably well down there.

JON FAINE: No, there's - Mortlake's in between that - it would be about 100Ks between that.

GREG ESNOUF: That's right. So, no, I'm not across the Caramut one, sorry.

JON FAINE: All right. Camperdown?

JON FAINE: Camperdown is still listed as going, 46 tankers, but the south-westerly wind change has come on to that one, so I think we'd have a bit of a degree of confidence coming into that one.

JON FAINE: And we've had eye witness accounts of significant property damage in Kinglake, including in the street of the town.

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah. Well, that's coming off the Kilmore fire, so the Kilmore fire has pushed down into that country. We've got reports in Kinglake West of fire pushing into Kinglake West. Now, I don't know about Kinglake itself, because that's about 10K to the east of it, but, yeah, look, there's all those spot fires that will be heading into Saint Andrews, Yarra Glen, all through that country off that fire.

JON FAINE: All right. Now Greg, in terms of power supply, Melbourne's main power supply coming from the valley, we've been told by NEMMCO and the Minister, Peter Batchelor, that they're precariously dangling at the moment on just enough supply, and they are wanting to be reassured that you don't have any crews active in the area before they try and reconnect one of those major power lines. What's the situation, as you know it?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, there's good procedures in place between us and the power companies, and the lines will trip and will actually fault out if the smoke or the fire actually starts them arcing to the ground. We train our firefighters not to work under active lines, and they won't re-energise the lines, the power companies, until they're sure that, first of all, the infrastructure's intact, ie, there isn't a problem with the line, and also that they're clear of firefighters, so we have very good relationships with the power companies there.

JON FAINE: You're working with them now to try and get that power secure?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, we'll do the best we can, but I'm not sure the fire's working with us at the moment, so it's really a matter of where the fires go as to what impact it has on what power lines.

JON FAINE: All right. Anything else that you can tell us, Greg?

GREG ESNOUF: Look, the wind change is pushing through. The fire activity will still be very extreme after that wind change, so don't - don't be relaxed after the wind change. In fact, it will open up that whole new front that I keep on talking about that can make it quite dangerous, and the fire that people have seen going away from them can all of a sudden turn around and be coming towards them.

JON FAINE: Yes.

GREG ESNOUF: And the other thing is that - I keep on harping on this one - we still have reports of a lot of people out on roads that shouldn't be on roads. There is no reason to be on a road now. Whatever you were planning to do, if it was sightseeing or just going out to visit someone --

JON FAINE: Don't do it.

GREG ESNOUF: -- please don't do it, because at the moment we've just got activity all over the State.

RICHELLE HUNT: John, we were just talking about the fact that, once it gets dark, any - when you're ever, you know, in a position of being afraid, once it gets dark it is heightened so greatly, so, you know, there is I guess that fear of people not wanting to stay throughout the night and it's just - you know, it makes it just so much worse.

GREG ESNOUF: Yeah, and you'll certainly get the glow of fires in the distance. Fires will look a bit clearer because you'll be able to see the - see the flames sometimes, and you certainly can't judge the distances as well at night time, so your whole perceptions will change at night time so --

JON FAINE: So if there's no essential reason for you to go out and about, really it's a very good day to ring your friends and say, "Look, I know we were going to drop over, but we've just decided we won't."

GREG ESNOUF: Oh, it'd be much better to go and see them next week, I think.

JON FAINE: Just about any time except today. All right, thank you very much for that, Greg. Unless there's more information, we'll move on to other things and come back to you at the coordination centre later.

GREG ESNOUF: Thanks, John. No, I'll leave it at that for now.

[7.27pm]

JON FAINE: Thank you. And Richelle, thank you for sterling work throughout the day, too.

RICHELLE HUNT: Thanks, Jon.

JON FAINE: Richelle Hunt, who has been broadcasting continuously for some hours from the coordination centre. Greg Esnouf, their deputy chief officer. We will be continuing to bring you information from there as soon as we can. There's some good news about the weather. The wind's dropped completely at the moment in Croydon, says Sue, and she says "foof". Greg in Torquay says the same thing, and looking out the windows here at South Bank at the ABC Centre, the trees are no longer bending over. So that's very good news there. Seymour, the power's on, but it's still 42 degrees. Well, I'm sorry about that. Steve in Bendigo. Hi ya, Steve.

CALLER STEVE: G'day, John, how are you?

JON FAINE: I'm well. Go ahead.

CALLER STEVE: John, yes, look I've just been out and about here, because I've lived in Bendigo all my life, and I was over - we were over in the Bracewell Street area, we saw two houses go up. Bracewell Street is probably around 4 kilometres from the centre of Bendigo, so people probably don't understand that.

JON FAINE: This is really quite - well, it's in the town.

CALLER STEVE: Yeah, it's in the town; it's suburbia. There's houses all around it and obviously that's - where that area is, there's some old gold diggings, so there's some bush interspersed. The wind changed - with the wind as it was, it was sort of taking fire towards the city, to the centre, but the wind changed. But it's pushed it again

towards more suburbia, so I guess I was out and about and the thing that concerned me is just - because we're talking about Bendigo with 100,000 people, the amount of cars on the road, the danger itself is probably more from the cars than the fire.

JON FAINE: Yeah, and as it gets dark and there's smoke, we do not want people on the streets and on the roads unnecessarily, because that's where you can have tragic outcomes. That's a very good reminder. Thank you, Steve. Anything else?

CALLER STEVE: No, that's all, Jon.

JON FAINE: No, that's good information and that's also a very timely reminder. We're getting a number of people calling, and also text messages saying is there a fire here, is there a fire there. I've got people saying is the Prom okay? What about Daylesford? I think you can take it from us that, if there is a problem, we'll be telling you about it, and if you're not hearing a particular town mentioned, that's very good news. It's not as if all of Victoria is on fire; it just sounds that way, but we're not going to go through telling you all the places where there aren't fires, but we will keep telling you all the places where there are. Tim from Healesville. Good evening, Tim.

CALLER TIM: How are you going?

JON FAINE: Well. More importantly, how are you and how is Healesville?

CALLER TIM: We're fine. We're in Healesville, and we look towards the north up Chum Creek, the valley up towards Toolangi, and as the wind change came through about an hour ago, a new fire started I suppose about a kilometre north of the town.

JON FAINE: A completely new site?

[7.30pm]

CALLER TIM: Yeah. And just headed straight up over the hill and down into Chum Creek and it's headed up the valley, and that was quite frightening. There were flames going a long way in the air and we've got a lot of friends up there and a lot of properties up there, and we just hope

they're okay.

JON FAINE: We certainly do, and I have in fact lots of text messages - Tim, thank you for that - that I haven't read out, but I suppose it's important just people saying we appreciate what you're doing for us at the CFA and the DSE, all the firefighters out there doing a great job, efforts are appreciated, thank you to the emergency people, tell the fellows they're doing a great job, and that should not be overlooked. You're quite right.

Graham's at Yarra Junction where there have been many, many problems. Graham, good evening.

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah, good evening, how are you?

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah, we're just sitting on a property on Little Yarra Road at Yarra Junction and there's lightning strikes here which have actually started spot fires up on the sides of the hill. It's just unbelievable to see.

JON FAINE: So you've actually seen that happen?

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah, you can see - actually see the lightning hit the side of the hill here and it's just started a fire which has now taken off - it's just started with a small wisp of smoke and now it's taken off up the ridge line of the hill up looking towards Warburton.

JON FAINE: Is there still lightning?

CALLER GRAHAM: There is lightning strikes in the area still and there's a little bit of rain at the moment, thank goodness, but it's not very much unfortunately.

JON FAINE: And the fire is - is it posing a threat?

CALLER GRAHAM: It's burning in probably a very - pretty much an inaccessible area up on the top of the hill I would say, so hopefully there's no-one out --

JON FAINE: Is there - are there people or properties up there at all, Graham?

CALLER GRAHAM: There is properties up there, but it's an

area that's a few Ks up from where the main Tarrango Road is of Yarra Junction, and the - it's an area - probably everybody from miles around can see the smoke burning and that's where it started from, from a lightning strike.

JON FAINE: And you actually saw that happen. That's an extraordinary thing to have seen.

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah. The lightning - the lightning - there's still bolt lightning now, you can see, in the sky.

JON FAINE: Well, we were looking forward to some rain from this. We didn't want --

CALLER GRAHAM: Yeah.

JON FAINE: -- it to start more fires.

CALLER GRAHAM: It's having the opposite effect, yeah.

JON FAINE: Yeah. Well, look, thank you, Graham. That would be quite remarkable.

CALLER GRAHAM: You guys are doing a good job, anyway.

JON FAINE: That's a remarkable thing to see. Look, thank you, we'll pass that on. Graham from Yarra Junction seeing - actually seeing the lightning starting fires. It's just after half past 7 - 29 minutes to 8. Jon Faine with you through the evening here on your emergency services broadcaster 774 ABC Melbourne. More specific information and more of your calls 1300 222 774, and keep the text information flowing through, it's most useful 1977 4774 and, in particular, if our switchboard is blocked, which from time to time I must say - in fact quite often it has been - then a text message to us always gets through on 1977 4774. In the news room, Alicia Byrne has the very latest information. Thank you, Alicia.

[7.31pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Thank you, John. The CFA and DSE are warning Victorians to prepare to be impacted by fire over the next few hours. The threat relates to all areas from central to south-east Victoria and Gippsland. People whose properties aren't fire ready are being urged to go to a neighbour's house. A wind change that's brought relief to

Melbourne could pose a serious bushfire threat to towns and properties across the State. The extent of the property damage won't be known until tomorrow, but dozens of homes are believed to have been lost.

A man's been flown to Melbourne after suffering severe burns near Hamilton. Crews say they're slowly getting on top of a big fire that's destroyed three homes and a golf club at Horsham in western Victoria. The fire started early this afternoon and has grown to about 5,500 hectares in size. Residents in the Drung Drung South, Longerenong, Dooen and Riverside areas remain on alert, but crews are making good progress on the fire.

The Kilmore fire is spotting into the Healesville and Yarra Glen and Kinglake areas. The blaze has burnt out about 4,000 hectares and about 30 homes have been destroyed in Wandong. The forecast wind change is expected to turn the blaze that started at Redesdale south-east of Bendigo towards more homes. The head of the fire is currently in the Sidonia area, and the towns of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East and Pastoria and the areas east of Kyneton are being threatened.

And a fire is burning on the edge of the suburbs in Bendigo. The blaze started on Bracewell Street in West Bendigo, and is about 400 hectares in size.

[7.33pm]

To the weather, a total fire ban for the whole of the State has now been extended to cover tomorrow as well. For the State: very hot with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow. Areas of raised dust for tomorrow. Isolated light showers, mainly on and south of the ranges. Moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. For Melbourne: windy with areas of raised dust this evening. For tomorrow a shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, 24, after a low of 20. In Melbourne 26 degrees. Next news at 8.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774, ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

JON FAINE: Needless to remind people, today is, and

remains all day right through to midnight, a day of total fire ban across the whole of Victoria.

[7.34pm]

There are many, many threatening fires. As we just heard a few moments ago, there are nine active serious major fires, and we'll run through them all with CFA, DSE, and other emergency services throughout the evening all night and into the morning, whatever is required. Trevor Chappell is monitoring threat messages on web sites and on phones for us. Trevor, what's the latest?

TREVOR CHAPPELL: And as they come to hand. The residents of Toongabbie, Glengowrie and Cowa may be impacted by smoke and embers from the Parkers Corner fire, which is burning in a south-easterly direction. Also, the towns of Nilma, Darnum and Warragul are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke at the moment, and we're bringing you the latest. If people are wanting to get more information on the fires that we don't mention, that's because we're giving the latest updates. If you go to www.cfa.vic.gov.au, and then go to "incidents" you'll get the information from there via the net as well.

JON FAINE: Thanks very much, Trevor, and as you speak another threat message: residents in the Warburton area - Wesburn, Millgrove, East Warburton, Warburton itself, Big Pats Creek and Gladysdale may all come under threat from a fire burning in Britannia Creek. This is on the south side of the Warburton Highway. It's travelling in an easterly direction and this is one of those fires that was mentioned when we spoke to the CFA a short while ago. It's known as the Murrindindi fire. It's been threatening Narbethong and Marysville. It's now also threatening Warburton.

Residents of Wesburn, Millgrove, Warburton, East Warburton, Big Pats Creek and Gladysdale may come under threat from the Britannia Creek fire which is travelling in an easterly direction and you should now, if you have not already, implement your emergency fire plan. If you don't know what to do, as we heard from the CFA earlier on this evening, if you are in doubt, either consult a neighbour - it's too late now to start to plan or to prepare, if you do not have preparations in place, then your options are substantially limited, and you need to find somewhere safe to be. And that is an urgent threat message for Wesburn,

Millgrove, Warburton, East Warburton, Big Pats Creek and Gladysdale - a fire burning in Britannia Creek, south side - south-east side of the Warburton Highway. We'll bring you an update in the next few minutes on the situation in Redesdale, which is on ongoing.

The Coleraine fire is regarded as contained. In Bendigo, as you heard, West Bendigo, in Maiden Gully there are about 10 houses believed to have been lost there, and that is still being engaged with. The fire in Horsham is regarded now as being less of a threat, but three or more houses in that region have been destroyed. The Kilmore, Kinglake, Whittlesea, Saint Andrews, Yarra Glen fire, and I know Kilmore's a very long way from Yarra Glen, but that's now regarded by the CFA as one fire, continues to threaten as it makes its way east and is not yet in any way regarded as contained.

I just mentioned to you the Murrindindi Narbethong Marysville Warburton fire, and that's an upgraded threat message. The Bunyip-Drouin fire is also continuing to threaten and we'll bring you information as soon as we can. That has sent spot fires down as far as Port Albert, and down to the coast, which is a very long way indeed. The Mt Tassie-Strzeleckis fire continues to threaten Churchill and Loy Yang, and now there is a fire, as we were told less than half an hour ago, south-east of Beechworth.

Considerable loss of property in the Kinglake area has been confirmed, and we'll bring you a full rundown of all that information very soon here, as we keep in touch with CFA and DSE and the rest of the emergency services.

[7.38pm]

Thank you for your calls and your text messages. 1300 222 774 is our number - 1300 222 774. And the text messages, when the phones are completely blocked, as they have been many times during the course of this afternoon and this evening - the text messages continue to come straight to our screens on 1977 4774. I have about 10 text messages from people saying can you tell me what's happening here, what's happening there. I can assure you that we are broadcasting all the information available to us as soon as it comes to hand. I have people sending texts saying: I've just got home, been out all day, is there any problem here, is there a problem there. What

about my holiday house here, what about my friend's house there. If the place that you're concerned about is not being mentioned, it's because we have no active alerts or problems and you can take it from us there is no problem if it's not being mentioned. The places where there are fires, we're listing them, we're updating them as regularly as we can and keeping that information flowing as fast as we can. 21 minutes to 8 here on 774 ABC Melbourne. Traffic and more information from DSE and others in just a moment.

MALE SPEAKER: Career and volunteer firefighters have their plans in place for this bushfire season. Are you ready? One sure way to minimise your risk is to have a bushfire action plan. If your plan is to stay and defend during a bushfire, make sure you've prepared a defendable space around your home. Clear the area of all long grass, leaves or anything that can burn easily. Call the CFA on 1800 240 667.

MALE SPEAKER: To organise your bushfire survival plan, ABC local radio, your emergency services broadcaster.

JON FAINE: Jon Faine with you, 20 minutes to 8 on your emergency services broadcaster, 774 ABC Melbourne. Local ABCs in the west of the State in Bendigo and in Gippsland are all broadcasting more locally specific information either on their main transmitters, or in Gippsland, where our transmitter has itself been knocked out by the fire, you can hear ABC Gippsland on 828 on the AM dial. If you're in an area where reception is inadequate on 828 on the AM dial, keep listening to us and we'll be across the information that is relevant for Gippsland as best as we can. The chief fire officer of the CFA in just a moment. Mary-Jane Fenech has more traffic information and some power information for us, too.

MARY-JANE FENECH: I do indeed. We have closures on EastLink affecting inbound and outbound traffic between Cheltenham Road and the Dandenong Southern Bypass. Also, the Maroondah Highway in Coldstream is blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway-Maroondah Highway intersection. They have also closed the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford due to smoke and fire. The alternate route is via Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the Northern Highway and the Broadford-Kilmore Road. The Princes Freeway is closed at Pakenham to Warragul. The

Princes Highway is closed at Sale for the west-bound traffic and at Stratford in both directions. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster, and the traffic affecting south of Horsham, the Western Highway at Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road, and also Horsham Drung South Road closed. Woomera Highway at - Woomera Highway at Natimuk Road is closed as well as Glenelg Highway at Coleraine; Princes Highway between Camperdown and Colac; Fox Hill Road at Lake Corangamite due to poor visibility; and Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake; Burwood Highway between Glenfern Road in Upwey to Dawsons Road in Upper Ferntree Gully.

And an update for you on our transport services. Advice from Connex is basically don't catch the train tonight. Unfortunately, they have no information as to what the disruptions will be across their network, but at this stage they are - they are being told by power companies that there will be ongoing disruptions across their network later on tonight. We'll have more information as soon as possible. Daniel Maloney says that from V/Line Warrnambool line won't return to service until Monday at the earliest. Around 2,000 sleepers have been burnt. Gippsland and Seymour lines will be closed until midday tomorrow at the earliest - it could be longer as they have not been able to assess the damage. Buses will be running where possible. Some areas have road closures. There will be no replacement services tonight in Gippsland. Bendigo and Ballarat are unaffected at this stage. Geelong line is running, half hour delays across the board.

Now, I've just been getting some updates from our power companies. Power Core have 5,000 off in the Horsham-Wimmera area. This is due to fires. Not sure what damage has been done at this stage.

JON FAINE: So that's damage to infrastructure, is it?

MARY-JANE FENECH: Yes. They are not too sure what damage has been done and how quickly they can get it up and running again. They hope to have most of their customers back up tonight however. 8,000 customers are affected in Bendigo and they are starting to lose a few in the western suburbs - Werribee, Sunshine and Hoppers Crossing have been affected. Jemina have approximately 6,800 without power, and they say it's affecting 45 suburbs across the network. If you're one of those, you can call their number on the

electricity bill or text to 0427 840 744. Now from SP Ausnet: bushfires affecting Bunyip, Drouin, Kilmore, Alexandra, Yea, and the surrounding areas, they are without power at this stage and, due to the fire the current fire conditions, it is not safe for their power crews to assess the situation. So unfortunately, if you are without power in those areas, you will be until first thing tomorrow morning. They are basically waiting for first light tomorrow morning to assess the situation and see how quickly they can get power up for you. If you can see damage such as fallen power lines, stay right away from it and report those hazards to the SP Ausnet line, which is 131 799, and if you haven't lost power as yet, make sure you get your radio with the batteries on standby so that you can continue to receive our updates. SP Ausnet do say that they understand that it is inconvenient to be without power, but their safety is their No. 1 priority.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Mary-Jane. Mary-Jane Fenech with up-to-date information and that will continue throughout the night. So many text messages: my friend just lost her house in Yarra Glen. That's how dangerous things are. Ian says: I'm listening in hospital. What an incredibly value service. And get well soon.

[7.44pm]

And we now have more information about Saint Andrews and Kinglake, but let's go to Russell Rees, who can update us - the chief fire officer with the CFA. Russell, good evening.

RUSSELL REES: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much for being available. Can we run through the major fires, and I suspect the unprecedented pressure is taking its toll at CFA headquarters. We have many people asking us, though, for the very latest information first.

RUSSELL REES: Well, essentially the south-westerly wind change is proceeding across the State, and impacting very severely on the fire that started in the Kilmore-Wandong area that's spotted, to be quite blunt, John, all over the place down into Kinglake, Whittlesea area, even down near the Plenty Gorge.

[7.45pm]

The start of the spot fire in Yarra Glen did enormous damage, and now the wind change has hit that and it's all pushing back towards the Steels Creek area and will eventually push back, even I think right back even towards that fire in the Murrindindi area and it's putting --

JON FAINE: Are you worried they may join up?

RUSSELL REES: Oh, it depends how long this southerly push lasts. Certainly the spots are carrying enormous distance. I think we need to understand just the horrific conditions both in weather and fuel that we've gone through today. It is clearly the worst fire weather and fire behavior conditions not that I've seen but I probably would not be passing judgment unfairly in saying ever in the State of Victoria, and we've sustained that, and we're dealing with it as best we can with every available resource. So that fire - that fire is putting enormous pressure on places like Kinglake, West Kinglake and then pushing through into Steels Creek, and of course you've got that spot fire that was Yarra Glen that was just mentioned.

Then if you go to the Murrindindi fire, which is Narbethong putting pressure back into Marysville, that's a very significant fire and quite hard for us to resource, because you have to get into the top - in from the top - it's hard to get in from the top, being in the north. That's very difficult for us. The wind change is on the two major fires in Gippsland. We've had reports --

JON FAINE: Sorry, this is now moving to Gippsland. Before we do move to Gippsland, Russell, Kinglake, we've had eye witness reports of significant loss of real estate, of assets --

RUSSELL REES: Oh, absolutely, Jon.

JON FAINE: -- in Kinglake and Kinglake West.

RUSSELL REES: Absolutely. All our reports indicate that - we have some details on the fires in the western district, you know, quite firm detail on losses - you know, I won't say rubbery but fairly solid figures that we've lost significant numbers of houses and assets in that - in those two fires I've just mentioned.

JON FAINE: What does "significant numbers" - what does that mean?

RUSSELL REES: Oh, dozens.

JON FAINE: Dozens of houses.

RUSSELL REES: Yeah.

JON FAINE: Dozens of shops, even the towns themselves - the townships.

RUSSELL REES: I don't think so, Jon. I think that's going too far to make that judgment. I'm - I'm saying that we have to be realistic in these type of conditions, and we have to say and make a plea to people to realise that just because the southerly wind change has come and the temperature drops, the risk is not gone. We've got three or four hours of very significant push in this wind change at least, and we all know from past history that fire at night is even more scary than fire in the day and it is more simpler and easier to get disoriented, to think it's all over, so our plea is just understand what's going on around you and be as alert as possible. You know, if the fire's all around you, getting in your car and driving is now the most dangerous thing you can do.

JON FAINE: All right. Well, let's go through then - I interrupted you as you moved from the Kilmore, Wandong, Kinglake, Marysville fire, and it's an astonishing thing to even recite that as one potential threat from that distance - from Kilmore to Marysville and Healesville is an enormous distance.

RUSSELL REES: Yeah, and there's issues with power lines and the catchment in the O'Shannassy and the Maroondah reservoirs, and there's just - you know, Jon, we are - we have thrown all day everything we've got at these fires.

JON FAINE: Right.

RUSSELL REES: Moving forward into the areas of the Bunyip fire --

JON FAINE: The Bunyip fire just north of the Princes Highway, yes.

RUSSELL REES: Correct. It's been affected by the wind change as well. It probably didn't proceed as far south as what I personally thought it would. However, an enormous amount of spotting activity pushing back towards Neerim - not a lot of information flowing at this point of time simply due to the complexity of the situation. The fire that started at Churchill --

JON FAINE: Down in the valley.

RUSSELL REES: -- in the pine plantation --

JON FAINE: Yep.

RUSSELL REES: -- is burning - has burnt basically up over the top of Mt Tassie, which is the communications facility that I think you mentioned earlier on, and has spotted into the Yarram area, and is now being subjected to that wind change, and will push back towards - in the Sale direction. I'm not saying it's going to get towards Sale, but push back into that direction.

JON FAINE: But that's also - from Churchill to Yarram, that's, what, a distance of 50, 60Ks in a straight line as the crow flies, let alone by road.

RUSSELL REES: Yeah. Whether the fire has done that in a fully body of fire or a whole pile of spots, we're unclear. What's interesting is those people, your listeners will understand, outside the sky is almost black would be an interesting description, your best description, and methods of getting intelligence on fires is - just unable to do it at this point in time. Flying them's impossible.

JON FAINE: Right. And further north, all the way up to Beechworth, DSE warned us of a fire that broke out on the outskirts south-east of Beechworth, and heading down towards Stanley.

RUSSELL REES: That's correct. That fire is still running south in that direction. I don't have a lot of information on that fire except to say that we're running a whole lot of equipment into that fire to try and protect those houses. People may not - Melbournians may not appreciate it's still 42 degrees up there and 7 per cent humidity, so the weather we had in the middle of the day they have right

now, and so it's some time before they get the wind change - in fact, it's not predicted they'll get it until tomorrow.

JON FAINE: Yep. The Narre Warren property losses, have you been able to quantify those?

RUSSELL REES: No, I haven't got firm detail, except we know there have been - my last check before I - not before I came in here, but a little while ago - was at least three houses in that area, I was told, were lost. If I come back across western Victoria generally starting at Coleraine, that fire is contained at around 600 hectares. There was a report of a house loss and some sheds, and certainly a lot of stock and fencing in that fire.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RUSSELL REES: Maiden Gully, a number of houses lost in Maiden Gully, which is in around the south-western part of Bendigo, still going fire, very difficult, wind change is now on it, it's dark. Again, the plea to people: don't get into your car and drive around, don't go rubber necking. We really don't want people on the road.

JON FAINE: All right.

RUSSELL REES: Vectis, which is a little town west of Horsham, significant fire running in and around Vectis, three houses confirmed lost at Vectis. The golf club - the Horsham Golf Club has been lost, and I'm unsure of the building itself, and some vehicles, and I understand but not sure that it's affected power assets in that area.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RUSSELL REES: And then there's a fire at Redesdale, which is on the north of the Calder Highway as you drive north looking north at Kyneton.

JON FAINE: North of Kyneton.

RUSSELL REES: Yes, north from Kyneton, at least two structures there are confirmed. What they are, I don't know. It's about 6,000 hectares in size, that particular fire, and then the last one that I will mention is at Weerite between Colac and Camperdown. That fire, they

stopped the head of that fire and expect it to be contained shortly.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RUSSELL REES: About 400 hectares - sheds lost there and the railway line severely damaged. So it's a long list, and the interesting thing, from a fire history point of view, is the entire State has been impacted by fire today --

JON FAINE: Except --

RUSSELL REES: -- with the exception of the north-west.

JON FAINE: The north-west. And I wasn't going to want to mention it in case it put a curse on them, I suppose. The extreme east has also been spared so far. Russell, is the situation in Kinglake - I'm getting some uncorroborated information here by text message - is your CFA station, is that a safe place to be at the moment at Kinglake?

RUSSELL REES: Well, my understanding is that, by their own volition, some people have gathered around there, and we're seeking to make sure that (a) the people are safe - when people are under pressure they tend to gather in places. I cannot say to you, Jon, over the air - it would be giving false information - to say the exact situation there, I'm sorry.

JON FAINE: But I am getting information confirming that many people have come to the CFA station in Kinglake.

RUSSELL REES: I believe - I believe that is correct.

JON FAINE: We've had eye witness accounts that a petrol station has been lost, that some shops have been destroyed, and a number of other structure fires in Kinglake, and, yes, there's apparently quite a few people seeking either sanctuary or advice from your local CFA office there.

RUSSELL REES: I can only imagine that'd be correct, Neil - Jon.

JON FAINE: It sort of makes sense, doesn't it? Yea is shrouded in smoke. Kilmore, Kinglake, Buxton, Acheron, fires throughout that very beautiful region which many,

many people will know well. Russell, anything else at 6 minutes to 8? I know you've got many other demands upon your time.

RUSSELL REES: I think there are some important messages, Jon. We've got to start back at the fundamentals here. This State has been absolutely belted by fire in absolute extreme conditions. In general, we've got to say our community and our fire services have stood up magnificently and I know we've suffered losses and I know it's tragic and traumatic what's going on here, but we can't afford to back off with this wind change.

JON FAINE: Not yet.

RUSSELL REES: We can't think it's over. Even tomorrow and the next day our communities have got to rally together and help each other.

JON FAINE: Yep.

RUSSELL REES: There'll be losses into the next days as we go out and have a look, so we just - we've just got to understand that this is a traumatic event for our State, but it is something that, if we work together with the emergency services, we're absolutely pulling everything we can find to do the - do our job, but we need the community to stick with us and work with us and listen to us.

JON FAINE: And stay right through it. Russell, it is of course significant that we're talking about massive fires but we're not at this stage talking about loss of life.

JON FAINE: Yeah. Jon, we're really worried about that fact. You know, and we're watching that and trying to find out. I hope and pray that we can survive this environment without significant life loss. The current indications are positive, ie, you know, we haven't heard much - any yet. We hear a number of rumours and we chase them down, and --

JON FAINE: And we do not broadcast them.

RUSSELL REES: Well, we're not there yet, if you understand me.

JON FAINE: Yes.

RUSSELL REES: But we do have to understand that these events are of enormous proportions, and only by us all working together and doing things like listening to the advice and not going and looking at fires and dressing properly and being vigilant and looking after our families and all of those key elements can we minimise the loss in our community, and then, when we stop these fires, and we will, then we have to put our community back together, and that's a critical approach we must take, and we must apply the same process to what we're doing today.

JON FAINE: Congratulations to all of your crews, both those in the central information centres and also of course those who are out fighting the fires. Tributes coming in for them and reminders saying what an extraordinary thing those volunteers and paid crews do. Russell, all strength to your collective arms and we'll keep in touch, thank you.

RUSSELL REES: Thanks, Jon.

JON RAINE: Russell Rees, chief fire officer with the CFA. Our information will continue. There's a news bulletin coming your way at 8 o'clock, and we'll continue to bring you information right through the night. Lisa Maksimovic from ABC News has just been flying over the fire that is known as the Bunyip fire down in the Strzeleckis. Lisa, what did you see?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, Jon, it's been difficult on the ground to confirm just how much damage there's been at this bushfire, so it was easier myself to get up in the chopper and have a look. Now, of course, it is still very difficult in some areas because the smoke is still very dense, thick and black, so it's hard to see the town below, let alone what damage could have been caused there. But I've seen with my own eyes one home burning to the ground, several sheds well alight, LPG gases exploding, cars and trucks set alight. So, as I said, only one house so far is confirmed destroyed in the Bunyip region, but there may be several more, if not dozens more tomorrow when the smoke clears.

JON FAINE: What's the weather doing now, Lisa?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: It's a lot cooler than it was today. It's significantly calmed down - the winds have calmed down over the past couple of hours, but there is a wind change

expected here, as there is across the State, and the great fear is here that with the enormity of this fire, it is, as it stands now, 20 kilometres long along the flank and 1 kilometre across the fire front, but with this wind change, which I can see wafting through now, the fear is that the fire front will become 20 kilometres long.

JON FAINE: As the flank becomes the front with the change of wind, yes.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: That's right. And that is going to leave many more towns in its path.

JON FAINE: And exposed. So, Lisa, on the ground there, are people confident?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, that's hard to say. They're too busy to be confident at the moment. Some are already breathing a sigh of relief, they feel that they have been missed with this wind change coming through as it is. But there are many more as we speak still trying desperately to save their homes. When I flew over Labertouche just about an hour ago, there were families that I'd spoken to earlier in the day that were going to stay and protect their homes and I could see them from the helicopter standing on their porches with the fire coming right up around the edges of their home, and they were standing on the porch, they were standing on their tanks with hoses - and with leaves - trying to keep it away from their homes.

JON FAINE: What an extraordinary thing to have seen. Lisa, I'm grateful to you for your on-the-spot reports and stay safe and thank you. Lisa Maksimovic from ABC News who's just flown over Labertouche.

[8pm]

More information from the emergency services, from CFA, from DSE, from police, power information, transport and road information as well as your texts and phone calls continuing on 774 ABC Melbourne broadcasting State wide, your emergency services broadcaster. It's news time, 8 o'clock.

[8pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good evening, Alicia Byrne with ABC News.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment and the CFA are warning Victorians to prepare for the worst, as wind changes push bushfires towards more homes. While the exact number of properties already destroyed by fire isn't known, dozens of homes and buildings have been lost.

A man is in hospital in Melbourne after suffering severe burns near Hamilton as he tried to move stock. The wind change moving through the State is expected to worsen conditions in many areas, and new threat warnings are being issued by fire authorities.

Caroline Douglass from the DSE says fire crews are under intense pressure.

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: We obviously have a lot of fires out there, and there's more starting all the time. The wind change will cause problems as it will push the fire in different directions, turning what was the head of - the flank of the fire into the head of the fire and creating a broader fire front.

ALICIA BYRNE: Three separate fires in Gippsland are posing a threat to communities. Peta Carlyon reports.

PETA CARLYON: The townships of Willung, Willung South, Stradbroke, Giffard West, Durriman and Gormandale have been placed on high alert as a fire on the eastern fringe of the Strzelecki Ranges makes its way towards Yarram. The fire in the Bunyip State Park is burning in a north-easterly direction.

A man in Labertouche has been taken to the Alfred Hospital with facial burns, and it's believed another person in Drouin West has also been burned. Falling embers have been reported in Warragul, Nilma and Darnum, and fire authorities are warning communities in Noojee, Neerim North, Noojee and Piedmont may be directly impacted.

And another fire east of Walhalla is burning in a south-easterly direction. Residents in Toongabbie, Glengarry and Cowa may be affected by embers. The fire in the Delburn Complex near Boolarra has also flared up and the township of Driffield is on alert.

The CFA says the next four hours will be critical. Peta Carlyon, ABC News, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: Senior weather forecaster Terry Ryan says thunderstorms are forming over fire-affected parts of west Gippsland.

TERRY RYAN: We call it pyrocumulus, where all the ash coming out of the top of the fire causes lifting and convection and can cause a thunderstorm-looking top, and you can get thunderstorms and lightning coming out of the top of the fire, basically, and that can add to the fire's effect, so that's a bit of a nasty feedback effect that can occasionally happen.

ALICIA BYRNE: Dozens of other fires are burning across Victoria. Justine Longmore reports.

JUSTINE LONGMORE: Homes and buildings have been lost and a number of communities are under threat. At least 30 houses have been destroyed in the Kilmore fire, and that blaze is now at Kinglake.

The fire burning in the Mount Despair State Forest has reached the community of Narbethong, and Marysville is under threat. Residents of the Yarra Valley have been told to immediately activate their bushfire plans.

In the north-east, a fire is burning south of Beechworth and is moving in a south-easterly direction. A blaze is burning in West Bendigo, and several homes are believed to have been lost. The Redesdale fire to the south-east of Bendigo has burnt about 6,000 hectares.

ALICIA BYRNE: The threat posed by a fire burning near Horsham in western Victoria has eased. Peter Leneghan reports.

PETER LENEGHAN: The CFA has issued a downgraded threat message for the fire burning around the city's perimeter. The heat and gusty winds have eased and the fire's no longer threatening any property, but people in the Dooen, Riverside and Longerenong areas are being urged to remain on alert. The fire's burned an estimated 5,700 hectares.

Assessment of the damage is continuing, but it's been confirmed that the Horsham Golf Club has been destroyed, along with three homes, several sheds and a fire truck. The truck's crew, from Dimboola, wasn't hurt. Sections of

the Western, Henty and Wimmera Highways remain closed. Peter Leneghan, ABC News, Horsham.

ALICIA BYRNE: About 37,000 homes and businesses are without power around the State because major lines have been cut in the fires. The Energy Minister, Peter Batchelor, says one of the main lines supplying power from the Latrobe Valley is down. He says it's proving difficult to fix.

PETER BATCHELOR: We can't test that to see whether it'll go back into service through flicking the switch at the control area --

JON FAINE: Yes.

PETER BATCHELOR: -- because there may well be firefighters in or around those transmission lines, so we have to carry out a manual inspection.

ALICIA BYRNE: To the weather, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State for today. There's also a total fire ban for the whole of Victoria tomorrow.

For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust. Tomorrow, isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges, moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne, windy with areas of raised dust overnight. Tomorrow, a shower or two. The chance of a thunderstorm, 24 after a low of 20. Monday, light showers and 21. In Melbourne, 28 degrees. ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

[8.05pm]

JON FAINE: Five minutes past 8. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne. ABC Local Radio stations in Horsham, Goulburn-Murray, ABC Central Victoria and ABC Gippsland are all broadcasting specific information for those regions. 774 ABC Melbourne will continue to give you a State-wide coverage of the fires that as you may have heard Russell Rees, the chief officer of the CFA, has described as perhaps the worst in the State's history and certainly the worst fire conditions anyone has ever seen.

The ABC Horsham, Goulburn-Murray, Gippsland and Central Victorian studios are all broadcasting specific information for those regions on their usual networks, except for ABC Gippsland. Our transmitter has been knocked out by the fire and, instead, ABC Gippsland can be heard on 828 on the AM dial. That's 828 on the AM dial for ABC Gippsland.

We will continue to bring you full information here, but ABC Horsham, ABC Goulburn-Murray, ABC Central Victoria and ABC Gippsland are all on air throughout the evening for as long as is necessary for the fires.

There are as many as nine serious fire events under way in Victoria as I speak. The situation in Kinglake is clearly critical. That is regarded as the Kilmore fire. I'll run through them and we will continue to bring you information as soon as we can to update the urgent threats as the evening progresses, and we will stay on air 24 hours, local, as long as we need to. There'll be, I suspect, no overnight networked programs, so your usual "could have beens", and so on, Saturday Night Country - I'm afraid I'm not able to offer you any particular alternative to those except emergency information.

However, the Redesdale, West Bendigo, Horsham, Kilmore to Kinglake, Warburton Murrindindi Marysville fire, Bunyip and Drouin, Strzelecki Churchill Loy Yang fire and the Beechworth fires - all extremely serious. There are reports of other fires, which we will not broadcast until corroborated, as is the fashion with the ABC. But the information coming through us is all checked and then broadcast on this network.

And you can keep information coming by text, 19 774 774, and also by talk-back, 1300 222 774. And, yes,

sometimes those lines are completely engaged. Every board - every line on the switchboard can be full. But then just try again a few minutes later, or send us a text. If you've got urgent information, you can send us a text saying, "Call me about the blah-blah fire", and when we have a spare set of hands - and there's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven people on the other side of the glass at the moment - then we will call you back and respond to your request.

The text number - 19 774 774. 19 774 774. And we'll continue to bring you information, as I say, throughout the night.

NEMMCO is the national electricity grid manipulators. Paul Bird is trying to keep your power supply going. Paul, good evening again.

PAUL BIRD: We are indeed, Jon. We're trying to manipulate the power so that people stay online. That's our job right at this very point in time.

JON FAINE: And are you succeeding?

PAUL BIRD: We are at this stage. The situation is far improved on what it was an hour ago. The three major transmission lines I mentioned that were affected earlier, there was one - two lines, I should say, affected by the Kilmore fire, and there was one line affected by the Bunyip fire, are still out of action, but the rest of the grid is operating efficiently. The demand has fallen significantly in the last hour and a half, possibly off slightly cooler temperatures, and that's helping us to maintain supply across the State.

We do anticipate that overnight as long as the grid stays in its current condition, that there won't be any deterioration of supply State-wide.

Can I just add, though, that there are a number of localised outages across the State, particularly in Victoria's east. The fires there have impacted on around about 37,000 customers in the east of Victoria. In the west of Victoria, it's impacted on about 18,000 customers, the heat and the winds, and so on.

So there's around about 63,000 customers across

Victoria currently affected by localised heat-related and fire-related issues, and I know the distribution businesses are doing their utmost to reconnect those customers certainly outside of the fire areas as quickly as they can.

JON FAINE: Thank you very much for that, Paul, and I'm getting some text messages that I'm sure would please you from people saying, "Look, we're turning off all inessential appliances. We've only got airconditioning running in one room or half the house because we suspect that the power is needed elsewhere." Does that help you when people do that? It's a very community-spirited thing to do.

PAUL BIRD: It certainly does. We managed to resecure the grid. Once we lost those three transmission lines, the grid was effectively in an insecure state, which meant that the loss of another line could have dramatically affected customers across Victoria. The fact that we were able to resecure it while still having the same lines off shows that people are reducing their power use. And if people continue to do that overnight, it will certainly be for the better good of people across the State who are still able to receive power.

JON FAINE: Well, entirely selfishly, I guess it's a matter of thinking, "Well, if I want to have any power at all, maybe I should be working on a minimum-necessary basis, and that might help everybody keep some going." Thank you, Paul.

PAUL BIRD: My pleasure, Jon.

JON FAINE: Paul Bird from NEMMCO, and we'll speak to them as we need to throughout the evening.

The situation at Kinglake has clearly been extremely difficult. Peter Mitchell is at Kinglake. Peter, what can you tell us?

PETER MITCHELL: Well, it's much the same as before, Jon. The whole township pretty much is on fire. Forest all around us - it just came through so quickly that no-one really had time to do anything. Cars were arriving at the hotel with burnt tyres and dents from crashes. A few of us huddled in the hotel for a while. There was no fire brigade. They're all off busy elsewhere, of course, the

poor guys. And, you know, finally we got a semblance of order. I mean, the horrible wind's died off, but there's just - I could look 360 degrees and see things burning. In the main street, there's probably half a dozen buildings gone, shops. There's a four-wheel drive just burst into flames. And there will be a massive loss of houses.

JON FAINE: Peter, that's a very difficult situation for people to have to cope with, of course, at the moment. What other reports are you hearing as people do arrive into the town and seek some form of sanctuary?

PETER MITCHELL: Well, there's about 200 of us holed up here at the moment. No-one else could get in or out, so we're just stuck here. We just have to wait until it all dies off and we go back and see if we can save anything. There is a water tanker up here. No fire truck. They probably can't get up, I would imagine. But with the water tank - big water tanker and the sewer pumps at the CFA, look, I'm standing on the verandah of the hotel at the moment looking across the road. There's guys trying to put out the fire in a shop, running a little bucket brigade because they can't get the hoses working properly.

JON FAINE: Are you safe, and the other people there? Are you safe at the moment, Peter?

PETER MITCHELL: Am I safe? I'm safe at the moment, yes.

JON FAINE: And the people gathered there?

PETER MITCHELL: All those that have made it into town will be fine. The rest will be sheltering and working on their fire plan, God help them.

JON FAINE: The weather at the moment, you said, is calm. Has the --

PETER MITCHELL: It's pretty calm, yes.

JON FAINE: The wind has died down. Has the temperature dropped?

PETER MITCHELL: It's probably in the low 30s, would be my guess. Yes, it's still warm, but we're getting a lot of heat, just radiant heat from the fire.

JON FAINE: Are all the roads into Kinglake closed, Peter?

PETER MITCHELL: I'm not 100 per cent sure, Jon. I would imagine so.

JON FAINE: Is there enough food and water?

PETER MITCHELL: The fire - I'm sorry, say again?

JON FAINE: Do you have food and water?

PETER MITCHELL: Oh, probably not. But we'll get through the night. We'll sort it out tomorrow. We'll stick together up here and sort it out somehow, and hopefully tomorrow we'll have a clearer idea of what we can do.

JON FAINE: Do you have power?

PETER MITCHELL: But there'll be a lot of us homeless. No, no power.

JON FAINE: You do have, clearly, mobile telephone towers still connecting you.

PETER MITCHELL: Yes.

JON FAINE: Do you have health services? Are there people who need assistance?

PETER MITCHELL: I did see State emergency ambulance taking some people down, probably overcome by smoke. They tried to get out one way and couldn't, and then they've disappeared off another way. I'm not sure whether they're going to have to turn around and come back or not. That's only just happened.

JON FAINE: Peter, what else can you tell us? Where are you going to sleep?

PETER MITCHELL: Don't know, Jon. Don't know. Least of our worries at the moment. We probably won't feel like sleeping tonight. Yes.

JON FAINE: Well, at the same time, if you don't, the consequences are also quite dangerous, of course.

PETER MITCHELL: Well, yes, yes, sure. But, yes, we're

all just still in the shock stage now, still just trying to come to terms with what happened. It just came through in absolute minutes. It was so quick. There was nothing on the radio.

[8.15pm]

I first heard explosions and went out to see what the hell was going on. Even though I had a fire plan, this fire looked way too big for anything I could do, so I bolted.

JON FAINE: Yes.

PETER MITCHELL: And that's what most other people did.

JON FAINE: And, in fact, this afternoon from about 2 o'clock, that's been the advice from CFA and DSE --

PETER MITCHELL: Yes.

JON FAINE: -- saying if you have a fire plan that includes trying to fight a fire, this is not the sort of fire that you are likely to be able to fight.

PETER MITCHELL: Yes, that's right. Yes, yes. I had a daughter and baby. We got them off the mountain very early, so they're safe and that's nice. Yes.

JON FAINE: Peter, if it's some consolation to you, there are goodwill messages flooding in by our text message service for you and the other people in Kinglake.

PETER MITCHELL: I'm sure there will be.

JON FAINE: And --

PETER MITCHELL: Thank you, yes, Kinglake's doing it very hard at the moment. But we'll be right. We'll build again, I suppose.

JON FAINE: There are millions of Victorians who are wanting to help --

PETER MITCHELL: Yes, yes.

JON FAINE: -- and will help, and if you can in some way be - and your colleagues there, your neighbours, be

consoled by the fact that we will be digging very deep into our pockets to try to help you all. That may cheer you up just a tiny, tiny little bit.

PETER MITCHELL: Yes.

JON FAINE: Peter, thank you.

PETER MITCHELL: Thank you, Jon. Thank you everyone who sent messages. We'll get through it.

JON FAINE: Well, no, thank you, Peter, because I'm sure you've got many things on your mind and --

PETER MITCHELL: Okay.

JON FAINE: -- talking to the ABC is not the top of the list, but you've done a terrific job.

PETER MITCHELL: It's okay. Yes, I'd better get going.

JON FAINE: Peter Mitchell at Kinglake. They have no power. They have little food. They've got just enough water. There are some hundreds of people who have gathered near the pub and the CFA, who don't know whether or not they've lost their homes. But, as Peter said, they're prepared for the worst. They feel completely cut off from the rest of the world. They're not sure that any roads in or out are safe, but for the meantime at least they feel comfortable. And as you heard from Peter there, quite a remarkable spirit.

16 and a half minutes past 9 [sic] on 774 ABC Melbourne.

[8.16pm]

Further threat messages coming your way in just a moment and text messages galore. Some of them are making inquiries, "Can you tell me about Mount Buller?", for instance. We have no information about a fire at Mount Buller. We don't have information about fires at any one of the 15 to 20 places that I have text messages inquiring about, and as I did say earlier this evening, and I'll repeat, if there's no information being broadcast about a particular location, that means we have no information about it to broadcast, which means there's no direct

threat.

The fires currently under observation and regarded as serious - there are countless minor fires, so, yes, there may be fires that you're hearing about, but they're regarded by the DSE and CFA as minor.

The major threat fires in Victoria right at the moment are still the fire at Redesdale, that's north of Kyneton, east of Castlemaine - Redesdale; Maiden Gully at West Bendigo; out in Horsham, although now contained. There's a fire that started out Kilmore way that's head across to Kinglake, Whittlesea, Saint Andrews and as far as Yarra Glen - an enormous area of spot fires there. And as you just heard, the situation in Kinglake has been critical.

The Murrindindi fire, which includes threats to Warburton, Narbethong and Marysville - we'll update the urgent threat message in a moment.

The Bunyip Drouin fire, which, as you heard from ABC News earlier - that's north of the Princes Highway, north of Drouin, and that is the Bunyip fire that's been running for some days - is still very active, and as the change hits it, that's going to cause enormous problems there.

Further east, the Strzeleckis Churchill Mount Tassie fire has gone as far as Loy Yang, Traralgon and is still of great concern, in particular as it may affect some of the infrastructure for power in Victoria.

And as DSE told us earlier, there's now a fire south-east of Beechworth, south-east of Beechworth, heading towards Stanley, that is regarded as a serious threat as well.

If you're concerned about other parts of the State, those are the only major fires that we're being notified of at the moment. There are other minor fires, and so it may be if you're being told about a particular fire, it's regarded as a minor fire. It may be that there isn't a problem at all. 19 minutes past 8.

[8.19pm]

Our text message service - 19 774 774. And the phone number here - 1300 222 774. Jon Faine with you throughout the evening. The ABC will continue to broadcast on 774 ABC Melbourne all night, your emergency services broadcaster.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

JON FAINE: Mary-Jane Fenech can update the urgent threat messages. Thank you, Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you, Jon. There is an urgent threat message for Beechworth, Stanley, Barwidgee Creek and Mudgegonga. A fire is burning 4 kilometres south of Beechworth and is moving in a south-easterly direction. The fire is spotting well ahead of the fire. The communities of Stanley, Barwidgee Creek and Mudgegonga should prepare for direct ember attack from this fire.

There is also an urgent threat message for Chum Creek residents. Residents of Toolangi and Chum Creek are advised to activate their bushfire plans immediately.

And, last of all, we have an urgent threat message for the Murrindindi Mill fire. The Murrindindi Mill fire is in the Mount Despair State Forest and it's burning in a north-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The fire has directly impacted on Narbethong and Marysville. Marysville residents are encouraged to assemble at a muster point at the town oval. The community of Buxton can expect to come under direct attack from this fire. Healesville residents are advised to remain on high alert for the prospect of ember attack.

For more information, you can head to cfa.vic.gov.au and click on "Incidents", and, of course, stay tuned to ABC Radio, your emergency services broadcaster.

JON FAINE: Mary-Jane Fenech, with the latest information.

Anne Wood can tell us a bit more about the situation at Kinglake. Anne, good evening.

CALLER ANNE: Oh, hello, Jon. I've just sent a text to the - to 774, because I hadn't heard anything about

Kinglake, and I've just spent the last - oh, since about 6 o'clock in contact with my daughter, who lives there with her partner and my eight-month-old grandson, and they got caught up in a fireball as I spoke with them on the phone.

It took me 25 minutes to get on to 000 because of the volume of traffic that was trying to get through. And they had gone into a neighbour's house, who had a pool, and were with the neighbours, and when I rang them back, the neighbour's house had burned down, along with the pool, which was an above-ground pool with decking, so it just all disintegrated.

And they took the baby out on to the road with the neighbours and - my daughter and her partner, and it was terrifying listening to the sound of the fireball coming across that my son-in-law, if you like, was telling me about and the difficulty that the baby was having breathing with all of the smoke, and then the phones cut out.

I kept on the 000 line waiting for a call and finally got on to them to send an ambulance and truck. However, I got back on to my daughter, and as I spoke to her, then their house was burning down. They were on the road, with nothing to protect them. Their house - their car was saved, and they eventually all got in the car and just drove to the CFA housing booth, and they are all in there at the moment.

My daughter Megan has said to me that there are at least 50 people there who've told her their houses have burned down. And all of the neighbours in the area my daughter lives - she only moved into her house on the 12th of January - their houses have all burned down as well. And she said it's just so terrifying. She said in the main street, the cars are on fire. She said there are cars on fire in the main street.

JON FAINE: Yes, we've also had that confirmed by our caller a moment ago, David Mitchell, who was in the main street and told us that that's exactly what had happened. But, Anne, your daughter, her husband - sorry, her partner, you said, and their baby are safe?

CALLER ANNE: They're safe. They've just been checked by the ambulance, Eliza and Nathan, and they're both going to be okay. They're very, very - I think they're all in shock

up there.

JON FAINE: And can I confirm, they've lost their home?

CALLER ANNE: Yes. Their home has burned to the ground.

JON FAINE: Where are they going to stay tonight?

CALLER ANNE: Well, they can't get out. There are fires all around them up in Kinglake.

JON FAINE: So as with our previous caller, they're just - they're all at the pub and just seeing what they can get through with?

CALLER ANNE: That's right. The roads are all blocked, apparently. There are fires in - is it Murrindindi --

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER ANNE: -- and Saint Andrews, Panton Hill.

JON FAINE: I understand the emergency services, though, are active in Kinglake and people are marshalled at the various --

CALLER ANNE: Yes.

JON FAINE: -- assembly points, including, I think, the school.

CALLER ANNE: Yes.

JON FAINE: So locally there, although, you know, the situation is clearly terrible, they are, as well as can be, being looked after.

CALLER ANNE: Yes. And she said she doesn't know when they will be able to get out, but as soon as they're able to take them out, I'll be picking them up and they can come to my place and stay.

JON FAINE: Yes, and it's a dreadful situation, but if it's any consolation, Anne, judging by the generosity already being expressed in our text messages and by many, many callers, people wanting to know what they can do to donate money, to donate goods and to provide all sorts of

accommodation. Look, Anne, best wishes.

CALLER ANNE: Jon, do you know what? It's life. It's the life that --

JON FAINE: It's not a very nice part of life, though, Anne, is it?

CALLER ANNE: I'm so relieved - I'm so relieved that they're all alive.

JON FAINE: They're alive. That's exactly right.

CALLER WOOD: Yes.

JON FAINE: It's not a very nice part of life and it's one that, really, we - no matter how much you think you're ready for it, it still is a hell of a shock when it happens.

CALLER ANNE: To hear their description of the fireball --

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER ANNE: -- and I'm on the other end of the phone and I can't do anything.

JON FAINE: Yes, you feel --

CALLER ANNE: I just - it just blew me away, literally. I'm so grateful they're all alive.

JON FAINE: Anne, thank you very much, and we're grateful to you for taking time to call us, too. It's clearly a very difficult situation for many, many people, including your daughter and her family.

Dean Stewart's on duty at the Weather Bureau now for the very latest weather information. Good evening, Dean.

DEAN STEWART: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: What are we going to have?

DEAN STEWART: Well, the change is still making its way across northern Victoria, went through Swan Hill about half an hour ago, also Mangalore. They had gusts around

46 knots, which is around 80 kilometres per hour, as it went through Mangalore Airport. And it's then lying along the Gippsland coast. It went through Bairnsdale half an hour ago or so as well, so getting towards the Orbost area and starting to push up towards the Shepparton area as well. So it'll gradually work its way north-eastwards during the night.

It may tend to weaken out as it pushes up towards north-east Victoria. I think it will tend to die away a bit and it won't be really until tomorrow morning before it does eventually push right across the far north-eastern part of the State.

Of course, there is the cooler air coming in behind it, and it'll be very welcome to see temperatures in the low 20s tomorrow over southern Victoria. It'll still be pretty hot in the north-east before that change moves through - temperatures in the high 30s, once again, in that north-east corner.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you very much for that, Dean. And the rain event seems to be, well, can I say - well, disappointing.

DEAN STEWART: Yes. Look, there is a bit of storm activity, one thing that is providing some extra hazards, because - the winds have eased off a couple of hours behind the change. In fact, out in the Bunyip area, the winds have become quite variable. But the fact that there is some storm activity, that can just add to the erratic nature of the wind, so that's just creating a bit of an extra hazard. And those storms are basically from the smoke plumes extending from about Kilmore down south-east over the Bunyip fire or just east of the Bunyip fire into parts of Gippsland.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you, Dean, and keep us informed if there are any other changes. I'm grateful to you.

DEAN STEWART: Will do, Jon.

JON FAINE: Dean Stewart, senior forecaster on duty at the Weather Bureau. 27 minutes past 8 on 774 ABC Melbourne.

[8.27pm]

Traffic information for you in just a moment. Anne, on the Macedon Ranges. Good evening, Anne. I know you've been waiting there for absolutely ages. Are you still there? No, she's had to go. Anne is a wildlife rescuer, and she was waiting to pass on to us information about wildlife, and unfortunately we had all sorts of other urgent information. So, Anne, I'm sorry if you were waiting there and had to go, but we were in the middle of some extremely urgent information there.

But, yes, there is all sorts of wildlife that's also affected by this, and, of course, we also have many domestic animals and farm animals that have been badly affected, too.

Keep the information coming. 19 774 774 is the text messaging service. And the phone number - 1300 222 774, although, as I look down now, all phone lines are busy, but our staff are clearing them as quickly as they can. 27 past 8.

[8.27pm]

Simon Brown is here with the latest traffic information. Simon, good evening.

SIMON BROWN: Good evening.

JON FAINE: What have we got?

SIMON BROWN: We've got a lot of closures. There's closures on EastLink affecting inbound and outbound between Cheltenham Road and the Dandenong Southern Bypass. Police are also saying the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream blocked between Hill Road and Melba Highway and Maroondah Highway intersection. The Hume Freeway is closed in both directions. The alternate route is Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford using the Northern Highway and Broadford Kilmore Road.

The Princes Freeway is closed at Pakenham to Warragul, and the Princes Highway is closed at Sale for west-bound traffic. South Gippsland Highway is closed at Sale and Foster. And the traffic south of Horsham - the Western Highway at the Grampians Road, Henty Road and Toolondo Road as well as Horsham Drung South Road is closed.

In terms of trains, advice from Connex is: reconsider your travel need tonight. Power companies have been advised of ongoing disruptions across the network. V/Line are continuing to update us. The Warrnambool line won't run until at least Monday. Around 2,000 sleepers have been burnt on the Warrnambool line. Gippsland --

JON FAINE: Are they advising that buses are available as a replacement?

SIMON BROWN: I'm saying - I've got: the buses are available on some lines where possible. There'll be no replacement services tonight in Gippsland. The Gippsland and Seymour lines will be closed until midday tomorrow, at the earliest.

JON FAINE: So Gippsland and north to Seymour, but V/Line are trying to arrange replacement buses where they can, but they can't do everything at once, by the sound of it.

[8.30pm]

SIMON BROWN: That's it. Bendigo and Ballarat fortunately are unaffected at this stage. The Geelong line is also running.

JON FAINE: All right. And if you have a chance to check with them next time you're speaking to them, Simon, about which replacement - where replacement buses will be available, that would be of some use to people.

SIMON BROWN: That's fine, yes.

JON FAINE: I think the general advice is: if your travel is not essential, it's best to just postpone it.

SIMON BROWN: That's right. All traffic closures information are being directed to VicRoads, and VicRoads are trying to get their website updated with closures as quickly as possible. So that's also a good place to go.

JON FAINE: Terrific. Thank you. Simon Brown, with the latest traffic information. That will continue throughout this evening.

I have people asking about the fires in Narbethong,

Yarram, Gruyere, "concerned about my folks in Marysville". The information continues. We are bringing you information as soon as it comes to hand.

And as we speak, I'm handed a print-out here of an urgent threat message. The Glendonald Road fire - this is Traralgon - the Glendonald Road fire is currently burning in and around Traralgon South and Callignee and Callignee North and South. Residents may be directly impacted by this fire.

Residents in the area may experience smoke and burning embers reaching their properties, are advised to patrol their houses to find out and put out any burning embers that may be landing. Protect yourself by wearing protective clothing, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, sturdy boots, a broad-brimmed hat. On no account wear synthetic material.

It's unsafe to be on foot or in a car. Buildings offer the best protection. Close all doors and windows and stay inside the house while the fire passes. Remain alert. Extinguish small fires, and, if necessary, move outside to burnt ground once the fire has passed.

If you're caught on the road, do not get out and run. Pull to the side, preferably in an area clear of tall trees and long grass. Put your hazard lights on and close the windows and the air vents. Cover any exposed areas of skin, preferably with a woollen blanket if you've got one. Get down as low as possible, and when the fire has passed, then move to safety. If you need to, get out of the car if it's been damaged, of course.

Drink plenty of fluids, so take them with you if you're moving. Avoid dehydration. Residents away from homes should not try to return to a burnt area, as access will be limited, the roads may not be safe and emergency vehicles need access first.

Continue to listen to us on the ABC and your local emergency service broadcasters in some of those regions for updates on this fire.

The South Gippsland Highway is closed to traffic south at Woodside, and this is a warning, an urgent threat message now, in Traralgon area, the Glendonald Road fire,

burning in and around the Traralgon South and Callignee and Callignee North and South areas, and that advice, of course, is general advice but specifically now a reminder for people caught up in that area.

We're getting many calls from people concerned about family in Kinglake. If you have made the decision to leave Kinglake and you're listening to us now, it would help if you called your family and put up some sort of chain system to let family and friends know that you're okay, because many people are deeply concerned about people from the Kinglake area, and it would help, of course, if you can let people know that you're okay.

Alicia Byrne has the news headlines and we'll bring you more information after that, with continuous updates throughout tonight for as long as there is a situation requiring emergency advice. Alicia, good evening again.

ALICIA BYRNE: Good evening, Jon. Victorians are being warned to prepare for the worst as wind changes push bushfires towards homes. More than 30 homes have been destroyed today, but that figure is expected to rise when firefighters are able to get a better look tomorrow.

Three separate fires in Gippsland are posing a threat to communities. Several townships are on alert as the fire on the eastern fringe of the Strzelecki Ranges makes its way towards Yarram. The fire in the Bunyip State Park is burning in a north-easterly direction. Falling embers have also been reported in Warragul, Nilma and Darnum. Traralgon South is also in danger.

Dozens of other fires are burning across the State. Homes and buildings have been lost in a number of communities which are under threat. At least 30 houses have been destroyed in the Kilmore fire that is now burning towards Kinglake. The fire burning in the Mount Despair State Forest has reached the community of Narbethong, and the Marysville area is under threat. Residents of the Yarra Valley have been told to immediately activate their bushfire plans.

In the north-east, a fire is burning south of Beechworth and is moving in a south-easterly direction. A blaze is burning in West Bendigo, and several homes are believed to have been lost, and the Redesdale fire to the

south-east of Bendigo has burnt about 6,000 hectares.

To the weather, the total fire ban for the whole State has now been extended and covers tomorrow as well. For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds, ahead of a cooler squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust for tomorrow, isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges, moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne, windy with areas of raised dust overnight. Tomorrow, a shower or two. The chance of a thunderstorm, 24 after a low of 20. In Melbourne, it's 28 degrees. Next news at 9.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: Homes are confirmed destroyed in the Darlimurla and ...

MALE SPEAKER: I've lost everything and I don't know where to start.

MALE SPEAKER: Victoria's Gippsland region has been affected by fire, and some of the people of the region have been left with nothing after losing their homes and personal belongings to devastating bushfires. ABC Victoria is encouraging all listeners to help victims of the recent bushfires by making a donation to relieffund.org.au. That's relieffund.org.au. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

[8.35pm]

JON FAINE: 25 to 9. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster.

Ah, well, the situation continues to preoccupy all of our emergency services, and we are in touch with them all. With no joy whatsoever, I confirm that there are still nine fires active across Victoria at the moment: the Coleraine fire, but that's contained, the CFA say, but still

requiring attention. The Redesdale fire is still going. Maiden Gully in West Bendigo - 10 or more houses have been lost. The situation there is still grave, and significant asset losses, and still requiring concerted effort from the emergency services.

The Horsham fire - less serious now, but more than three - three or more houses have been burnt there.

The Kilmore fire, which has extended from Kilmore across Whittlesea as far as Kinglake - including now spot fires in Saint Andrews and Yarra Glen. And as you've been hearing, the situation in Kinglake - devastating. People are safe at Kinglake township, although there has been significant loss of assets, shops in the streets, a petrol station, numerous cars, numerous houses. At this stage, a number cannot be put on the losses of assets there, and the emergency services flat out, and we will continue to monitor that situation very, very closely indeed.

The fire called the Murrindindi fire extends from Narbethong and Warburton and Marysville, also a most serious fire, and we're getting more information on that as it comes to hand.

Bunyip fire, down near Drouin, as we heard a short while ago, is continuing to trouble people, and the information on that will be updated shortly, too.

Further east, the Strzeleckis fire has destroyed our transmitter, amongst other things, on Mount Tassie. That's now affecting Churchill and Loy Yang, and there is a fire south-east of Beechworth.

The bushfire information line, 1800 240 667, gives you specific information. We're getting many calls here in the studio as well, and we're fielding them. We have, I think, seven people at the moment answering phones and putting information through to our broadcast studio where I sit at the moment.

The CFA website - if you're just wanting to know about things, if you just want to know whether or not a particular spot has been affected or you want to know the latest information, you can look at the latest threat information yourself. It's at cfa.vic.gov.au.

James Bennett is an ABC News reporter at the Kilmore staging ground with the CFA. James, good evening.

JAMES BENNETT: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

JAMES BENNETT: Jon, at the moment, fire crews have just had a changeover. There's some incredibly exhausted crews here at the staging ground in Kilmore who've arrived with blackened faces and haggard looks after what's no doubt been an incredibly torrid day in such extreme conditions, fighting blazes which the incident controller here has told us have taken around 30 houses so far. That's in the Kilmore, Wandong and Heathcote Junction areas.

JON FAINE: That's a significantly higher number of buildings destroyed than we've previously been advised.

JAMES BENNETT: That's right. This is a number which the incident controller is quite certain of. Unfortunately, the advice which goes along with that is that not only are those losses expected to rise, but given the conditions overnight, there's very, very little which can be done to stop it. The authorities say that with a blaze of this size, regardless of the wind direction and regardless of the cooler temperatures now, there's simply very little that can be done, and despite their best efforts at asset protection overnight, they do expect to lose more.

JON FAINE: And that's in which particular parts of that fire front, James?

JAMES BENNETT: At the moment, the areas which are under direct threat are around the Ogradys Road, South Broadford, Broadford, Wandong and Sunday Creek Road and also Pheasant Creek areas. So they're the areas which are on the, I guess, north-western flank of this fire, which is now the fire front as the change has come through. It came through here about an hour and a half ago and has begun to push that blaze away from the direction it was burning in, steadily towards Melbourne itself, and now away towards those townships on the north and east of the blaze.

JON FAINE: Does that count of 30 houses lost include Kinglake or is that at the Kilmore end of this fire alone?

JAMES BENNETT: That's at the Kilmore area. The incident controller, when I spoke with him, wasn't including in those what's believed to have been lost around Kinglake, although it must be stressed this is the number which he is estimating at the present time, and it has been stated that it's been an incredibly difficult area to get into to actually assess these losses in any kind of certainty because of the fact that some of these areas are still so hot and thus so dangerous. The word which he says is continually coming back from the crews attempting to assess those losses is that the areas just simply aren't safe to enter at the moment to get a firmer quantum.

JON FAINE: Even to do an audit. But, clearly, the situation from eyewitnesses around Kinglake is extreme, and if there are 30 houses around the Kilmore Broadford area alone that have gone, then add to it what may have happened at Yarra Glen where we've had reports; Saint Andrews, there's been threat, if not loss of property; certainly, at Kinglake, and that is a most devastating outcome.

JAMES BENNETT: It certainly is. Some of the scenes from around this area earlier on, as we watched residents both prepare to leave their homes and those who tried to stay frantically work to beat back flames which were encroaching towards their verges, using fire extinguishers, using blankets, using garden hoses and buckets of water - they were really, really frantic scenes of people doing absolutely whatever they could with what they had to try and defend their homes in a situation which could only be described as utterly extreme conditions.

JON FAINE: Thank you, James. I'm grateful to you for your on-the-spot report. At Kilmore CFA staging ground, ABC News reporter, James Bennett.

Many, many people sending us information here that we are checking and corroborating and continuing to process as fast as we can and turn it around for broadcast. We will continue to bring you information right through the night.

Stewart Kreltszheim is the CFA incident controller for the Wallan fire. Stewart, good evening. What can you tell us?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Good evening. It's been an absolutely horrific day. We've had an absolute firestorm

go through this part of the world and pushing into some of the places you've just mentioned, and we're continuing to go into asset-protection mode and do what we can to battle mother nature.

JON FAINE: Can I ask you an unpleasant question, Stewart. Have you reports of casualties?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: We have unconfirmed reports of casualties, but we'll assess that during the night.

JON FAINE: And are those casualties in large numbers or small numbers?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: I can't actually tell you, because the reports have come in and it's uncertain whether one person is reporting the same event, et cetera, so we're systematically going through and assessing all the losses, both civilian losses and asset losses.

JON FAINE: We are concerned about assets, but we're more concerned about people. So I understand we don't broadcast information until it's confirmed, until it's certain and all the rest of it, so that work is being done now, is it?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: That's correct. That's correct, and understanding, too, that a lot of the areas where we've received some of these reports are still very hot spots, and, as you said, firefighter safety and civilian safety is our key in this fire fight. So if that takes some time, well, so be it.

JON FAINE: Thank you. Can we go through the areas, because this is an enormous space that we're talking about. This is a fire that started as far away as Kilmore but now is affecting properties a very long way away. Can you take us through the whole distance of that one fire that you've been watching?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Right. Well, we have divisional commands set up out of Kangaroo Flat in that Kinglake area, and they're taking care of all the fires that side of the divide. We have a divisional command structure out at Whittlesea, and they're looking up at the southern end of our fire. And then we're operating out of the Wallan area here to take that Kilmore, Broadford, et cetera - all that patch as well.

JON FAINE: All right.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: So it's a huge patch of ground.

JON FAINE: All right. Now, at your end of it, we're told that there are as many as 30 houses that could have been lost.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: That doesn't surprise me at all.

JON FAINE: Are you able to put a number on the Kinglake or Whittlesea parts of this fire?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: No. Currently, they're still being assessed. We've just been moving crews back and we've had large amounts of people, as you can understand, sheltering in football grounds, fire stations, community halls.

[8.45pm]

And, as you said, our key component is to look after both our firefighters and those communities.

JON FAINE: All right. Is the fire still moving?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Yes. They much so. It is an active fire front on all parts of this fire and will be till mother nature decides to give us a break.

JON FAINE: What's the weather doing right now?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: It's - we've got this - the wind change obviously came through several hours ago, and it came through earlier than we - earlier than we hoped, and that's caused the significant damage across this whole fire. It's still blowing as I look outside the window here, and I don't see any respite for several hours to come.

JON FAINE: Is the weather the same at the other end of the fire as far away as Kinglake and Yarra Glen?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Yes. The fire's at a stage now where it's almost creating its own weather as well. You can understand that the fire creates a convection column, and it's running in very, very dry country and up and down

terrains and up valleys, et cetera. So, you know, it's the weather, the terrain, and everything else has been against us all day.

JON FAINE: It certainly has. I understand. We've spoken to people who are at the CFA fire station at Kinglake. I know you're a long way away from there.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Mmm-hmm, yes.

JON FAINE: It's not surprising to me, though, that people turn to the CFA, physically going to the CFA fire station as a sanctuary if they don't know where else to go.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Oh, very much. I mean, the CFA is a community hub in a lot of our communities, and people go to where they feel safe and comfortable.

JON FAINE: All right. Anything else that you can tell us, Stewart, from your perspective?

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: No, but I suppose - it's going to be a long, hard fight. It was the day that we absolutely dreaded, but there was always the potential for it, and we'll just continue to look after our own people, look after the community as best we can, and then recover together as a group of people.

JON FAINE: Stewart, all strength to your collective arms, and there are as many text messages making inquiries as there are text messages saying, "I'm in awe at what the CFA, both volunteer and paid staff, do", and we need to respect the work they're doing, but we also need to dig very deep when the opportunity comes in the next few days as well, and we will.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: And it's a whole community effort. I mean, our fire partners in DSE, the MFESB are helping us out, the Victoria Police have been great, Human Services, Ambulance Victoria and community organisations --

JON FAINE: This is all stops.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Yes, it is.

JON FAINE: This is all hands on deck, and that's certainly the same around all these areas. I can see it

here at the ABC. Even the boss has come in to lend a hand, and that's how it is at every single emergency service at the moment. Stewart, thank you.

STEWART KRELTSZHEIM: Thank you, bye-bye.

JON FAINE: Stewart Kreltszheim, CFA incident controller for the Wallan fire, and, as he said, he can only tell us about his end of this enormous fire that is quite unprecedented in its devastating impact. 12 minutes to 9. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne.

[8.48pm]

In some parts of ABC Victoria, there are local ABCs broadcasting throughout the night - at the ABC Horsham studios, the ABC Goulburn-Murray studios, the ABC Central Victorian studios and at ABC Gippsland, but you'll catch them on 828 AM, on the AM dial, 828 AM for Gippsland ABC broadcast, because our own FM transmitter that you normally listen to on 1 00.7 has been knocked out by the fire. But those ABC colleagues for Horsham, Goulburn-Murray, Central Victoria and Gippsland are all providing specific local information on local ABCs in those regions of Victoria. We here at 774 - we know we are heard across the State - will provide you with State-Wide information, but if you are looking for something more specific, those four ABC regional radio stations are on air as well.

Mary-Jane Fenech has current threat messages for us. Good evening again, Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Good evening, Jon. Urgent threat message for the communities of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria and other communities to the east of Kyneton.

A grass fire that started 9 kilometres west of Redesdale south of Lake Eppalock has burnt in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be over 6,000 hectares in size. The fire has crossed the Heathcote Redesdale Road in the vicinity of Barfold and has also crossed the Campaspe River and Watchbox Road.

A wind change from the south-west has now reached the area. The head of the fire is currently at Sidonia. The communities of Barfold, Langley, Metcalfe East, Pastoria

and other communities to the east of Kyneton may be impacted directly by this fire. Residents in the Pipers Creek, Woodend North, Newham, Cadello and Carboor areas are advised to be alert and implement their fire plans.

When the wind change arrives at the fire, it will run in a north-easterly direction, and residents in the following localities need to be alert and implement their fire plans: Redesdale, Glenhope, Baynton and Baynton East. Residents in the areas between Glenhope, Baynton, Redesdale and Heathcote and Tooborac need to be aware that these communities may also be under threat when the wind change passes through.

There is also an urgent threat message for Kilmore East fire. The grass and scrub fire burning 4 kilometres east of Kilmore south of Saunders Road is burning in a southerly direction and is estimated to be 4,000 hectares in size. The communities in the area of Kinglake to Flowerdale may be directly impacted upon this fire.

Also an update on the Murrindindi Mill fire. The Murrindindi Mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is still burning in a south-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The fire is now directly impacting on Narbethong and landowners. Residents around Murrindindi and Limestone are in the direct path of this fire and need to prepare for imminent impact. These communities can expect to come under heavy ember attack from this fire. All residents in these areas are advised to remain on high alert, and if they haven't implemented their fire plan, they should do so now.

You can also find out more information from cfa.vic.gov.au/incidents, or you can also head to abc.net.au/news for also updated information, and we'll have more information for you on your emergency services broadcaster.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Mary-Jane. Mary-Jane Fenech with the current threat messages, which, as you heard, are many and extensive.

Christine, out around Kilmore. Good evening, Christine. Are you there, Christine? Welcome aboard.

CALLER MARGARET: Hi, you've got Margaret from Vesper here.

JON FAINE: Go ahead, Margaret.

CALLER MARGARET: Hi. We're just on the hills outside of Noojee, and we've been watching the fire come from south-east and south-west, not sure which way it's going today. So we've got a partly built straw bale house unrendered, under construction, so we've been --

JON FAINE: Mmm, that's a bit of a magnet, I would have thought, for embers and the like. How did you go?

CALLER MARGARET: We put a fire hydrant in at the back of the house a couple of weeks ago and had all the protective clothing, took all the advice from people, and we've been very vigilant with mops and buckets and watching for the embers, so --

JON FAINE: So far?

CALLER MARGARET: So far so - we've got lightning storms and a little bit of rain.

JON FAINE: Yes, well, as we've just heard, it's not over yet, Margaret, but good luck, and congratulations on implementing your fire plan so far. May you stay safe and thank you for giving us an update.

Christine from Kilmore, hello.

CALLER CHRISTINE: Hello, how are you?

JON FAINE: I'm well, but how are you?

CALLER CHRISTINE: Wow, it's been a very busy day.

JON FAINE: It's not over yet.

CALLER CHRISTINE: No.

JON FAINE: What can you see?

CALLER CHRISTINE: I have a 180-degree view of Kinglake Ranges, and all day all we've seen is fires start up from Kilmore. And at the moment, as it's getting dark, you can

see all the glowing - Kinglake, Mount Disappointment, Flowerdale, Wallan, what do you call it? Oh, I've forgotten the name. I'm all - I'm flustered.

JON FAINE: Not to worry, Christine. It must be almost a ring of fire, then.

CALLER CHRISTINE: Oh, it's just everywhere, you know. Like, all day, it's been - because of the wind, you couldn't see much, you know. You could just sort of see bursts of flame.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER CHRISTINE: And then there'd be smoke, and then now as it's got dark, you know, you can just see all these glows everywhere, you know.

JON FAINE: Has the wind died down now, Christine?

CALLER CHRISTINE: Yes, it has, thankfully.

JON FAINE: And the temperature?

CALLER CHRISTINE: Oh, yes, about 20 degrees, it's dropped.

JON FAINE: Oh, what a relief.

CALLER CHRISTINE: Yes, and like, it's been horrendous, the wind. But now it's as calm as calm, so hopefully, you know, they can get - firefighters can get in and do a bit more work --

JON FAINE: All right. Good on you --

CALLER CHRISTINE: -- because the Kinglake Road was shut off earlier from the fires from Whittlesea.

JON FAINE: Yes, yes.

CALLER CHRISTINE: I'm 6 kilometres out of Whittlesea and, yes, the sky's just starting to glow.

JON FAINE: Yes, it's an eerie sight. Christine, thank you for your on-the-spot report.

We're expecting after the 9 o'clock news to be able to speak to the Emergency Services Minister, Bob Cameron, who is at the emergency control centre. The Government of Victoria have assured us that every possible measure is being implemented.

The Premier has issued a personal message thanking DSE, CFA and SES firefighters, who in fact have saved his parents' property from the fire at Coleraine, and he has been at his own country property. He has a farm and he has been at his own property up in the Harcourt area implementing his personal emergency plan, his fire emergency plan, and the Premier says he is dealing with the situation in his neighbourhood, as are many other Victorians.

We'll speak to the State Minister for Police and Emergency Services after the 9 o'clock news, which is just 5 minutes away. 5 to 9 it is now on 774 ABC Melbourne.

[8.55pm]

Text messages. "Excellent job by all at the CFA and DSE and St John Ambulance volunteers - don't forget them, either." And that's a fair point to make, too.

"Just spoken with friends and family stranded in Yarra Glen. Sure there are many other in the same predicament. Roads closed. Help needed." And, "Please, as many reports on the ABC for those of us who are away from our local areas."

"Are roads open? We're in Echuca now. Can we get back to Lilydale from here? Are the roads open?" Well, I suppose that's going to depend on which way you come, but from Echuca you've got a long, long way to go, and the information we have is that if you're coming down - the update will come. Shortly after the 9 o'clock news, we'll have another update for you on roads and traffic.

There are local diversions in place around the Broadford area on the Hume Freeway. Other than that, there's certainly some problems on the road between Heathcote and Kilmore, but we've had no information that I'm aware of of the Calder being closed, because the fire has been east of the Calder, so that may be your best bet.

Text messages galore. We're working our way - well, we're going to have some more information in due course in relation to the situation in Warragul as well. Terry from Lilydale. Hello, Terry.

CALLER TERRY: Yes, Jon, hi, mate. Look, two things. Number one, my wife and I live in a four-bedroom house in Lilydale, which is fairly close to Kinglake and Yarra Glen. We're willing to put a family up for as long as it takes - until they rebuild, buy a new home, it doesn't matter.

The second thing is I would like to urge anybody else with spare accommodation anywhere in Melbourne: open your house, take these people in. We can't have them on football grounds. We can't have them in communal centres. Open your house, take a family in, take a couple in - do whatever. But my house is open. If there's a family wanting accommodation anywhere near the Lilydale area, I've got three spare bedrooms. Mate, they're welcome.

JON FAINE: Terry, we don't at this stage have any procedures in place for processing generous requests - generous offers like yours, but I've no doubt over the next 24 hours the emergency services will be setting those sorts of facilities up and putting in place the sorts of necessary systems to process an application or a request - or an offer, I should say, like yours, Terry. So we have other offers of accommodation for people --

CALLER TERRY: All right.

JON FAINE: -- also prepared to put their homes available, and people with vacant houses or holiday homes. The ABC may end up setting up some sort of website where people can register their offers in order to process those sorts of generous statements like the one you just made, Terry.

CALLER TERRY: Not a problem. I just think this is a time we should all pull together. If we've got spare rooms, open them up.

JON FAINE: Well, that's very kind of you. And we also - I have any number of text messages from people saying, "I've got a spare this or a spare that", or, "I've got a caravan", "We have tents". I don't think it's quite come to tents, but we'll certainly find a way of making sure that that information is passed through.

There's a news bulletin coming your way at 9 o'clock, which is just under 2 minutes away, and after the news bulletin we'll bring you more information from the emergency centre, the coordination centre, where CFA, DSE, SES, police, everybody, ambulance, of course, are all coordinating and working together, and we'll bring you an update on all of these fires straight after the 9 o'clock news.

There are problems with mobile telephony in some of these areas, and there's a communications problem when you rely on mobile phones if the towers are down and fixed line phones when the wires are burned. So people are concerned about relatives. They're concerned about friends.

If you are in the situation where there's no other way for you to get your information across, you can give us a call here on 1300 222 774, or you can send us a text on 19 774 774 if you're in an area where you can access some mobile telephony or if you can get a message to someone else who can send it through, and we'll broadcast information so that people know that you're safe, if that's the situation, if you can get to somewhere else, if your own phone's not working, and we'll pass on that information and exchange those sorts of pieces of information so that people are less worried than they otherwise might be.

Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne. Our numbers: 1300 222 774. The bushfire information line: 1800 240 667. And we'll continue with our broadcast here on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster, right through tonight, if necessary, right through until tomorrow. It's news time, 9 o'clock.

[9pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Good evening, Alicia Byrne with ABC News. Fire crews are preparing for a long night across Victoria, with strong winds expanding fire fronts on several large blazes. Power has been cut to tens of thousands of homes and several major highways are closed. Fire crews are attempting to establish containment lines to limit the spread of major blazes, but the southerly wind changes are increasing the width of fire fronts and putting more communities in danger.

The CFA's Chief Fire Officer, Russell Rees, says Victorians need to be prepared for the fire threat to increase through the night.

RUSSELL REES: We have to make a plea to people to realise that just because the southerly wind change has come and the temperature drops, the risk is not gone. We've got three or four hours of very significant push in this wind change at least, and we all know from past history that fire at night is even more scary than fire in the day.

ALICIA BYRNE: Fires have destroyed properties around Bendigo, Kilmore and Kinglake. Justine Longmore reports.

JUSTINE LONGMORE: Several homes and buildings have been burnt, but the exact number is not yet known. The CFA says homes have been razed in the Wandong area and it's believed a primary school in the town has burnt down.

Homes have also been destroyed in Kinglake, and about 50 houses and a sports stadium have been lost in Bendigo's west. There have also been property losses in Narre Warren. The blaze south of Beechworth is affecting towns in the area, and the Kilmore and Murrindindi fires are still threatening communities. Firefighters hope to have the Redesdale fire south-east of Bendigo contained by tomorrow morning.

ALICIA BYRNE: Fires have also destroyed several properties across Gippsland. Allison Price reports.

ALISON PRICE: Thick smoke and ash is blowing across west and central Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley from fires burning near Drouin, Walhalla and the Strzelecki Ranges. The fire on the eastern fringe of the Strzeleckis is currently heading towards Carrajung South and Carrajung Lower, and the CFA is warning residents may be directly impacted by the fire.

Earlier, the fire passed through Callignee, and other areas including Traralgon South, Gormandale and Yarram are on alert for falling embers.

It's been confirmed houses have also been lost in towns around the Bunyip State Park fire, but it's not clear how many. That blaze is still threatening a number of townships, including Nilma North, Darnum, Neerim South and

Noojee, and spot fires have broken out in Warragul.

And a fire burning north of Traralgon is heading in a south-easterly direction, and residents in Toongabbie, Glengarry and Cowa are also on alert. The fire has damaged the ABC's FM transmitter in the region, but ABC Gippsland is still broadcasting emergency information on 828 AM. Alison Price, ABC News, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: Ricky from Callignee, south of Traralgon, says her neighbours' houses were destroyed. She says her husband has been burnt in the blaze, which destroyed the family's cars and a shed but spared the house.

CALLER RICKY: The roar from over the hill. I just got too scared and we went back down towards the house and ended up getting in the house, and, yes, it was just - the windows cracked, but we've got double-glazing, so we're just putting wet towels around the bottom of the doors.

ALICIA BYRNE: And the Princes Highway and has been closed either side of Warragul in West Gippsland. The South Gippsland Highway is now closed south of Longford.

Easing temperatures and winds have reduced the threat posed by a fire at Horsham in western Victoria. The blaze has burnt about 5,700 hectares around the city's outskirts. It's been confirmed that three homes, the Horsham Golf Club and a fire truck have been destroyed, and further losses are being collated. The golf club's manager, Jason Maybery, says the damage to the course is extensive.

JASON MAYBERY: Total devastation. The clubhouse and the pro shop have been gutted. The sheds in the middle of the course have all been burnt as well, and a lot of the trees around our lovely course have also been totally burnt down.

ALICIA BYRNE: A 48-year-old man from Warrnambool was killed in a two-car accident at Mortlake in Victoria's south-west this afternoon. Two others were injured. Police say the Hamilton Highway has been closed in both directions near Mortlake.

To the weather: the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State for today, also for Victoria for tomorrow, covering the whole of the State. There's a gale warning between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom,

between Mallacoota and Gabo Island and for Port Phillip, Western Port and the Gippsland Lakes.

For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust as well for tomorrow. Isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges. Moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne, windy with areas of raised dust overnight. For tomorrow, a shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, 24 after a low of 20. Monday, a light shower or two, and 21. In Melbourne, it's 28 degrees. This is ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

JON FAINE: Yes, Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster.

There are around 10 serious fires affecting Victoria tonight. We will continue all night broadcasting here at the ABC and are gearing up to continue our broadcast right through the night and into tomorrow. In fact, I can tell you we've flown some crews in, ABC staff, from Hobart, who have come across so that we can stay on air overnight and continue to provide you with the information that you need.

We are in constant contact with the emergency information coordination centre, CFA and DSE, and an update on all those major fires will come your way shortly.

As I speak, there is a briefing of the heads of all the emergency services at the moment, and included in that briefing is the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. He will come from that meeting and speak to us very, very shortly.

As the Premier has issued a release saying that he has

been at his own farm in Harcourt activating his own fire plan, his parents' property has been saved at the doorstep by CFA crews from Coleraine, and he's made a quite personal message of thanks to DSE, CFA and SES firefighters, as have many other community leaders, and as they so richly deserve.

For the very latest urgent threat messages, Mary-Jane Fenech, good evening.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Good evening, Jon. We do have an urgent threat message for the Glendonald fire at Carrajung South and Carrajung Lower. The Glendonald Road fire is currently burning in a north-easterly direction towards the townships of Carrajung South, Carrajung Lower. The fire is expected to impact in 20 minutes or less. Residents may be directly impacted by this fire.

There is also an urgent threat message for the Murrindindi Mill fire. The Murrindindi Mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is still burning in a south-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The fire is now directly impacting on Narbethong and landowners. Residents around Murrindindi and Limestone are in the direct path of this fire and need to prepare for imminent impact. These communities can expect to come under heavy ember attack from this fire. All residents in these areas are advised to remain on high alert, and if they have implemented their fire plan - if they haven't implemented their fire plan, they should do so immediately.

We also have an urgent fire message still for Beechworth. A fire is burning 4 kilometres south of Beechworth and is moving in a south-easterly direction. The fire is spotting well ahead of the fire, in some cases as much as 4 kilometres ahead. The communities of Stanley, Barwidgee Creek and Mudgegonga should prepare for direct ember attack from this fire. A strike team from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service has been despatched to Beechworth to assist with asset protection.

For more information, you can head to cfa.vic.gov.au and click on the "Incidents "button, or you can also head to abc.net.au/news. We are always updating information here. And, of course, tune in to ABC Radio, your emergency services broadcaster.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Mary-Jane. Mary-Jane Fenech. 8 minutes past 9 here.

[9.08pm]

Jon Faine with you through till whenever it takes here on 774 ABC Melbourne, with the ABC emergency services broadcasting remit taking us right through the night.

Lisa Maksimovic is an ABC television reporter at Pakenham. Lisa, good evening.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: The latest at that part of the State?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, this seems to be where there is a bit of a reprieve and people getting away from the thick of it all. I've just been speaking to some locals, one in particular, who - there are no other words to describe - he was just drowning his sorrows. He's from Labertouche, where I spent most of the day today, and his property is one of those that is gone, and this particular gentleman has no other way of expressing his anger. I can't even share his words with you, but he is just so angry that his property is gone, and that's because of a deliberately lit fire here.

JON FAINE: We have many reports of deliberately lit fires, indeed, awaiting confirmation from the emergency services, Lisa, but many of the fires we have been talking about, it seems, would be the result of arson; there's no other way to put it --

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: That's right.

JON FAINE: -- which is heartbreaking.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: No, that's right. And here in the Bunyip Ranges, the fires were initially started last weekend around the same time as the Boolarra fires, and they were started by lightning strikes. There were seven spot fires which started on the Bunyip Ridge, but those were put out, and the really horrible thing is that they were put out and followed about a day later by three more which were deliberately lit.

JON FAINE: Yes.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: So it's those that have taken these homes today and that's why they're so angry, and it's --

JON FAINE: Lisa, those people who understandably are devastated - are they able to express what they want done in any way that we can build on?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Sorry, there's just a phone going in the background here.

JON FAINE: Are people able to say what they want done about arson, what they want done about fires that are deliberately lit?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, they're really too angry and emotional to share logical views about that, Jon, to be honest. They want to see justice, but, I mean, the things they've been saying to me - they have no understanding of how someone can do this. And if you see the devastation - I know you've been getting reports coming through all through the day, but if you've seen what I've seen today, there are no words to describe the heartache that is being felt in these communities, and how that could be something that's been put on them purposely is so hard to understand. So, I mean, I suppose they want arsonists to feel the pain they're feeling.

JON FAINE: Well, it's understandable that you think of, well, vengeance and all the rest of it, but that's, of course, not the way the system works. But it's understandable, that emotion. Lisa, anything --

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: (Indistinct) how they feel.

JON FAINE: -- else that you can tell us about the latest in that part of the State, the Bunyip fires, from where you are at Pakenham?

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Well, look, it's much cooler here tonight than it has been through the day. The wind has eased off considerably, but the wind has changed direction, which is now putting several new towns in threat.

The ones here in Labertouche, which was the worst affected by the fire here - they're still not safe. The

houses that have been saved at this point - it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be standing tomorrow afternoon. The spot fires are severe around this area, and spot fires are still jumping kilometres in front of the fire front, which is now much larger than it was this afternoon.

JON FAINE: Lisa, thank you.

LISA MAKSIMOVIC: Thank you, Jon.

JON FAINE: Lisa Maksimovic, ABC reporter at Pakenham.

We're getting many, many calls and text messages from people saying, "I need to know about my friends or family in Kinglake." If you're listening to us and you're one of those who have left Kinglake, could you please call family and friends. Let them know you're okay, and that way that reassures them. It also leaves the emergency services free to deal with other issues and threats, too.

The bushfire information line: 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667. And a reminder, we get information here from the emergency coordination centre. We broadcast it as soon as it comes to hand. It is being updated every moment. There are seven ABC staff fielding information, answering phones and dealing with these updates. As soon as information comes to hand, we do put it to air.

We are being deluged with people calling, saying, "I just want to know about this or that. I've got friends or relatives", or, "I used to live here", and so on. We're doing all we can to help you with your inquiries, but they do not take priority, I'm sorry. They do not take priority and we do therefore have to sometimes either ask you to call back another time or to find another way of getting that information.

Our priority at the moment is to deal with the immediate threat, and our lines are sometimes completely blocked by people calling in just wanting a bit of information. As soon as information comes to hand, we will put it to air and broadcast it for you. I do assure you of that.

The current situation is there are approximately nine fires, as best as I have, nine fires posing a threat. The

Coleraine fire, the tenth one, is regarded now as contained. The Redesdale fire has now split. It's still causing a problem at Redesdale, but east of Kyneton near Eppalock, as you heard, there are problems.

The Maiden Gully fire at West Bendigo - more than 10 houses lost there. In Horsham, that is still a fire, but it's no longer a serious threat. It's been downgraded, but it's still burning.

The big fire, started in Kilmore, has gone through to Kinglake, Whittlesea, Saint Andrews and Yarra Glen - from Kilmore to Yarra Glen through Kinglake, Marysville, in that beautiful part of the State, around Warburton as well.

We've heard there are more than 30 houses in just the Broadford/Wandong area, that end of the fire, and an unknown number but a substantial number of other houses and properties lost and some unconfirmed reports of casualties around the Kinglake area. We're getting information for you as soon as we can in relation to, of course, all of that. That is, at the moment, the worst of the fires.

[9.15pm]

However, the Murrindindi fire is threatening to join up there, and that's also caused great problems. Bunyip and Drouin, at the Strzeleckis, the Mount Tassie Churchill fire has also at times threatened Loy Yang Power Station. At the moment, there is not a problem there but concerns from the emergency services for it.

There's a fire up near Beechworth, south-east of Beechworth. We've not had some information on that for a while. We'll get some for you soon. But I might say that's a good sign, because information comes to us when there's problems. We don't hear if things are going well.

And that's pretty much a summary of the situation at the moment. We'll get information shortly for you about power services as well.

Now, Anne from the Macedon Ranges Wildlife Network has been wanting to give us some information about wildlife rescue for a long time. And, Anne, thank you very much for coming back to us when we lost you earlier this evening. How are you?

CALLER ANNE: Hot, bothered, all the rest of it, like everybody else. My sympathies go out to the families in Kinglake and everywhere else that have lost homes and livestock. I've been there, done that in central-west New South. But it's not information I want to give you about wildlife. I would actually like to send out an SOS for medical supplies, possibly through - any single pharmacy in the entire State could actually provide the following of what we would actually need to treat our burn victims?

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER ANNE: Okay.

JON FAINE: And so that's another way of dealing with the problem.

CALLER ANNE: Well, yes, the problem being that we found the other week when we had the fires up here at Woodend that the wildlife was horrendously spooked by all the choppers and everything, so instead of, like, fleeing, they actually went back on themselves into the fires. And, yes, we did - luckily, because it was such a - sort of like an open-range more grassfire and there wasn't a heavily wooded area - it was managed to be kept out of that area - we didn't sustain as many injuries with wildlife as what we were anticipating.

But the thing is, what humans use for burns we use on animals as well. So what I'd really like is if all the pharmacies, any pharmacist that's out there listening, if they could spare, out of their shop, burn creams? We're looking at, like, maybe one from each pharmacy of either a Silvazine or Jelonet, a couple of bags each of saline IV bags, non-stick dressings and bandages.

JON FAINE: Sure. Anne, there is a universal effort here across the board in the community to see what can be done, and you're quite right, wildlife is also a concern.

CALLER ANNE: Yes.

JON FAINE: And undoubtedly we are going to be addressing all of those needs in due course and you're quite right to draw our attention to it.

CALLER ANNE: Yes.

JON FAINE: We are concerned, of course, at the moment about human lives and human casualties as well.

CALLER ANNE: Yes.

JON FAINE: And in due course, I'm sure we'll be able to deal with wildlife, too. But thank you for your concern and your suggestions, which many people have heard.

Lots of text messages here. "Kilmore fire running back towards Sunday creek." "People are stranded in Yea. Can you give us roads information?" That's coming in just a moment. People are asking for information about all of these fires. We will continue to broadcast throughout the night.

"Mount Dandenong Tourist Road - closed at both ends, residents only allowed through." "Yarra Glen - the glow, sitting here at Chernside Park watching the glow." "Yarra Glen, Christmas Hills, even Steels Creek." It must be an extraordinary sight.

Lots of people saying, "Can you thank the CFA, especially the volunteers." And, yes, it is an extraordinary thing that they do. I have a text here, "My brother-in-law, CFA volunteer, fighting fires in Callignee, has lost his own house and property and horses." And, yes, that's an extraordinary thing that they do; it certainly is.

And many people sending in text messages with some occasionally creative suggestions of appropriate punishment for people convicted of arson in these difficult times. I won't read those out, but I think in these difficult circumstances, we understand your sentiments but we won't go there.

Mary-Jane Fenech has an urgent threat update for us at 19 past 9. Mary-Jane?

[9.19pm]

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you, Jon. There's an urgent threat message for the communities of Nilma, Darnum and

Warragul. That's in regard to the Bunyip Ridge fire. The towns of Nilma, Darnum and Warragul are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke.

Emergency relief centres are located at the Warragul Leisure Centre and the Cardinia Cultural Centre. There is no accommodation for pets.

There is also an urgent threat message for the Glendonald Road fire, Carrajung South, Carrajung Lower. The Glendonald Road fire is currently burning in a north-easterly direction towards the townships of Carrajung South, Carrajung Lower. The fire is expected to already have impacted. We haven't got an update on that as yet. Residents may be directly impacted by this fire.

Also, we have an urgent threat message for the Murrindindi Mill fire. The Murrindindi Mill fire in the Mount Despair State Forest is still burning in a south-easterly direction and is spotting well ahead of the fire. The fire is now directly impacting on Narbethong and landowners. Residents around Murrindindi and Limestone are in the direct path of this fire and need to prepare for imminent impact. These communities can expect to come under heavy ember attack from this fire. All residents in these areas are advised to remain on high alert, and if they haven't implemented their fire plan, they should do so immediately.

We'll have more information for you as soon as possible. You can also head for updates to cfa.vic.gov.au and click on the link to "Incidents", and also head to abc.net.au/news for also more updates.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Mary. Mary-Jane, Mary-Jane Fenech.

[9.21pm]

21 minutes past 9. Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster. We'll continue with our broadcast and our coverage of the situation, the crisis affecting Victorian fires, right through the night continuously and into tomorrow.

Some information coming your way on emergency relief centres. 1300 222 774 is our number here. 1300 222 774. We have additional staff who have been brought in tonight,

even from interstate, from Hobart, in order to continue our broadcasts on the ABC right through the night and we'll continue to do the best we can to answer your inquiries.

If you're not hearing about a particular part of the State or a particular area, take that from me as a good sign. It's not a reason to wonder what's going on, to call us or 000 or the emergency services and say, "What about this? What about that?" Please do not do so. It's creating a substantial problem for all the emergency services. Please be assured, if you're not hearing about a part of the State, then do not ring up to find out. Don't ring us. Don't ring them. Don't ring the CFA.

If you've got access to the internet, have a look and you'll see information there on the CFA site, the DSE site, and we will bring you information as soon as it comes to hand about all those areas that are under threat and where there is an emergency. If you're not hearing about a particular part of the State, even if you're told there's a fire there, that means it's a minor fire or of no immediate concern.

Allison Watt is communications manager with Nillumbik Shire Council. Allison good evening.

ALLISON WATT: Hi, Jon, how are you?

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

ALLISON WATT: Look, I'm just ringing to let your listeners know that we have set up an emergency relief centre at the Diamond Creek Community Centre. That's at 28 Main Hurstbridge Road, Diamond Creek, and that's open now for those many people that we understand have been displaced by those fires in the Kinglake area, which are to the north of the shire.

JON FAINE: All right. And exactly what can people get from there at the Diamond Creek Community Centre?

ALLISON WATT: Look, it's an opportunity for them to - you know, it's somewhere to go, first and foremost. They can register with the authorities, such as the Red Cross. We'll have some food and refreshments there a bit later in the evening and an opportunity for them to just have a rest, take a break and also to get in touch with family

and friends if they need to arrange alternative accommodation for the evening.

JON FAINE: All right. So that's your first port of call in that area, then.

ALLISON WATT: It is.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Allison. And how many people can you cater for?

ALLISON WATT: Look, we're not putting a number on it at this stage, Jon. We understand that the numbers of people that have been affected in that area are in the hundreds, so we can open more centres around the shire as we need to, and I'll keep you posted throughout the evening on that.

JON FAINE: The Diamond Creek Community Centre is the local emergency relief centre, Allison?

ALLISON WATT: That's correct.

JON FAINE: Thank you. Allison Watt from Nillumbik Shire Council, saying the emergency relief centre is set up at the Diamond Creek Community Centre for people affected in the area.

Some more traffic information coming your way in just a moment, and we'll also get the very latest from the DSE and CFA. Becky, in the city. Becky, good evening. Go ahead, Becky.

CALLER BECKY: Jon, my parents - I'm in Melbourne. My parents are in the Murrindindi area in a place called Taggerty. I'm just trying to get a message through to them --

JON FAINE: Taggerty just near Acheron and Buxton?

CALLER BECKY: Yes, very close to Buxton.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER BECKY: Their names are Rose and Joe Fleischer. I know that they left their house about an hour and a half ago, and I don't know where they are. I can't get in touch with them, and I just wanted to give my number in case

anyone has seen them.

JON FAINE: Or if they're listening to us now, you would appreciate a call --

CALLER BECKY: Yes.

JON FAINE: -- so that your anxiety is put to rest.

CALLER BECKY: Yes.

JON FAINE: I'm sure.

CALLER BECKY: So it's Rose and Joe Fleischer, and my number is zero --

JON FAINE: They'll know your number, Becky.

CALLER BECKY: Oh, okay.

JON FAINE: I don't want you giving out your number on the air.

CALLER BECKY: Okay. Thank you.

JON FAINE: Do you know which way they were heading?

CALLER BECKY: I think they were heading into the Taggerty CFA.

JON FAINE: Right.

CALLER BECKY: I'm just worried about them because they're on the road and --

JON FAINE: Yes, they'll be locally directed by the emergency services, and in fact now let's get you some information on road closures.

CALLER BECKY: Okay.

JON FAINE: Good on you. Thank you, Becky.

CALLER BECKY: Thank you.

JON FAINE: Thank you. Keep listening. We'll bring you information as soon as it comes to hand.

And Simon Brown has the latest information on road closures and traffic and transport. Good evening again, Simon.

SIMON BROWN: Good evening. The major road closures - and there's quite a few of them - are the Burwood Highway between Glenfern Road and Dawson Road in Upper Ferntree Gully, the Melba Highway at Yarra Glen, the Maroondah Highway at Yarra Glen, and between Taggery [sic] and Healesville --

JON FAINE: Taggerty that is, yes.

SIMON BROWN: Okay, we're missing a T.

JON FAINE: Yes.

SIMON BROWN: The Eltham Yarra Glen Road at Yarra Glen, MacIntyre Lane at Melba Highway, the Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford, Buckland Gap Road between Beechworth and Great Alpine Road, Glenelg Highway through Coleraine, various local detours in place there, Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake, the Princes Highway west between Camperdown and Colac, Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite. Heathcote Kyneton Road is closed at 9 kilometres east of Lake Eppalock. Western Highway between Stawell and Horsham is closed. The Henty Highway is closed at Toolondo. Wimmera Highway at Natimuk, Horsham Drung South Road are both closed. The South Gippsland Highway between Sale and Foster is closed. The Princes Highway is closed at Sale and Stratford. The Princes Freeway is closed between Pakenham and Warragul, and the Hyland Highway at Grand Ridge Road is closed.

JON FAINE: And a reminder from the emergency services, Simon, as you've been saying pretty much all afternoon and evening: if your travel is not essential - and, really, we literally mean essential - the request from the emergency services is that this is a state of affairs that requires the utmost community effort. Please stay off the roads. Road conditions are hazardous even in areas well beyond those that Simon has just listed. There's smoke. There's haze. And it's a good idea - if you can possibly avoid going out on to the roads in Victoria tonight, it's a very good idea not to, so that, amongst other things, emergency vehicles can get through.

Anything else, Simon?

SIMON BROWN: We've got the trains. The advice still is that the Gippsland line will remain closed to all train services between Monday - until midday Monday between Traralgon and Bairnsdale - sorry, midday Sunday, at the earliest. Current road closures are causing back-up coach services to not be available.

The Seymour line is also closed between Melbourne and Seymour Shepparton until midday tomorrow, at the earliest. Limited back-up coach services are currently being provided where allowed by emergency services.

And the Warrnambool road - line, rather, will remain closed, all train services between Geelong and Warrnambool until Monday at the earliest. Back-up coach services are currently running between Geelong and Warrnambool.

JON FAINE: Now, that's not because of any fire, but that's because of sleepers destroyed in earlier fires, as I understand it.

SIMON BROWN: As far as I understand it.

JON FAINE: Yes.

SIMON BROWN: And also we've had a lot of people ringing up to offer help and support and people ringing up to - like Anne from the Wildlife, asking for specific information. We've set up a facility on our website where you can put your offer of help or ask for help. So if you go to abc.net.au/melbourne and click on "Offer or ask for help", then you can submit whatever it is that you've got there.

JON FAINE: So that's like a message board where you can either say, "I've got a caravan I can lend", or, "I need a caravan", and we can get people together in that way.

SIMON BROWN: That's exactly how it's going to work.

JON FAINE: That's fabulous. So that's at the ABC website, which is at?

SIMON BROWN: abc.net.au/melbourne.

JON FAINE: And then you go to the?

SIMON BROWN: There's a link on the front page saying "Offer or ask for help". We've also got links to the DSE, the CFA and to the latest bushfire news.

JON FAINE: Can we keep that going through the night? Have we got enough people? I know you've been here, I don't know for how many hours, and as I look out, there's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight people working around me as I'm on air, providing us with information, checking --

SIMON BROWN: Yes, and now it's set up --

JON FAINE: -- corroborating and confirming --

SIMON BROWN: Now it's set up, it's pretty easy, so we should be able to keep that running through the night.

JON FAINE: All right. But you - you've got to look after yourself, too, Simon. I'm concerned about some - some big black patches appearing around people's eyes around here. We're going to have to spread the load a little bit, too. So take it easy. Simon Brown with the very latest information on traffic and transport.

Apparently, DSE have also asked people not to log on unless you are at risk, because they're also concerned that they may end up - they may end up with an overloaded website, and I'm also getting some information here that we are checking about some situations.

[9.30pm]

If you've sent us some last-minute or latest-minute information, we don't just read everything out if it's to do with some of the situations, some of the emergency situations. We do check everything here, because there has also been some information handed out by the media that has turned out to have unnecessarily caused distress and panic, and we will not do that here at 774 ABC Melbourne. So we only broadcast information once we know that it's right.

So Brenda from Woori Yallock, don't panic, and we will broadcast information as soon as we can once it's confirmed

and once we know that it's actually accurate. And there's no need to just react to every rumour, every concern. And that goes, I suppose, across the State, actually.

[9.30pm]

Just after half past 9. More information, including the Minister for Police and Emergency Services joining us shortly from the emergency information coordination centre with the very latest information. There's just been a summit between the heads of all the different emergency services, and he will come straight from that to us, as the level of concern in the State reaches the highest possible peak. This is as serious an emergency event as we've experienced, and it's being dealt with as thoroughly as the services can.

Your assistance and your information is invaluable. 1300 222 774. 1300 222 774. That's our phone number.

Our phones are almost continuously busy. If you can't get through, the text messaging service is 19 774 774, and we do get information there through the text messages, although I might say they're coming in at the rate sometimes of 20 or 30 every minute and it's very hard to process all of those. We're doing the best we can. We'll bring you up to date on all the 10 different spots of serious concern across Victoria in the next half-hour as well.

[9.31pm]

Just 29 minutes to 10. Alicia Byrne has the latest news headlines for us, and thank you again, Alicia.

ALICIA BYRNE: Thank you, Jon. At least 80 homes have been lost in today's fires across Victoria. A fire burning in the Wandong area has destroyed 30 houses and it's believed a primary school in the town has burnt down.

About 50 houses and a sports stadium have been lost in Bendigo's west. Three houses and the golf course have been destroyed at Horsham. Fire crews say strong winds are expanding fire fronts on several large blazes. Power has been cut to tens of thousands of homes, and several major highways are closed.

Fire crews are attempting to establish containment lines to limit the spread of major blazes. The southerly wind changes are increasing the width of the fire fronts and putting more communities in danger.

Thick smoke and ash is blowing across west and central Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley from fires near Drouin, Walhalla and the Strzelecki Ranges. The fire on the eastern fringe of the Strzelecki Ranges is currently heading towards Willung South, Carrajung South and Carrajung Lower, and the CFA is warning residents may be directly impacted by the fire.

Earlier, the fire passed through Callignee, and other areas including Traralgon South, Gormandale and Yarram are on high alert for falling embers. It's been confirmed houses have also been lost in towns around the Bunyip State Park fire, but it's not clear how many. That blaze is still threatening a number of townships, including Nilma North, Darnum, Neerim South and Noojee, and spot fires have broken out in Warragul.

The fire burning north of Traralgon is burning, south-easterly direction, and residents in Toongabbie, Glengarry and Cowa are also on alert.

To the weather, the CFA has extended the total fire ban to cover tomorrow for the whole of the State. The weather for the State - very hot, with squally, gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of the cooler, squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west, but that won't reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust as well, for tomorrow, isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges, moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

For Melbourne, windy with areas of raised dust overnight. Tomorrow, a shower or two, the chance of a thunderstorm, 24 after a low of 20. In Melbourne, 28 degrees. Next news at 10.

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in firefighting for

nearly 30 years, but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the State in the next few days, with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

JON FAINE: Jon Faine with you on 774 ABC Melbourne. It's coming up to 25 minutes to 10.

[9.35pm]

There's a lovely text message from someone offering to bring some food in for the ABC crew, who are working through the night. That's awfully sweet of you. We do have supplies and provisions. I'm not sure if there'll be any left by the time I finish, but I'll look after myself. They're scoffing it. But, no, we do have some food here, in fact quite good food. And that's very, very kind of you and just one tiny little example of how people are trying to work out what they can do to help in every imaginable way.

Richard in Yea. Hello, Richard.

CALLER RICHARD: Hello, Jon. It's a very smoky old Yea tonight, I'm afraid. The main street is like market day here.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER RICHARD: There are cars everywhere. They can't get through to Melbourne down through the Whittlesea Road or through the Melba Highway.

JON FAINE: Melba Highway has been closed. We've been broadcasting that.

CALLER RICHARD: Yes. That's right. And the situation is there are people from the Kinglake area, there's over a quarter of a mile, or half a kilometre at least, of cars trying to get petrol from the only service station here in Yea.

JON FAINE: Sure, but, Richard, the safest place to be is right where they are right now --

CALLER RICHARD: That's --

JON FAINE: -- and although they may want to get somewhere --

CALLER RICHARD: That's right, Jon.

JON FAINE: -- they shouldn't, until it's safe.

CALLER RICHARD: That's right.

JON FAINE: Just stay right where they are, and that's the best place to be. Thank you, Richard.

CALLER RICHARD: Righto, Jon. You're doing a terrific job in there tonight.

JON FAINE: There's a huge team of people here, Richard. The ABC does its part.

Paul Holman from Ambulance Victoria is on the line. Paul, good evening. What can you tell us?

PAUL HOLMAN: Good evening, Jon. Well, look, our main concern right at the moment is this fire's gone through the Kinglake area, as you already know. We're still unable to get there, and we have reports of, you know, multiple people hurt and injured in some way. People are coming down the mountain and coming into various areas.

What we'd like to do, if we can get a message out there, if anyone's listening, to actually direct people towards the Whittlesea Showgrounds - we have medical teams and paramedics at the Whittlesea Showgrounds - the Coldstream CFA in Killara Road, or to the Diamond Creek Ambulance Station, which --

JON FAINE: Is that road open from Kinglake west to Whittlesea?

PAUL HOLMAN: We're not sure at the moment. But we're getting patients that are presenting around the Hurstbridge area, so for those patients, if they could move and go to

the Diamond Street - Diamond Creek Ambulance Station in the Main --

JON FAINE: Not to Hurstbridge. So if you're in the Panton Hill Hurstbridge area, can you get yourselves to Whittlesea, you're saying?

PAUL HOLMAN: No. If you can get yourself to Diamond Creek Ambulance Station.

JON FAINE: Oh, Diamond Creek's closer then, isn't it.

PAUL HOLMAN: Yes.

JON FAINE: Yes.

PAUL HOLMAN: Yes. So the people in the areas - there's three places that we're currently deployed, which is Whittlesea Showgrounds, the Coldstream CFA in Killara Road and the Diamond Creek Ambulance Station, which is the Main Hurstbridge Road. We've currently got two strike teams trying to get into the Kinglake area with paramedics and emergency support.

JON FAINE: How many people are you transporting or need transporting, Paul, are you able to put a figure on it?

PAUL HOLMAN: We just don't know, unfortunately, Jon. We're getting varying reports of multiple injuries, and we just - at this point, we don't know.

JON FAINE: So --

PAUL HOLMAN: We're managing --

JON FAINE: -- individual people with multiple injuries or many, many people?

PAUL HOLMAN: Many, many people with injuries and burns injuries.

JON FAINE: Any fatalities, Paul?

PAUL HOLMAN: We have reports of fatalities. Nothing's confirmed as yet. We're coordinating events still right across the State. We've got problems in Beechworth, still down in Gippsland, in the Latrobe Valley, Warburton,

Healesville.

JON FAINE: That's the Ambulance Service with problems?

PAUL HOLMAN: That's the Ambulance Service with problems in trying to actually get to patients and --

JON FAINE: So you have patients wanting to be transported, with injuries from the fires?

PAUL HOLMAN: We do and --

JON FAINE: So let's go through this. In Beechworth --

PAUL HOLMAN: Beechworth, there's a problem with the hospital and power with the hospital and we may have to evacuate the hospital. We have a similar issue in Healesville --

JON FAINE: Sorry, Beechworth Hospital has lost power and may need to be evacuated?

PAUL HOLMAN: That's - that's at this point in time, yes.

JON FAINE: How many people are there, do you know?

PAUL HOLMAN: About 100.

JON FAINE: How would you do that?

PAUL HOLMAN: That's what we're working on now, Jon.

JON FAINE: Where would you send them?

PAUL HOLMAN: That's exactly what we're working on now. They will stay in --

JON FAINE: Do they go to Wangaratta or to Wodonga?

PAUL HOLMAN: No, that's - probably both, and that's what we're - we're working through that now. That plan's still in formation at the moment.

JON FAINE: How do you transport them?

PAUL HOLMAN: That's a good question. We're getting our resources together now and working on that plan, so I can't

give you any more detail than that at the moment. It's really just hot off the press through our EOC at the moment.

JON FAINE: Beechworth Hospital may need or does need to be evacuated, are you able to say?

PAUL HOLMAN: May need. We're still - I'm still waiting for confirmation. They're trying to get generators going now.

JON FAINE: Yes.

PAUL HOLMAN: So that's the potential there.

JON FAINE: All right. Back --

PAUL HOLMAN: Our main - if I can get back to the main concern at the moment.

JON FAINE: Yes, Kinglake Healesville area.

PAUL HOLMAN: The Kinglake Healesville area. If anyone is injured, if they could move to any of those locations, if they can get themselves there.

JON FAINE: And one of them was Coldstream, one of them was Diamond Creek and one of them was at Whittlesea.

PAUL HOLMAN: Whittlesea Showgrounds.

JON FAINE: Yes, and emergency services will know the precise location of all of those. Whittlesea Showgrounds. Where was it at Coldstream?

PAUL HOLMAN: At Coldstream CFO - CFA --

JON FAINE: Which is on the highway there, yes.

PAUL HOLMAN: -- in Killara Road.

JON FAINE: And at Diamond Creek?

PAUL HOLMAN: Diamond Creek Ambulance Station in the Main Hurstbridge Road, Diamond Creek.

JON FAINE: All right. And other areas? Where else do

you have concerns?

PAUL HOLMAN: Look, we've still got concerns down the Warburton area and the fires that are going down there.

JON FAINE: Warburton Marysville?

PAUL HOLMAN: Yes, in Neerim.

JON FAINE: Do you have transport issues there?

PAUL HOLMAN: We have transport issues right across the State, Jon. We're trying to get our resources in the best spot we can. At the moment, it's about getting teams, paramedics and medical teams, in to treat people in casualty collecting posts.

JON FAINE: All right. Have you implemented all your extreme emergency measures?

PAUL HOLMAN: We have.

JON FAINE: Have you called in crews from interstate?

PAUL HOLMAN: Not as yet.

JON FAINE: Do you need to?

PAUL HOLMAN: We will assess that later on this evening.

JON FAINE: Certainly, Beechworth is not far from Albury, New South Wales, of course. It's very close.

PAUL HOLMAN: Yes, and that's the plans that people will be working on now, Jon.

JON FAINE: Yes, all right. Well, keep us posted on those, please, Paul. Anything else I need to know right now?

PAUL HOLMAN: No, I think that's the main message, if we can get that out. And thank you for your time.

JON FAINE: That's an important message. Thank you, Paul Holman from Ambulance Victoria.

Those three emergency medical postings are at

Coldstream, at Whittlesea Showgrounds and at Diamond Creek.

And the Beechworth Hospital has lost power and there's an assessment being made now if the emergency generators cannot be able to - made to provide, there may need to be an evacuation of the Beechworth Hospital, with an effort taking people to either or both of Wangaratta or Wodonga and maybe a need to call in additional resources from New South Wales Ambulance as well.

So far we've been amidst all of this, we've been very lucky with power supplies to metropolitan Melbourne, although there are, of course, substantial parts of the State, isolated areas in particular caught by fire, that have been affected by power continuity. Hugo Armstrong from Power Core is on the line with an update. Hugo, good evening.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: What can you tell us?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Jon, as you say, certainly the major damage to the Power Core network, which is the outer western suburbs of Melbourne and all of western Victoria and much of northern Victoria - most of the damage has been sustained in the rural areas, particularly in the Horsham and Wimmera area. We probably have about 4,000 customers still off supply around the Wimmera, basically as a - mostly as a result of the fire that occurred there this afternoon. That fire I think is under control now.

Of those 4,000, we'll probably get 2,000 or 3,000 back on supply at varying stages during the night. Most of the work that's going on now is replacing poles which have been damaged by the fire and --

JON FAINE: How many of those do have?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: We've probably got about a dozen poles to replace, so we've --

JON FAINE: That's reassuring.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Yes, that's not too bad. We've had a fair convoy running up from Ballarat, taking extra poles up there, and they'll be working through the night, so we

hope that a fair number of those 4,000 will be back on supply, though some of them - we've had some difficulties, as you've probably heard from other people, often getting into fire areas to make assessments, so that's delayed the whole process to actually find out what's going on.

Other areas that have suffered in recent times - Bendigo. The fire in Bendigo took out probably 9,000 or 10,000 customers just through fire damage. Now, in Bendigo, the message at this point - we're down to about 2,000 off supply, but if they're off supply now, they're basically going to be off supply all night, because we just can't get in there and do the work and check things out in the darkness. So we'll be back on the job first thing tomorrow morning, but there's probably not much point Bendigo customers ringing up and saying, "When am I going to be back on supply?"

JON FAINE: So the answer to that is?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Well, the answer to that is --

JON FAINE: Not until we can --

HUGO ARMSTRONG: -- if you're not on now, you won't be on until tomorrow and --

JON FAINE: When we get crews there, and they will take some time to do the work that needs to be done, too.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: That's right. It is probably - there's not much point ringing our contact centre for an update until tomorrow afternoon if you're still off supply.

JON FAINE: All right.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Other than that, there's really a smattering of incidents around. The western suburbs, Werribee and Laverton areas, were hit earlier on, but a lot of those faults are back on supply. There's still probably 700 customers off supply in Newport and Altona North, and we're hopeful that they'll come on tonight. Most customers in other areas will come on.

Jon, there's one thing I do need to say, and that is: obviously, in these big fire areas, there's quite a lot of damage and there may well be more faults that we don't know

about. We won't find out for a while.

The other thing is that, obviously, we fix the biggest faults first, and that means that there are many customers in rural areas, in particular, relatively isolated faults - the truth is if someone's off supply and it's only affecting your place or perhaps you and the one next door, it's going to take us quite a while, quite a few hours, and it may even take a couple of days for us to get round and clean up all those --

JON FAINE: To every single and particular small outage.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: That's exactly it, those single-premise outages, yes.

JON FAINE: I do suspect at the moment, Hugo Armstrong, everybody understands the enormity of the crisis, the emergency that literally is afflicting almost the entire State except the north-west, and thank goodness that they're not affected and let's hope they stay that way.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Yes. Oh, well, it got pretty hot in Underbool today. I gather it was 47 degrees and the power was off for about five hours.

[9.45pm]

But I think we've got them all back on, so there's some consolation there. But you're absolutely right, Jon. But, look, the message I would just give very quickly is: there's not a lot of point ringing the contact centre for updates unless you have some information we need.

JON FAINE: Yes.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Don't do it more than every couple of hours. And if you're in Bendigo in particular, probably just leave it till tomorrow afternoon --

JON FAINE: All right. And you're undoubtedly receiving the same overflow of information that we are, many people ringing up just for information, which makes it just a little more difficult to get to the people who are perhaps a priority in these sorts of situations.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Absolutely.

JON FAINE: Hugo, I think we all understand, and let's hope that the community can all work together through this. Anything else?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Oh, that's about it, Jon. I was just going to say that Power Core number, if you do need to ring: 132412. It will be staffed overnight, but, as you say, you know, spare them if you can. And, Jon, I would just say that the ABC is doing an absolutely fabulous job for Victoria, helping a lot.

JON FAINE: Along with so many others, yes. We've brought some people over from Tasmania to help us stay open throughout the night. There's one, two, three, four, five, six - yes, there's still seven people sitting here answering phones, checking websites, processing information and, I might say also, corroborating, confirming and checking information before it's broadcast, which is extremely important, to avoid panic.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Yes, it's great value, great service to Victoria.

JON FAINE: Good on you, Hugo. Thank you.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Thanks, Jon.

JON FAINE: Hugo Armstrong from Power Core. The Deputy Chief Officer of the CFA, Greg Esnouf, can bring us right up to date on the major fires. Greg, good evening, again.

GREG ESNOUF: Good evening, Jon.

JON FAINE: Let's go through. First of all, I think Kinglake is clearly of great significance this evening.

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, Kinglake's I think going to be a fire that the news only gets worse on as the night goes on. It's been a horrible fire, and it's gone through, right through from Kilmore right through Kinglake.

JON FAINE: What can you tell us is the latest?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, the latest I had is 2,000-plus hectares, and we've got all sorts of reports of people sheltering at places like Kinglake West Fire Station and

all the other places - a number of other places around the area, and that fire has been very active and we're expecting, at the end of the day, there'll be quite substantial structure losses reported there.

JON FAINE: Casualties?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, look, I think the police are about to do a press release soon and I think they're going to make an announcement on some casualties, so I won't be - I won't --

JON FAINE: No. I think we should prepare ourselves for some unpleasant information.

GREG ESNOUF: I think the indications aren't good. I'll leave it at that.

JON FAINE: Yes.

GREG ESNOUF: So that's the Kinglake fire, the Kilmore fire.

JON FAINE: Well, on that, I think we need a little more information, if we could. How many people are stranded in Kinglake town itself?

GREG ESNOUF: We had various reports of 100 to 150 people sheltering, was one of the last reports that I got on that fire.

JON FAINE: And is the road still closed - all the roads?

GREG ESNOUF: Oh, look, I can't even keep up on the road closures. You need to work on the websites, and we'll put the best up-to-date knowledge we can on the website.

JON FAINE: So you're throwing everything you can at Kinglake?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, we've got a number of other fires, so we'll throw what we can at that one, but we're not letting the people at Bunyip and other areas down as well.

JON FAINE: Understood, understood. But that is - is that the most serious spot in terms of loss of assets and, potentially, casualties?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, if you bundled up the Kinglake - the Kilmore fire that went through Kinglake, the Murrindindi fire that's gone through Narbethong and Marysville and has gone into the Yarra Valley, into the top end of the Yarra Valley, and the Bunyip fires, they've certainly all posed significant problems to assets. So that whole area through the mountain ash country, through that area, just that ring around the north and east of Melbourne, has been a major area and massive number of spot fires that have come out of those fires.

JON FAINE: When we last spoke, we were concerned about the Murrindindi Narbethong Marysville Warburton fire joining up with the Kinglake Whittlesea fire. Has that --

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, well, that's a potential, but I haven't heard any more on that. Certainly, my understanding is that the Kilmore fire, under the south-westerly, is pushing a bit to the north-east, but I think there's still a bit of distance between those two. Hopefully, we can knock them off, but I suppose that at one stage is a potential that those two could join.

JON FAINE: Either way, the damage is obviously absolutely enormous even without those sorts of disaster scenarios coming into play.

GREG ESNOUF: That's right, and we shouldn't forget the fire down in the Strzeleckis. It's now --

JON FAINE: The Bunyip fire?

GREG ESNOUF: No, no, the one down at Churchill, down in the valley.

JON FAINE: Thank you.

GREG ESNOUF: That has pushed over Mount Tassie, over the Strzelecki Ranges, and has spotted close to the west of Yarram, and now, under the south-westerly, it's pushed all the way back up to Traralgon South, so --

JON FAINE: That's north of the Prom.

GREG ESNOUF: Well, yes, east - east and north of the Prom, that's correct. So it's a bit west of Yarram, north

of Toora and places like that - south of Traralgon, so it's pushed right up into Traralgon South.

JON FAINE: And there's some assets lost in Traralgon. Is there any further threat to the coalfields in the Latrobe Valley?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, it's getting awfully close to that. I don't know exactly how close it is at the moment, but certainly it's pushed very much up towards the valley, Traralgon South. Now, Loy Yang itself is a little bit to the west of that, so I can't comment on exactly how close it is, but it's certainly not that far away.

JON FAINE: You're still concerned, clearly.

GREG ESNOUF: Oh, yes.

JON FAINE: All right. And the east of Kyneton fire?

GREG ESNOUF: The Redesdale fire has become quite a large fire. It's 10,000 hectares, which is a massive fire to hap in an afternoon. The last report I had on that was that there were some structure losses in the order of probably, you know, four to five, not massive numbers, but, still, there were some structure losses there, and the last report said they were hoping to contain that fire Sunday morning. So there's still a lot of work to do on that one through the night.

JON FAINE: All right. And Beechworth?

GREG ESNOUF: Beechworth - the report I saw about 20 minutes ago had some concerns for Mudgegonga, Stanley. Stanley's critical to the north-east in terms of communications infrastructure, the tower on the top of Mount Stanley, so there was concerns about it going into that country. And Stanley township itself is probably in the path of the fire at the moment.

JON FAINE: Mmm, so that's not good news, either. And the Ambulance, Paul Holman, confirmed for us that there are concerns about power supply at Beechworth Hospital, so that's posed an enormous problem as well. They were hoping to be able to deal with it without needing to evacuate but may need to evacuate the Beechworth Hospital - another problem but not one that's immediately in your

responsibilities, Greg. You've got enough on your plate, by the sound of it. Are your crews able to be refreshed and renewed?

GREG ESNOUF: We'll do some changeovers. We threw virtually everything we had on it today, although we knew that there was always a potential for some to run through the night, major fires into the night, so we've held some people back, and we'll rotate our people through and try and rest some people.

JON FAINE: Crews from interstate?

GREG ESNOUF: There are some crews, particularly the Beechworth one. We've been able to bring in some Rural Fire Service crews from across the border, and also there's been some crews come in from South Australia, into the west, to help on the Horsham fire and I think the Coleraine fire as well. So that's helped us a bit.

JON FAINE: Anything else we need to know, Greg?

GREG ESNOUF: No, look, just reinforcing the messages: don't go out. Do not go sightseeing. Don't go near these fires if you - and don't go on the road, if you don't need to, tonight because there's still a lot of fire activity that can happen around Victoria.

JON FAINE: And the last thing we need are people getting caught up in road crashes caused by smoke on roads and traffic doing unexpected things, and all the rest of it.

GREG ESNOUF: That's right.

JON FAINE: Thank you, Greg. A reminder there. Good on you. And we'll let you get back to it.

GREG ESNOUF: Thank you.

JON FAINE: We'll keep talking to your people all through the night. Deputy Chief Officer Greg Esnouf at the CFA.

Michael in Kinglake. Hello, Michael.

CALLER MICHAEL: How are you?

JON FAINE: Well. More importantly, how's things at your

end?

CALLER MICHAEL: It's - it's very red, very smoky, very hot and quite scary.

JON FAINE: Which part of Kinglake are you in?

CALLER MICHAEL: I'm in a street called Bower Street.

JON FAINE: Where's that in relation to the main street?

CALLER MICHAEL: It's about 3 kilometres north-east of the hotel.

JON FAINE: And what have you seen?

CALLER MICHAEL: We've had - we've had fire in our street. We've - Jon, I've got to go. I'm sorry, I've got to go. The - the fire's close.

JON FAINE: Michael, you take care and look after yourself and your loved ones.

CALLER MICHAEL: Thank you.

JON FAINE: We understand entirely. I'm concerned for you, as are all of our listeners. And that's just a reminder of how serious the situation is.

Colin, our fishing reporter from Saturday mornings, Colin.

CALLER COLIN: I was just going to say, "Good morning", Jon, but it's not. It's quite late in the evening.

JON FAINE: It certainly is. What's happening at your end?

CALLER COLIN: We're up at Eildon.

JON FAINE: Yes.

CALLER COLIN: And we spent the day on the lake, and the winds were horrific and I can understand why these fires have spread so rapidly. I'm standing on the decking of the place where we're staying. We're out on the Goulburn River at Snobs Creek and we can't see 10 foot in front of us.

We've - it is just unbelievable. We've got (indistinct).

There's a caravan park on the opposite side of the river, and the CFA have been over there with their loud-hailers and they've been telling everybody to get ready to evacuate. And we're just waiting for some - we can hear them, so we're just waiting.

We've only just had the power come back on. The power's been out all day, and when we come back off the water about 6 o'clock this evening, we come back to no power. And the place we're staying in has electric pumps to pump all the water, and all that sort of thing, so it's quite scary up here at the moment. We're a considerable distance away from where the hell is.

JON FAINE: It's quite scary pretty much everywhere, actually, Colin.

CALLER COLIN: Yes, that's right, yes.

JON FAINE: Good to hear from you, and do take care. Thank you very much.

CALLER COLIN: Yes, that's all right.

JON FAINE: And keep yourself well away from anything that looks like a great big bushfire, if you possibly can. Colin there, calling us from Eildon Weir.

Dean Stewart's on duty at the Weather Bureau tonight. Dean, thank you for an update. What can you tell us?

DEAN STEWART: Well, the wind change is still working its way across north-east Victoria. It's gone through Shepparton now. They've gone around to south-south-westerly at around 20 to 30 kilometres per hour, so it's halfway between there and Wangaratta at the moment. It's still a little bit undecided whether it's going to push all the way up to the Beechworth fire tonight. I think there is certainly a chance. We've put that on our forecast for the fire of the southerly change pushing through there between about 11 and 12 tonight. However, it may actually tend to stall just before getting there and not push through to the morning, so that one's a very difficult one to forecast for.

The rest of the fires - around the Bunyip area, the winds have generally become quite light and variable at the moment. However, we are seeing south-westerly winds develop over Port Phillip Bay and I think the winds will swing around south-westerly up there again during the night.

We've still got some storm activity extending in a similar line to what it was earlier from Kilmore down just east of the Bunyip fire, or just near the Bunyip fire, down towards the Latrobe Valley and Sale area, so there is still some lightning strikes in that area as well.

And there is also some isolated shower activity out to the west and over Port Phillip Bay, so there is still potential for some more thunderstorms developing overnight as well, which is not good news.

JON FAINE: Well, not if it's got lightning attached to it; is that the case, Dean?

DEAN STEWART: Well, yes, that's right. Thunderstorms - yes, they'll have lightning and potentially more concerns with fire. You know, they can start fires, of course.

JON FAINE: We had eyewitness accounts of exactly that up around the Cathedral Ranges earlier this evening, and a very scary prospect it is, as if things aren't bad enough already. Anything else, Dean?

DEAN STEWART: Along the Gippsland coast, a change has pushed right through Orbost now. It's heading out towards Mallacoota, so it will continue its progression along the east coast there.

The higher elevated areas of the north-east, Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Falls Creek, are all still showing quite strong northerlies, up around 60 kilometres per hour. So I think they'll tend to ease off a little overnight, but they'll probably not swing around till tomorrow as well.

JON FAINE: All right. Thank you very much, Dean, for your efforts at the Weather Bureau. And we'll continue throughout the night to get regular updates for people as long as the emergency continues. I'm grateful to you.

DEAN STEWART: Thanks, Jon.

JON FAINE: Leanne in Portland. Hello, Leanne.

CALLER LEANNE: Hello.

JON FAINE: Go ahead.

CALLER LEANNE: I'm just trying to track down my cousins, Rose and Brian Dove. They live in Mountview Road at Wandong, and I've tried to send them text messages and I haven't been able to reach them.

JON FAINE: And is their situation - are they in a heavily wooded area there?

CALLER LEANNE: I do believe they are, yes.

JON FAINE: Yes. Look, the situation that we have been advised of is that certainly there are to be some announcements shortly in relation to some casualties at Kinglake, but that is not yet confirmed, and the Police Minister is to make that announcement about the situation. He is at the moment being briefed at the emergency information coordination centre, and we have only been advised that the State of Victoria should, as we are clearly aware, prepare itself for some fairly bad news about that situation. But there's nothing about Wandong that I've heard, if that's any relief to you, Leanne.

CALLER LEANNE: Thank you very much.

JON FAINE: We are getting many, many calls here. We are checking and corroborating information as fast as we can. The situation is that the Beechworth fire, as you've heard, is a serious one, not threatening the town, but power supplies, including to Beechworth Hospital, have been affected and Ambulance have told us that they may need to evacuate Beechworth Hospital if generators are not able to cope.

We've also, of course, heard that the situation with the Bunyip fire threatening the power transmission lines and the Churchill fire threatening the open-cut coalmine, quite apart from asset losses in both of those fires, continues to be serious.

The main concern, though, is with the situation in and around - in and around Kinglake, and that's a fire that's come all the way across from around Kilmore and Broadford. A very serious situation, indeed, with as many as 150 - 120 to 150 people stranded at the moment - safe, but in Kinglake - safe, but stuck in Kinglake because of roads closed in the surrounding areas, in the hills there, Marysville, Warburton, even Healesville being affected. And more information coming your way throughout the night.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services will, after the news, undoubtedly be available to speak to my colleague, Tim Cox, who has come across from Hobart to keep the ABC airwaves going right through the night.

Tim, none of us have ever seen anything like this.

TIM COX: Well, it's remarkable, Jon. And the ABC transmission services across the State will be in full operation mode, where, of course, electricity allows, right through the evening, so stay tuned right into the morning and see what occurs.

JON FAINE: All strength to your arm. Our phone number: 1300 222 774. 1300 222 774. The text messages: 19 774 774. The Red Cross have set up an inquiries number: 1800 727 077. We'll continue that information here on 774, your emergency services broadcaster. It's news time now. It's 10 o'clock.

[10pm]

ALICIA BYRNE: Fourteen people confirmed dead in today's fires across the State. More than 80 homes destroyed and firefighters from New South Wales due to arrive in Victoria tomorrow to help battle the blazes. Good evening, Alicia Byrne with ABC News.

Police have confirmed that 14 people have been killed in today's bushfires across Victoria. Six have been killed at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Strathewen and one at Clonbinane. Police fear up to 40 people may have died.

A media conference is currently under way in Melbourne. Fire crews are continuing to work on up to 10 major fire fronts across the State. While the scale of the damage to property isn't yet known, dozens of homes

have been destroyed, and schools and community centres have also been razed.

Strong winds are sweeping through Victoria from the south, expanding the fire front and turning blazes towards more communities. The Premier, John Brumby, has described today's fire conditions as the worst in the State's history.

Ambulance crews say they're having trouble reaching some of the many people who've suffered burns in today's fires. Paul Holman from Ambulance Victoria has told the ABC that anyone needing treatment in the Kinglake and Healesville areas should head to dedicated medical treatment areas.

PAUL HOLMAN: This fire's gone through the Kinglake area, as you already know. We're still unable to get there and we have reports of multiple people hurt and injured in some way. People are coming down the mountain and coming into various areas. What we'd like to do, if we can get a message out there, if anyone's listening, to actually direct people towards the Whittlesea Showgrounds - we have medical teams and paramedics at the Whittlesea Showgrounds - the Coldstream CFA in Killara Road or to the Diamond Creek Ambulance Station.

ALICIA BYRNE: Power has also been lost at the Beechworth Hospital and 100 people may need to be evacuated.

More homes are reported destroyed by massive fires in Gippsland in Victoria's east. Peta Carlyon reports.

PETA CARLYON: Homes in the Callignee area south of Traralgon have been destroyed by fires in the last two hours. The storm front has crossed over parts of Gippsland, and strong winds are blowing thick smoke and ash across the region. Fires are burning in the Latrobe Valley and are now threatening communities south of the Strzelecki Ranges.

Rain has started falling across central Gippsland, but further west the CFA's Peter Schmidt says the Bunyip Ridge fire has wreaked havoc on the nearby communities of Drouin West and Longwarry, and it shows no sign of slowing.

PETER SCHMIDT: We have had reasonably significant loss.

We don't know actual numbers at this point in time.

PETA CARLYON: Spot fires have broken out at Warragul, and the Princes Highway is closed in both directions. The CFA says the next few hours will be critical. Peta Carlyon, ABC News, Gippsland.

ALICIA BYRNE: Homes, primary schools and other community buildings have been destroyed in other bushfires across Victoria. Justine Longmore reports.

JUSTINE LONGMORE: There have been significant property losses across the State, but the exact number is not yet known. Several residents in Kinglake have lost their homes, and about 30 houses were destroyed in Wandong. A primary school in Wandong is also believed to have been razed. About 50 homes in Bendigo's west have burnt down, and properties in Narre Warren, Narbethong, Coleraine and Labertouche have been lost.

The fire south of Beechworth is spotting up to 4 kilometres away. The CFA is hoping to have the Redesdale blaze contained by the morning, but it's currently threatening communities east of Kyneton. The Murrindindi and Kilmore fires are still burning in a south-easterly direction.

ALICIA BYRNE: Glenda Mann from the Kilmore Hotel says the fires are frightening.

GLENDA MANN: It's devastating. It's devastating for people, like our locals, you know, to have lost houses, and I'm hearing stories of people in hospital. And, I mean, now I'm hearing that over the other side, Maroondah Highway and Mount Evelyn - it's like Ash Wednesday again. It's terrible.

ALICIA BYRNE: The number of homes destroyed by a fire at Horsham in western Victoria has been revised up to seven. Peter Leneghan reports.

PETER LENEGHAN: The fire's threat eased as the temperature and winds dropped this evening. The head of the fire's been contained at the Horsham Lubeck Road to the city's east. The fire's estimated size has been revised down to 3,000 hectares, but it's been confirmed seven homes on Horsham's southern outskirts have been destroyed.

A large workshop, several sheds and the Horsham Golf Club have also been lost. The golf club's manager, Jason Maybery, says the course has been devastated.

JASON MAYBERY: You just couldn't believe that when we evacuated everyone this afternoon that you'd go back a couple of hours later and the total club - everything's gone.

PETER LENEGHAN: A community meeting will be held at the Horsham Town Hall at 11.30 tomorrow morning.
Peter Leneghan, ABC News, Horsham.

ALICIA BYRNE: Fire crews from southern New South Wales will travel to Victoria tomorrow morning to help firefighters struggling to contain blazes here. Local crews have worked for much of the week on fires in different areas of the State.

Firefighters in New South Wales are working to establish containment lines around a blaze that's threatening homes at Peats Ridge on the State's Central Coast. The Rural Fire Service has applauded residents in the area, saying they've worked hard to protect their homes from the threat of embers. It's one of about 40 fires burning across New South Wales tonight. Police arrested a 31-year-old man on the Pacific Highway this afternoon. He's accused of lighting a fire on the Central Coast.

A 48-year-old man from Warrnambool was killed in a two-car accident at Mortlake in Victoria's south-west this afternoon. Two other people were injured. And a woman has been killed in a car crash near Stawell in western Victoria. Police say the woman, aged about 50, died when her car crashed into a tree on the Stawell Halls Gap Road about 4.30 this afternoon.

Heavy rain is again falling in flooded North Queensland. The downpour is extending from Innisfail in the north, south to almost Mackay. The Bruce Highway is cut in several places, and the town of Ingham is bracing for its second flood peak in a week. Forecaster Brian Rolleston from the Weather Bureau says hundreds of millimetres of rain could fall tonight.

BRIAN ROLLESTON: Getting up around 200mm in 24 hours, so some places even higher than that, getting up to 300, and

there may be some minor places down to just under 100, but it's sort of in that broad range, and you can really expect the same sort of thing tomorrow. There's not that much change.

ALICIA BYRNE: A Qantas 747 bound for Los Angeles has had to return to Melbourne Airport shortly after takeoff this afternoon due to engine trouble. The plane took off just after 1 o'clock and returned to the airport when the problem was detected 15 minutes into the flight. A replacement aircraft has been called in, and the flight will depart just after midnight.

Indonesia has implicitly criticised Thailand for towing hundreds of Burmese Muslims out to sea in boats without engines, and little food. The Foreign Minister says Indonesia will now consider granting refugee status to the asylum seekers now in its care, as Jakarta correspondent, Geoff Thompson, reports.

GEOFF THOMPSON: Hundreds of Rohingya Muslim asylum seekers from Burma have been recently rescued at sea off Aceh, with tales of abuse in Burma and at the hands of Thai security forces, which they accuse of beating them and then towing them out to sea and setting them adrift in boats without engines.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda, has called for an end to human rights violations of minority groups in Myanmar and harsh treatment like physical abuse when they transit. He said that towing them out to sea will certainly burden neighbouring countries in Asia, and without explicitly mentioning Thailand, he added, "They must stop casting them out to sea." Geoff Thompson, ABC News, Jakarta.

ALICIA BYRNE: In soccer, Melbourne Victory has defeated Adelaide United 2 nil in the first leg of the A-League major semi-final in Adelaide. Melbourne scored in the 14th and 89th minutes.

In State cricket, Tasmania has defeated Victoria by 14 runs in Hobart to stay in contention for the final of the One Day competition. The Tigers scored 8 for 197 off a rain-shortened 37 overs and then restricted the Bushrangers to 9 for 189.

In women's tennis, Australia has won the final of the Asia/Oceania Fed Cup Group 1 playoff in Perth, with a three rubbers to nil win over New Zealand. Jelena Dokic and Samantha Stosur clinched victory by winning their singles matches. Then Casey Dellacqua and Renae Stubbs won the doubles. Dokic says there's been a great team spirit this week.

JELENA DOKIC: We're really trying to play well for the team and trying to do well for the team. We knew we had a chance this week and, you know, we just really - we really click, I think, well in a team atmosphere.

ALICIA BYRNE: Just repeating our lead story: police have confirmed that 14 people have been killed in today's bushfires across Victoria. Six have been killed at Kinglake. All are believed to have been in one car. Three people at Strathewen were killed, and they too are believed to have been in one car. Four people perished at Wandong and one at Clonbinane. Police fear up to 40 people may have died.

To the weather, the CFA has declared a day of total fire ban for the whole of the State for today and for tomorrow. There's a gale warning for between Cape Otway and Wilsons Prom, between Mallacoota and Gabo Island, and Port Phillip, Western Port and the Gippsland Lakes.

For the State, very hot, with strong and gusty north to north-westerly winds ahead of a cooler, squally south-westerly change extending from the south-west but failing to reach the far north-east until tomorrow.

Areas of raised dust, for tomorrow, isolated light showers mainly on and south of the ranges. Moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. For Melbourne, windy with areas of raised dust overnight. Tomorrow, a shower or two, chance of a thunderstorm, a top of 24 after a low of 20. In Melbourne, 28 degrees. This is ABC News.

[Music]

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

[10.10pm]

TIM COX: And it's 10 past 10 on this Saturday night. And the grim news confirmed, in fact your worst fears, I'm sure, confirmed in that ABC News there. More on that as we go through the evening and into the morning. Tim Cox with you until, well, pretty much sun-up, I suppose. And at some stage shortly, hopefully the Emergency Services and Police Minister, Bob Cameron. We don't know if there is a breakdown at this stage of whether they have been civilian deaths, firefighter deaths, CFA salary - CFA firies, or what the details might be. But hopefully some of that very shortly.

Let's get the very latest update on the fire situation now with Mary-Jane Fenech.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you. There has been an urgent threat message for Wandong. The grass and scrub fire burning 1 kilometre south of Wandong near - is burning in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be over 1,000 hectares in size. The communities of Wandong, Wallan, Wallan East, Eden Park and Whittlesea, Humevale Bruces Creek, Upper Plenty, Kinglake West, Pheasant Creek, Smiths Gully, Kinglake, Flowerdale, Glenburn and Hurstbridge may be directly impacted upon this fire.

An emergency relief centre has been opened in Diamond Creek in the Shire of Nillumbik for those affected by these fires in the northern parts of the shire and the Kinglake area. The centre is located at 28 Main Hurstbridge Road in Diamond Creek.

Also, for the Whittlesea and surrounds, there are other emergency threat messages going out for those areas, too. In Arthurs Creek, Nutfield, Eden Park and Doreen, you also may be directly impacted upon this fire.

An emergency relief centre also at Diamond Creek in the Shire of Nillumbik at the same address: 28 Main Hurstbridge Road in Diamond Creek. That is also the centre located for those in the Chum Creek area. Residents of Toolangi and Chum Creek are advised to activate their bushfire plans immediately and you could also head out to 28 Main Hurstbridge Road, Diamond Creek.

And we'll have some more information for you as soon as possible. Also, you can head to cfa.vic.gov.au and

click on the link to "Incidents" for more information. And, of course, stay tuned to ABC radio, your emergency services broadcaster.

TIM COX: Tim Cox with you on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster, as Mary-Jane said. The number here: 1300 222 936. 1300 222 936 the number you can call.

A question about the Beechworth Hospital. A decision will be made in the next little while as to what will happen at the Beechworth Hospital. They've lost power there, and it will depend on what they're able to do by way of back-up power through generators. So once that's been arrived at, you'll hear that here on ABC Local Radio.

Time for the latest on road closures and beyond with Simon Brown. Simon?

SIMON BROWN: Good day. Yes, Burwood Highway eastbound only between Glenfern Road and Dawson Road, Upper Ferntree Gully is closed, as is Melba Highway at Coldstream. Maroondah Highway is also closed at Coldstream. Melba Highway is also closed between Yea and Healesville Kinglake Road.

It's also closed - sorry, Eltham is - Yarra Glen Road is closed at Yarra Glen. MacIntyre Lane is closed at Melba Highway. The Hume Freeway is closed in both directions between Wallan and Broadford. The Heathcote Kyneton Road is closed 9 kilometres rest - west, rather, of Lake Eppalock. The Loddin Valley Highway, Eaglehawk Road, between Marong and Holdsworth Road, Bendigo is closed, as is Golden Square Long Gully Road between Calder Highway and Loddin Valley Highway. The Heathcote Kyneton Road is also closed 9 kilometres east of Lake Eppalock as well as 9 kilometres west.

Buckland Gap Road between Beechworth and Great Alpine Road is closed, as is the Healesville Kinglake Road, the Whittlesea Kinglake Road and the Whittlesea Yea Road between Yea and Whittlesea.

Glenelg Highway is closed through Coleraine. There are local detours in place. Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake is closed. Princes Highway West between Camperdown and Colac is closed, as is Foxhow Road at

Lake Corangamite.

Also closed are Western Highway at Grampians Road, Horsham, Henty Highway at Toolondo, Wimmera Highway at Natimuk, the Horsham Drung South Road, South Gippsland Highway at Welshpool. South Gippsland Highway is also closed at Yarram and Longford. The Princes Highway between Stammers Road and Traralgon and Sale is closed.

[10.15pm]

Princes Freeway between Pakenham and Warragul is closed, as is the Hyland Highway at both Grand Ridge Road and Traralgon Creek Road, and Traralgon Creek Road itself is closed at Traralgon southbound. Boolarra Churchill Road is closed at Boolarra, and Walhalla Road at Tyres-Thompson Valley Road is also closed.

We've had a lot of offers of help come through the website. So far, we've had offers for stock requiring emergency agistment, people offering their homes for anyone who has been homeless, people also just volunteering their services - handymen, et cetera.

So if you've got an offer of help, please do go to abc.net.au/melbourne and click on the "Offer or ask for help" link. And, indeed, if you are in need of help, then please go to that website, have a look at the offers. We will not be publishing your details if you're in need of help. We will simply be putting you in touch with the people who are offering it.

TIM COX: All right. And, of course, if the power is down, if you're listening on --

SIMON BROWN: The power is --

TIM COX: -- battery wireless or what-have-you?

SIMON BROWN: If the power is down, then just give a friend a phone call and see whether they can rustle something up for you.

TIM COX: All right. Thank you, Simon. More from Simon very soon, of course, here on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio through Victoria. 1300 222 774 is the number you can call. 1300 222 774.

And if you are after fire information, you can call 1800 240 667. That's the CFA's fire information line. 1800 240 667. Not surprisingly, you will need to be patient if you are ringing there. They are being hammered with calls.

Tracy Bartram, a voice well known to ABC Local Radio listeners, has just packed the car in Warburton. Tracy, good evening.

TRACY BARTRAM: Hello, Tim. Yes, we have, and I've got to say it's something I never thought I'd do. We've been living in the country now for six years. I've grown up in Victoria, Melbourne, my whole life and every year looked at the fires, and this is the first time we've had to evacuate. And I have to say it's really quite daunting and pretty emotional, because no-one knows what's going to happen.

And so my message to Warburton listeners is: if you can, if you haven't got a fire plan - that's what we were told by the Millgrove Fire Brigade - the sirens went off tonight, and that was pretty scary. It sounded like a - you know, it just reminded me of a war zone, not that I've been in one, but to hear that evacuation siren --

TIM COX: Of course.

TRACY BARTRAM: And we couldn't get through to them, so we dropped down to see them, and they said, "If you haven't got a fire plan, if you don't plan to stay and fight, then we suggest that you leave now", and that was really scary.

TIM COX: All right. Tracy, let me let you get back to what you need to be doing. And thank you and best to you, of course. Tracy Bartram there.

Let's go to Kieran Walsh, the Deputy Commissioner of Victoria Police, who's just come out of a briefing. Kieran Walsh, thanks for joining us. Good evening to you.

KIERAN WALSH: Good evening.

TIM COX: Kieran, what are you able to tell us about the current state of play and, of course, these 14 deaths that have been reported at this time?

KIERAN WALSH: Yes, look, we can confirm - as of 9.45 this evening, we can confirm 14 deceased: we have six deceased at Kinglake; we have four at Wandong; we have three at Strathewen; and we have one confirmed at Clonbinane.

Look, this has been an absolute tragedy for this State and we believe, unfortunately, that this figure may only get worse. We're concerned that we could even see a figure reaching up to the 40s.

TIM COX: What's leading you to believe the number could be almost three times what you're confirming right now?

KIERAN WALSH: Well, we base that on the fact that we're only just getting in to these areas now, with police resources and other emergency services, to undertake some searches of buildings and properties, and these have been very, very significant fires and our concern is that if this is what's been identified at this point of time, our concern is that it can get worse.

TIM COX: Do you know at this stage, or are you able to detail at all, Kieran Walsh, if these are civilian deaths, if they are CFA firefighter deaths or volunteer firefighter deaths?

KIERAN WALSH: No, look, we can't say that at this stage. Look, it is very early. We're not going to be probably in the situation to be able to make any sort of confirmations on identities and that until tomorrow morning. We're going to need some daylight to assist us and we will need to get investigative teams and disaster victim identification teams into those areas in the morning.

TIM COX: Given the fear you've expressed, that you're looking at perhaps 40 deaths rather than 14, are you concentrating that particular work around Kinglake and Wandong where the bulk of these deaths have already been confirmed?

KIERAN WALSH: Look, we will be working in that area, but we'll also - when all these fires, when it's able to do so, we'll have emergency services, police and emergency services personnel going in to the area, all these fire areas, to do similar searches, so we're just going to have to wait till the opportunity allows us to do so.

TIM COX: What have police and fire and ambulance authorities been able to do by way of getting in fresh crews after such a gruelling day?

KIERAN WALSH: Look, I know from a police perspective, we're endeavouring to get fresh people on board and we're looking at tomorrow as to what we're going to need. Whilst the temperatures are going to be down tomorrow, unfortunately there's going to be a considerable amount of work for police to deal with tomorrow, and also the other emergency services, and I'm confident that the fire services and the ambulance services will be doing their best to rest their personnel and to get relief for them as soon as they can.

TIM COX: Of course, the concentration at the moment is on the quite remarkable loss of life. What do you know about asset and property loss at this stage?

KIERAN WALSH: Look, I don't know a lot about that at this point in time. We've been really trying to focus a little bit around the unfortunate loss of life at this stage. Again, we need to get people in to those areas before we're going to really identify the level of houses and assets that have been lost.

TIM COX: All right.

KIERAN WALSH: But could I just make a plea to the community here. This is going to be a very, very difficult time overnight and particularly tomorrow for all emergency services, and my plea to the community is: don't go to those fire areas. Please stay away. Please allow the emergency services to do what is going to be a very, very difficult task. We do not want sightseers heading up to those areas.

TIM COX: How large a difficulty or obstacle has that been already, Kieran Walsh?

KIERAN WALSH: Well, it hasn't been a great difficulty at this time, but unfortunately, quite often, we do experience, after we've had tragic incidents, some people, for some reason only known to themselves, go up to have a look at what's taken place. Now, I'm asking people not to do that. Don't go sightseeing. Stay away. Allow the

emergency services to do their job.

TIM COX: All right. Appreciate your time. I know you're very busy. Thank you.

KIERAN WALSH: Thank you.

TIM COX: Kieran Walsh, the Deputy Commissioner of Victoria Police, just confirming there that 14 people now have died after the bushfires across the State today: six at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Strathewen and one at Clonbinane. But as Deputy Commissioner Walsh has reiterated, they are fearful that up to 40 people may have died. They're only just being able to get in to some of those areas that have been inaccessible to them.

"My heart", says a text - 19 774 774 - "My heart goes out to the loved ones of those tragically taken. We must all stand together as one community and do whatever it takes to ensure a future for all affected on this tragic day. Our hearts, homes and wallets must open for our countrymen, women and children."

199 - 1300 222 774 the number you can call here, ABC Local Radio. Or you can call the fire information line, 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667. That's the number that has all the information on fires burning across the State. 1800 240 667. 23 minutes past 10.

[10.23pm]

Tim Cox with you on your emergency services broadcaster, 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio throughout Victoria on this extraordinary Saturday, the 7th of February 2009.

From the DSE, Caroline Douglass. Good evening to you, Caroline.

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: Good evening.

TIM COX: Caroline, what are you able to tell us about what you are seeing and what your personnel are seeing?

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: We're obviously seeing a lot of fires that are still going and a lot of homes still at risk from those fires. The wind change has changed the direction of a number of fires. We're also starting to get some new

lightning strikes reported out of some of the storms that have gone through, which is not what we need, but these things happen. So obviously there's a number of people feeling at threat and at risk at the moment.

TIM COX: What has the weather - we'll be crossing to the bureau soon, but what has the weather brought for the worst-affected areas and the hardest-working or perhaps most-stretched crews?

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: The weather has obviously brought a wind change with it, so the fires have changed direction and are now heading to the north, north-north-east, with the wind change. There's quite strong winds behind them. That's fanning those blazes and causing spotting out ahead of the fires. So most of the concentration of work is very much on asset protection rather than trying to contain or hold fires at the moment. It's just too risky to put firefighters in the line of that.

TIM COX: Is it a battle that you would say you are winning on some fronts at least?

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: I think certainly the threats have been reduced for some fires, particularly in the west, which is terrific. But I think around the Yarra Valley and the areas from Kilmore, the Kilmore fire, are still at threat - are still at risk. And as the wind change is still yet to hit part of the north of the State, there's still a big problem up there, particularly in Beechworth, where we have a fire up there.

TIM COX: All right. That fire, of course, has taken out the power supplies to the hospital. We're still awaiting details of what will happen there, whether the hospital will be evacuated or not. Any areas of particular concern that listeners need to be aware of at this stage, Caroline?

CAROLINE DOUGLASS: Oh, look, there's quite a few areas. I think obviously there's an urgent threat message for the communities around Barwidgee Creek, Mudgegonga, Rosewhite and residents on Carrolls Road in the Beechworth area.

Obviously, there's still some urgent threat messages around the Bunyip Ridge fire, and road closures. The Churchill or Gippsland fires - there's some urgent threat messages out around those fires, and in Bendigo as well.

So we'd still encourage people to obviously go to websites, listen to the ABC, ring the Victorian bushfire information line. But certainly listening to the ABC is very important and use their bushfire plans and keep off the roads wherever possible.

TIM COX: All right. Thank you for that. Caroline Douglass there, a spokesperson for the Department of Sustainability and Environment. 26 minutes past 10 on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio throughout Victoria.

[10.26pm]

Again, 1800 240 667 the number you can call for information from the CFA. 1800 240 667. The number here, 1300 222 774. 1300 222 774.

A couple of interesting texts coming through, 19 97 - 19 774 774. And I'll share some of those with you in a moment.

But first of all, we go to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron, who's at the integrated emergency coordination centre. Bob Cameron, thank you for your time. Good evening.

BOB CAMERON: Hello, Tim. I wish I could say "good evening", but of course this is a very sad night as we learn of the deaths that have occurred in Victoria today.

TIM COX: A tremendously dark day. Do you know any more of the circumstances of these deaths at Kinglake, Wandong, Strathewen and Clonbinane?

BOB CAMERON: No, I don't at this stage. What I know is what you've already been told, and no doubt police will get more of those details later on. But, of course, what I can say is that our hearts do go out to all the family and friends of those people, and if I can also just say, Tim, to all of the people who have worked so hard all day and continue to work into the night, Victorians are so grateful for what they do.

TIM COX: Are you getting a sense that they still have enough resources, internal and external, I suppose, Minister, to keep this going through the night and into

tomorrow?

BOB CAMERON: Yes. I've spent a lot of time with both of the two Chief Fire Officers - Russell Rees from the CFA and Ewan Waller from DSE - and they will be working through the night.

One of the issues that we have had is that we would like to do a line scan over the catchment areas. What a line scan is is a plane flies over and you're able to then tell where there is actually fire. But that doesn't work where there's cloud. But hopefully there will be a break some time during the night so that we can get more of an accurate picture of that.

TIM COX: Are you being told by those brigade chiefs that they have the resources they need? A number of people have been in touch here asking if any consideration has been given to calling in the Army, given the remarkable circumstances of these fires?

BOB CAMERON: When we need resources, what we do is we look interstate. We know from past experience that the Army doesn't really have the sort of equipment that we have in terms of firefighting. They're not geared up for firefighting. And what we do is we look to other States.

But tomorrow is going to be an extremely bad day in New South Wales. Western Australia is going to have a few bad days. So we're all pretty much in a similar position. But we do have plenty of people and resources to get out on the ground, but where necessary they will draw. So during the course of the day, there were some people from South Australia who came over and helped in the west. There were some people from New South Wales who came over and helped in the north of the State.

TIM COX: So what happens from here just in terms of human resources in the wake of that and the difficulty you will have and your brigades will have getting further people from interstate?

BOB CAMERON: Well, in terms of tomorrow, some of the fires will be contained and resources can then be directed more at the fires that continue to go.

[10.30pm]

So if you look today, there was over 400 fires that the CFA had, which is an enormous number, but, of course, most of those were dealt with. But there are those that are large and they are significant, but they've had over 3,000 - 3,300 firefighters out on the ground today from the CFA, the MFB and DSE, so there's a lot of people there to continue to draw upon.

TIM COX: All right. What will occur by way of assistance from the State Government? And I presume, Minister, that that will be in place very first thing tomorrow on top of what's already there.

BOB CAMERON: Yes, well, we've activated the emergency grants. So for those people who have unfortunately lost their homes or had their homes damaged, there is assistance available to them and they will be able to work with DHS, the Department of Human Services.

But just as those tremendous firefighters and volunteers and everybody else who has assisted them today have been doing everything, the Government will be working with DHS and any other recovery agencies to make sure that we have a recovery in each of the areas, because these communities are hurting so much.

TIM COX: All right. We'll leave it there, Minister. Thank you very much for your time.

BOB CAMERON: Thank you, Tim.

TIM COX: Bob Cameron there, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, live from the integrated emergency coordination centre. It is 28 minutes to 11 on 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster and ABC Local Radio across Victoria.

[10.32pm]

A strong southerly breeze passing through Box Hill now. Could you pass this, asks Tim, on to the people in Smiths Gully. Can't get in contact with family there.

Interestingly, a little earlier, a text to say that they had had a single breath of wind - in fact, in a couple of places. In Watsonia, "We lost roof tiles at 6 o'clock

from a wind gust with the cool change. Since then, not a single breath of wind."

Megan Flamer, what's happening on the other side of the glass?

MEGAN FLAMER: Well, we're getting a lot of calls. We've got a full board of calls going the whole time, so apologies if we've sounded a little abrupt with people, but we're just trying to get to as many people as we can.

I just wanted to remind people that they need to call the bushfire information line, not our talk-back line, especially if they're looking for information about individual fires, and that number is 1800 240 667. Us sitting on the other side of the glass there - we can't give information about the fires. Most people understand that it's spread all over the State, so I don't have a big list of information about where to go and what to do in terms of each individual fire.

So if you are looking for information about a particular area or a particular fire, even if you can't get in contact with people, the best thing to do is to contact the bushfire information line: 1800 240 667. You're also welcome to call us on our talk-back line if you have something to say or a piece of information that might be useful, if you can see something or if you know something that you can pass on that could be useful for people in those areas who might be listening to the radio. But if you are looking for information about a particular fire, please call the bushfire information line. I'll give that one more time: 1800 240 667. And then they can help you.

You may have a little bit of difficulty getting through to that line. They're obviously dealing with a high volume of calls, as are we, but you will eventually get through and, really, you're just going to be on hold here. I can't give out that information at this stage. But we will have another update in the next 10 minutes.

TIM COX: Okay. We will in fact have that update right now. Thank you.

MEGAN FLAMER: No worries.

TIM COX: Megan Flamer there on ABC Local Radio. I'll do more texts in a minute. But let's hear the very latest now from Mary-Jane Fenech. Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE FENECH: There is an urgent threat message for Barwidgee Creek, Mudgegonga, Rosewhite and residents along Carrolls Road. A fire is burning 4 kilometres south of Beechworth and is moving in a south-easterly direction. The fire is spotting well ahead of the fire, in some cases as much as 4 kilometres ahead. The communities of Barwidgee Creek, Mudgegonga and Rosewhite and residents along Carrolls Road should prepare for direct ember attack from this fire.

A change in wind direction later on tonight could push the fire north-east towards Stanley, Yackandandah and Burarong. Residents of Stanley, Yackandandah and Burarong should remain on high alert for ember attack. A strike team from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service has been despatched to Beechworth to assist with asset protection.

And the Murrindindi Mill fire is now burning in a north-easterly direction. The communities of Taggerty, Acheron, Thornton, Rubicon, Snobs Creek, Eildon, Alexandra and Molesworth can expect thick smoke and ember attack. All residents in these areas are advised to implement their fire plans immediately if they haven't done so already and to remain on high alert.

And for those in Wandong, the grass and scrub fire is burning 1 kilometre south of Wandong and is burning in a south-easterly direction and is estimated to be over 1,000 hectares in size. The communities of Wandong, Wallan, Wallan East, Eden Park and Whittlesea, Humevale, Bruces Creek, Upper Plenty, Kinglake West, Pheasant Creek, Smiths Gully, Flowerdale, Kinglake, Glenburn and Hurstbridge may be directly impacted upon this fire.

An emergency relief centre has been opened in Diamond Creek in the Shire of Nillumbik for those affected by these bushfires in the northern parts of the shire and the Kinglake area. That centre is located at 28 Main Hurstbridge Road in Diamond Creek.

And for more information, you can check out cfa.vic.gov.au/incidents, and also keep up to date by checking in on abc.net.au/news.

TIM COX: All right. Thank you very much. We'll have more of that in a moment from Mary-Jane Fenech, as we go through the evening and into the morning on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio, your emergency services broadcaster. 1300 222 774 the number you can call.

A number of texts coming through, as well, asking what's happening in Marysville. We'll endeavour to get the latest on the fire around Marysville for you in a moment. So stay listening, please, and we'll get you what information we can when we can.

And where, asks Glen, is our previously high-profile Premier? I think endeavouring to put out a fire or at least to fight off a fire at his place.

John is in Kilmore. John, good day.

CALLER JOHN: Hi, Tim, how are you?

TIM COX: Just fine.

CALLER JOHN: A lady rang in earlier asking about Brian Dove. Brian and Rose are fine. I've just been speaking with them. Brian has saved three or four houses in his street. He says he's lost a couple, but that sounds a pretty good average to me, don't you reckon?

TIM COX: Who is this man? How do we thank this man?

CALLER JOHN: Well, he got an Australia Day Award, and I reckon he's about due for another one. Brian is a very retiring fellow, who's always been committed to his community, and he's proven that today in absolute gold.

TIM COX: How about that. Look, there's actually a message here from a Maria, a lady inquiring about the Doves. If it is Brian, tell her he has saved his house and three others.

CALLER JOHN: Absolutely.

TIM COX: What a remarkable bloke.

CALLER JOHN: He's a great lad, I'll tell you.

TIM COX: All right. That's tremendous news, John. Thanks so much.

CALLER JOHN: You're welcome. Thanks, Tim.

TIM COX: Helen at Yarra Glen, good day. Hello Helen.

CALLER HELEN: Hi, Tim. It's Helen here, from Hobart, actually.

TIM COX: Hello.

CALLER HELEN: We're just visiting. Yes, hello. We are here - Ian and Angela and I came over for the concert at Rochford Wines tomorrow night, and we actually were evacuated from our hotel, and now we're actually in a police escort getting us out of Yarra Glen.

It's absolutely dreadful. It's just absolutely horrible. We were stuck - I shouldn't say "stuck". We had the luxury of staying at the Yarra Glen Hotel for six hours. We couldn't get back to our hotel. So, anyway, the bottom line is we're on our way to Melbourne in the clothes that we're standing in, and we're very grateful for that, because we can see the fires as we've been brought out with the police escort, and it's really tragic. It's very, very tragic, indeed.

TIM COX: It is, indeed. Helen, all the best and travel safe.

CALLER HELEN: Thank you, Tim.

TIM COX: Thank you. Helen, just through Yarra Glen there. 1300 222 774 the number you can call. 1300 222 774.

The Red Cross Victoria has a number you can call as well to get information about the welfare of friends and family that have been evacuated. That number is 1800 727 077. 1800 727 077. That's the Red Cross, and they obviously are helping coordinate the evacuation and the welfare of those being evacuated.

Amy is in Horsham. Amy, what's it like in Horsham right now? Amy, hi.

CALLER AMY: Look, it's not too bad. It's calmed down a little bit. It has cooled down, but it's still very smoky around, and things like that.

TIM COX: What have you been doing, Amy? What preparations have you made?

CALLER AMY: Well, my house hasn't been directly in a threat at all. It's mainly just been trying to sort of - you know, you do think about what you would take. I am on sort of the outskirts of town, but not at all in any threat, unlike some of the other people that are further out than I am.

But I'm working in the emergency services - I'd prefer not to say where - and the work that they've been putting in to prepare and things like that - and I think that we need to recognise those that aren't - don't have a big role but have really had a massive impact, is those that - these farmers that come down with their water trucks and trailers with water and, you know, are out there sort of, you know, on the outskirts of town, fighting these little fires, because the CFA are just so stretched out with their resources. These guys just can't get forgotten. I know of one - two young farmers that are from 40 kilometres north of Horsham are down south in Haven and were actually responsible for saving the general store down there.

TIM COX: Amazing story. I mean, there are so many amazing stories emerging from this already.

CALLER AMY: Yes, and I think these are easily the forgotten heroes. The CFA do a great job, but I think they've just been so pushed for resources. It's just fantastic, seeing the community - I'm originally from the city, and seeing a community come together like this is just amazing.

TIM COX: What sort of night are you expecting there, Amy?

CALLER AMY: Hopefully, a little bit cooler, and it's actually nice to listen to the radio and hear that - it's just calming to hear that things are settling down here and hopefully they will have things under control by the morning. But seeing the other side of the State just, sort of, getting a lot worse is just a little bit unnerving, and it's a major reality check, I think, for everyone.

TIM COX: I appreciate the call. All the best to you.

CALLER AMY: Okay, bye.

TIM COX: All right. That's Amy there in Horsham. Again, the number you can call: 1300 222 774. 1300 222 774.

Lots of queries, obviously, about specific sites. Let's get the latest now with Megan Flamer. Megan, are you there? We'll have Megan in just a moment.

The forecast for Sunday looks like this across the State: isolated showers and thunderstorms contracting to the east and north-east, but mostly dry, moderate to fresh south-westerly winds extending throughout. Hot at first in the north-east. Otherwise, cool to mild in the south and mild to warm in the north.

And you know enough about the fire danger, but not a lot of relief on the way rain wise, sadly. The Bureau of Meteorology website, bom - Bureau of Meteorology - .gov.au. bom.gov.au.

For the latest fire information, don't ring here. Ring the fire information line: 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667.

[10.42pm]

And at 18 to 11, just repeating the terrible news that you've perhaps already heard, but if you've just come in or you've just missed it, there are now deaths confirmed in these fires across Victoria today: six at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Strathewen and one at Clonbinane. The police fear, and they have confirmed here, that they fear that perhaps up to 30 people have died in the fires today.

So stay tuned for the fires that perhaps are near your place or for those of your friends and family. And thanks for all the messages of goodwill coming through here for those affected and, of course, those fighting the remarkable fires across the States.

Roads, et cetera - Simon Brown.

SIMON BROWN: Burwood Highway eastbound only between

Glenfern Road and Dawson Road, Upper Ferntree Gully is closed, as is Melba Highway at Coldstream and Maroondah Highway at Coldstream.

The Melba Highway is also closed between Yea and Healesville Kinglake Road. The Maroondah Highway is also closed between Alexandra and Healesville. The Eltham Yarra Glen Road at Yarra Glen is closed, as is the MacIntyre Lane at Melba Highway.

The following are closed: Hume Freeway in both directions between Wollert and Broadford, Heathcote Kyneton Road 9 kilometres west of Lake Eppalock, Loddin Valley Highway or Eaglehawk Road between Marong and Holdsworth Road, Bendigo, Golden Square Long Gully Road between Calder Highway, Marong Road and Loddin Valley Highway.

Heathcote Kyneton Road is closed 9 kilometres east of Lake Eppalock. Buckland Gap Road between Beechworth and Great Alpine Road is closed. The Healesville Kinglake Road and the Whittlesea Kinglake Road and the Whittlesea Yea Road are closed between Yea and Whittlesea.

Glenelg Highway is closed through Coleraine. Local detours are in place. The Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake is closed. The Princes Highway west between Camperdown and Colac is closed. Foxhow Road is closed at Lake Corangamite. Western Highway at Grampians Road, Horsham is closed, Henty Highway at Toolondo is closed, Wimmera Highway at Natimuk is closed, and the Horsham Drung South Road is also closed.

And also closed are the South Gippsland Highway at Welshpool, the South Gippsland Highway at Yarram, the South Gippsland Highway at Longford, the Princes Highway between Stammers Road, Traralgon and Sale, the Princes Freeway between Pakenham and Warragul, the Hyland Highway at Grand Ridge Road, the Hyland Highway at Traralgon Creek Road. Traralgon Creek Road is closed at Traralgon southbound. The Boolarra Churchill Road is closed at Boolarra, and Woollahra Road at Tyers-Thomson Valley Road is closed.

TIM COX: Thank you very much, Simon Brown, the latest on those. And, of course, that right through the evening and into the morning.

A couple of queries about what the program or the programs will be beyond here. Well, it looks like we're going to be together right through the night until Tonya Roberts comes in in the morning, and then Jon Faine again, we think, from 8 o'clock tomorrow morning on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio across the State.

Russell says that you've got to put "www" in front of bom.gov.au. Thank you very much for that, Russell. www.bom.gov.au. At a quarter to 11, let's get the latest from the CFA with Deputy Fire Officer Greg Esnouf. Greg, good day there.

[10.45pm]

GREG ESNOUF: Good afternoon - or good evening it is now, yes.

TIM COX: Yes, I know, it's a marathon, and, of course, your people are doing the most astounding job. And I must say, just through the text and the phones here, the most astounding number of calls saying thank you so much for the men and women that are doing your work.

What are you able to tell us? First of all, we're getting a lot of calls, obviously, about Marysville. What's happening there?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, Marysville - yes, look, the latest report I had on Marysville, if I could just bring that one up, is that there's some CFA resources and people at the Marysville Recreation Reserve probably supporting the township. I get the impression that the fire is basically - the town is cut off by the fire. We're hopeful that we won't get any asset losses in Marysville, but it must be pretty rugged there at the moment, I would have thought.

TIM COX: All right. So nothing up to date, but you do have people there in place?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, yes. Look, there's 10 tankers, 40 or 50 firefighters, so that's a good start to try and support protecting assets in Marysville.

TIM COX: All right. Sunday Creek as well?

GREG ESNOUF: No, you've got me on that one. Sunday Creek, as in near Kilmore?

TIM COX: That's right.

GREG ESNOUF: No, I don't have any specific information on Sunday Creek. I know that fire has moved. It's been a massive fire and we're going to have significant asset losses at the end of the day with that fire, I think, and you would have already spoken, unfortunately, about the fatalities that we've had, that I think some of them may have been within that area as well.

TIM COX: Yes. There are some reports, indeed, of perhaps some of the larger fears you might have at Marysville, a couple of suggestions of that. So we'd appreciate, Greg, if you're able to let us know of any confirmation from there. What about Bendigo?

GREG ESNOUF: The Bendigo fire - the one at Eaglehawk I think you're talking about, just to the west of Bendigo, Maiden Gully. The last report I had on that one was that up to 50 houses had been destroyed by that house - by that fire. I'm just clicking through all of my various systems here to try to give you the very most up-to-date information. And I've lost it. There it is. No, no, I've lost it completely.

But, as I said, 50 houses was the last information I had on that small fire. We had, I think, about 100 - 80 people on that fire at one stage. So I don't know where that one's at at the moment. I've just lost it off my radar.

TIM COX: All right. What about Bunyip, of course - an area of extra concern?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, the Bunyip fire was pushing back into the forest and - under the south-westerly wind change and moving towards places like Jindivick and the like. During the afternoon and into the early evening, it certainly pushed down into Longwarry and Drouin. So that fire will still be of concern. It's going back into the forest, which - thankfully, for the next three to four days, the weather's quite cool, but, you know, it's just going to go back into the forest and it's going to take a lot of effort to put decent control lines around that fire.

TIM COX: And, of course, the other concern around Morwell - do you know anything about where that fire's moving to?

GREG ESNOUF: Well, if you're talking about the fire that started at Churchill, a bit to the south-east of Morwell --

TIM COX: Yes.

GREG ESNOUF: -- and then it went very rapidly over the Strzeleckis, over Mount Tassie, and knocked out quite a bit of communication infrastructure. Under the south-westerly wind change, it's pushed back into Traralgon South and has got very close to Traralgon South, but we haven't got any figures on major structure losses in there. So we're hopeful that we've been able to pick it up as it's come back into Traralgon South.

TIM COX: We heard earlier that there are some fresh lightning strikes - that from the department. Have you had many reports of fresh fires and are there any of specific concern, Greg?

GREG ESNOUF: No, look, we haven't had reports of additional fires coming out of there. Most of the lookout towers will not be up at night. So what's happened is with the intense cloud that's gone up with the fires, particularly the Bunyip fire and the Kinglake fire, they've generated their own lightning, and that's been to the east where the smoke plume has been and that's over in the country sort of over Noojee, Neerim, Erica way. A lot of that country we haven't - you know, the fire towers won't be up till the morning so probably won't pick up if there's new fires until then.

But the good news is that with the milder weather, even if there are some new fires, we should be able to pick them up much quicker than what we've been able to do today.

TIM COX: Are you getting any or many reports of rain assisting your crews?

GREG ESNOUF: No. I've heard anecdotally of showers in various areas, but you'd need a couple of inches of rain to even get people to start smiling, I think, at the moment.

TIM COX: All right. Now, they're getting mud rain at Gladysdale, so that's a good sign for there.

A text from Ellen, "Beside myself. Husband, daughter, other family at Brandy Creek near Drouin." They haven't had any contact there for four or five hours. What might be the go there, do you think, Greg?

GREG ESNOUF: Oh, look, if they looked up the website or rang the Victorian bushfire information line, they'll get better information than what I can specifically give on every individual fire. They can talk to the operators and get through and get the information on the alerts on their particular area.

TIM COX: All right. And a specific query, again going back to Marysville, for Taggerty, which is near there?

GREG ESNOUF: Yes, Taggerty, yes - I've just got to get my geography right and it helps if I looked at a map, I suppose. But, yes, Taggerty - a little bit to the north, I would have thought, where the fire is at the moment. So my understanding is the fire's pushed through Narbethong and then will push back, you know, Marysville. But Taggerty's, what, 15, 20K to the north of there, so I would hope it hasn't got that far.

TIM COX: All right. Anything else that we should know at this stage?

GREG ESNOUF: Look, what we're asking is - apparently, we're getting a bit of overload on some of the websites. The DSE one is reporting a bit of overload, and I'm sure some of the other ones are, and the bushfire information line may be as well. So we're asking that people don't use those ones if they're just looking for general information at the moment. Certainly, if they've got people of concern or if they're in areas of concern themselves, of course that's exactly what those computer websites are there for. But unless you've got a specific interest, perhaps just ease the load on some of those sites and let the people that need to know get on to them.

TIM COX: Appreciate your time, Greg. I'm sure we'll talk again soon.

GREG ESNOUF: Thank you very much.

TIM COX: That's Greg Esnouf there, Deputy Fire Officer with the CFA. And the number you can call again, that fire information line: 1800 240 667. Write it down: 1800 240 667. It's 8 minutes to 11.

[10.52pm]

[Music]

MALE SPEAKER: Career and volunteer firefighters have their plans in place for this bushfire season. Are you ready? One sure way to minimise your risk is to have a bushfire action plan. If your plan is to stay and defend during a bushfire, make sure you've prepared a defendable space around your home. Clear the area of all long grass, leaves or anything that can burn easily.

MALE SPEAKER: Call the CFA on 1800 240 667.

MALE SPEAKER: To organise your bushfire survival plan. ABC Local Radio, your emergency services broadcaster.

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network, bushfire information.

TIM COX: And repeating that news confirmed at 10 o'clock today that these are fatal fires in Victoria. Fourteen confirmed deaths. Police fear that number may rise to as high as 40. Megan Flamer has the latest update.

MEGAN FLAMER: Hi, Tim. The Murrindindi Mill fire is now burning in a north-easterly direction. The communities of Taggerty, Acheron, Thornton, Rubicon, Snobs Creek, Eildon, Alexandra and Molesworth can expect thick smoke and ember attack. All residents in these areas are advised to implement their fire plans immediately if they haven't already done so and to remain on high alert.

Tourists are advised to stay away from the following areas: the Mount Despair State Forest. We've also got a warning for the Kilmore East fire. That's an urgent threat message for the communities in the area of Broadford. The grass and scrub fire is now burning less than 4 kilometres south of Broadford. It's burning in a north-easterly direction also. It's estimated to be 30,000 hectares in size.

Communities in the area of Broadford are under direct threat of being impacted upon by this fire, and that includes Broadford, Broadford East in the area of Ogradys Road, south of Broadford, Broadford in the Sunday Creek Road area, Reedy Creek and Tyaak.

They are already fighting around there with - well, they're saying that firefighting resources are currently fully committed. Residents are reminded they can't expect firefighting trucks to be in attendance if the fire front approaches their properties, and the Wallan Community Centre is the emergency relief centre in that area.

We've also got a fire, as we were discussing earlier, in Bendigo. That's the Bracewell fire. It's burning at the edge of Bendigo. It's involved at least 50 homes in the Long Gully and Sparrowhawk estate area. The progress of the fire front has been slowed within a perimeter along Marong Road, Eaglehawk Road, Bracewell Street and Upper California Gully Road. The fire is still burning inside that perimeter. Some homes to the north of Eaglehawk Road are still subject to ember attack.

Relief centres have been set up at Kangaroo Flat Senior Citizens Centre and the Eaglehawk Leisure Centre. There are, again, significant numbers of firefighters working on that fire and there are more tankers en route to - sorry, from Ballarat and Swan Hill. Gas and electricity to the area has been cut off to prevent leaks.

And just a quick road closure about that one - the area bounded by the Calder Highway, Bracewell Street and Upper California Gully Road are all closed. And emergency centres - as we said, the Kangaroo Flat Senior Citizens Centre and the Eaglehawk Leisure Centre in Napier Street. I'll have another update for you in around 15 minutes, Tim.

TIM COX: Thanks to Megan Flamer there. A big thunderstorm going through Balnarring on the Mornington Peninsula. Heavy rain, but lots of lightning. Let's get the latest on roads, et cetera. Mary-Jane Fenech.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you, Tim. EastLink between Cheltenham Road and Dandenong Southern Bypass in Dandenong has been closed as well as Burwood Highway between Glenfern Road and Dawson Road, Upper Ferntree Gully. Melba

Highway at Yarra Glen, the Maroondah Highway at Yarra Glen also between Taggerty and Healesville. Eltham Yarra Glen Road at Yarra Glen, MacIntyre Lane at Melba Highway, Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford, Glenelg Highway through Coleraine - local detours are in place - and the Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake.

Princes Highway west between Camperdown and Colac, Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite, Heathcote Kyneton Road 9 kilometres east of Lake Eppalock, and Western Highway between Stawell and Horsham. You'll also find in that area Henty Highway at Toolondo, Wimmera Highway at Natimuk, Horsham Drung South Road and the South Gippsland Highway between Sale and Foster, Princes Highway at Sale and Stratford and the Princes Freeway between Pakenham and Warragul.

TIM COX: Thank you. More from Mary-Jane in the next hour here on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio across Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster. The Premier, John Brumby, we understand will be joining us as well. It's 3 minutes to 11 now.

[10.57pm]

On the weather, here is David at Donald. David, hello.

CALLER DAVID: Oh, good evening, how are you going?

TIM COX: Look, fine.

CALLER DAVID: It's been a torrid day all round, but we've just experienced quite a weather change here in the last half hour. It's actually become quite overcast. We've had a reasonable amount of thunder and a bit of lightning, no rain whatsoever.

But for those who aren't sure, we're about 85, 90Ks west of Horsham and about 105, 110Ks east of Bendigo and sort of been stuck in the middle of it a bit, wondering which way things are going to go all day. But it's actually starting to - the wind's swung around now and it is a direct south-easterly. But it's just that thunder and lightning now that's becoming quite concerning. It's very dark out - oh, if you look out from Donald in the north-north-westerly direction, it's very, very dark and

quite a lot of lightning action around.

TIM COX: That's what you don't want. But, of course, look, the Weather Bureau radar, for what it's worth, shows some heavy rain activity around Bairnsdale, Sale, Traralgon, so around Gippsland, but I'm not sure just how much that's getting and what sort of lightning it's bringing with it, David.

CALLER DAVID: Yes. Probably one of our biggest problems is, I suppose, at the moment - well, a bonus to us, in a way, is that we're sort of situated north-central, north-western area of Victoria, but it's - just the whole weather's changed so quickly within the last half hour that, yes, it's just sort of very scary to know what's coming.

TIM COX: Yes, absolutely. So you've had your plan in place all day?

CALLER DAVID: Oh, certainly. We've been ready all day, yes. We've been - car loaded. You just never know. How quickly it moved south of Horsham today around to the eastern side of Horsham, around Dooen and that area - it could only be - you know, an hour, two hours at the most and it could have been here at Donald. So, yes, you just wouldn't know, so --

TIM COX: All right.

CALLER DAVID: It's something that's got to be in place all the time, I think, this time of the year.

TIM COX: Have you been in touch with other members of the community, your neighbours, that sort of thing?

CALLER DAVID: Well, we've spoken to a few of the neighbours. We had a fire truck leave here mid-afternoon and headed for Horsham, along with five or six others from surrounding districts, and, yes, hopefully they're all safe. I haven't heard anything back as yet, but hopefully they're all safe and sort of getting on top of what's going on in Horsham, anyway.

TIM COX: All right. Well, good luck to you, brother. Thanks for the call.

CALLER DAVID: No worries. Thank you.

TIM COX: All right. David there in Donald looking at lightning but at this stage not very much else, I'm afraid.

Again, the number you can call, the latest fire information from the CFA: 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667. Please stay listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Local Radio across Victoria.

In the next hour, further updates on fire situations, what will be happening on roads across the State. Hopefully, the Premier, John Brumby, as well. And, of course, you: 1300 222 774 the number you can call. What are you seeing? How ready are you? 1300 222 774 is the number you can call.

More from Tim Cox on ABC Local Radio after ABC News.

[11pm]

{Music}

MICHAELA CARR: ABC news with Michaela Carr. It's feared more than 40 people may have died in bushfires continuing to burn across much of Victoria. 14 deaths have been so far confirmed: six at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Strathewen and one at Clonbinane. Firefighters are continuing to work on 11 major firefronts across the state. Dozens of homes have been destroyed and it will be some time before the full extent of the losses is known. Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner, Kieran Walsh, says the death toll is almost certain to rise.

KIERAN WALSH: This has been an absolute tragedy for the state and we believe this figure may only get worse. We're concerned that this figure could even reach up into the 40s.

MICHAELA CARR: The number of homes destroyed during the Gippsland fires is also rising. Peta Carlyon explains.

PETA CARLYON: Rain is starting to fall across central Gippsland but it's having little effect on two enormous fires threatening dozens of communities. The CFA has described home losses from the Bunyip Ridge fires as significant and fires burning in the Latrobe Valley across

the Strzelecki Ranges and south towards Yarram have also destroyed homes. Steve in Callignee, south of Traralgon, says the fire ripped through properties half an hour ago.

CALLER STEVE: Unbelievable ferocity. Lost all our sheds and I would imagine our livestock. There are houses all around us and they just exploded.

PETA CARLYON: Strong winds are blowing thick smoke and ash across the region and authorities are warning residents to prepare for more ember attacks. Peta Carlyon, ABC News, Gippsland.

MICHAELA CARR: Firefighters in New South Wales are working to establish containment lines around a fire that's threatening homes at Peatsridge on the state's central coast. It's one of about 40 fires burning across the state.

And in Western Australia a large fire burning at Cape Naturalist in the state's south-west corner has been contained. The fire threatened a lighthouse, houses and property and caused the evacuation of a resort and several beaches.

[11.02pm]

The weather bureau says the flooded North Queensland town of Ingham may have to wait until Monday or Tuesday for a reprieve from heavy rain. Road closures throughout the region mean Ingham remains cut off, as does the town of Tulley further north. The Herbert River peaked at 12.25 m at Ingham for the second time this week. Forecaster Brian Rolleston says heavy rain is falling between Innisfail and Bowen and the system probably won't move south until Monday.

BRIAN ROLLESTON: By then the rain area will be probably just south of Townsville, maybe even south of Bowen by Tuesday, so the - through Ingham district there'll be an easing of the weather through Monday, Tuesday, then the rivers will start to - perhaps start to go down a bit.

MICHAELA CARR: About 50 people are staying at the evacuation centre in Ingham. Nic Lowe from the Red Cross says some of them have been living there for more than a week and many are worried about another flood peak.

NIC LOWE: I think it has added a - an extra level of tension about the place and a little bit of despair, you know at - when we had a heavy downpour yesterday, people were starting to think that, you know, maybe the level could drop and they could get home. They've now realised that they could be here for some time yet.

MICHAELA CARR: Senators in Washington say they've reached agreement on a huge economic stimulus package designed to revitalise the US economy. Senior Democrats say they will back a plan worth US$780 billion instead of the 900 billion sought by the President in order to gain vital republican support. The President, Barack Obama, has become angry with delays to the bill, which mixes big spending plans and tax cuts. The Senate is now due to hold a vote in the coming days. President Obama has spoken of an urgent and growing crisis and says further Senate delays will be inexcusable and irresponsible and lead to a catastrophe. His comments come as the latest unemployment figures show that the US had its single worse month for job losses since - in 35 years.

Sports news, and in soccer Melbourne Victory has defeated Adelaide United 2 nil in the first leg of the A-League major semifinal in Adelaide. Melbourne scored in the 14th and 89th minutes of the game.

In women's tennis Australia has won the final of the Asia Oceania Fed Cup group 1 playoff in Perth with a 3 rubbers to nil win over New Zealand. Jelena Dokic and Samantha Stosur clinched victory by winning their singles matches, then Casey Dellacqua and Renae Stubbs won the doubles. Dokic says it's been a great team spirit this week.

JELENA DOKIC: We're really trying to play well for the team and trying to do well for the team. We - we knew we had a chance this week and, you know, we just really - we really click, I think, well in the team atmosphere.

MICHAELA CARR: Australian cricket captain Ricky Ponting will play in tomorrow's 3rd one-day international against New Zealand at the SCG. He missed yesterday's loss to the Black Caps in Melbourne after national selectors decided to rest him for two matches. ABC News.

{Music}

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria. Your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

[11.05pm]

TIM COX: 5 past 11. G'day, Tim Cox with you through until 6 tomorrow morning and you'll be kept up-to-date right through the night and into the morning on developments across the state. From 6 tomorrow Tonya Roberts and then at 8 o'clock, after the 7.45 news, a special edition of AM for you and then Jon Faine in from 8.30. So right through the night and into tomorrow, well and truly into tomorrow, you will be kept in touch here on 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

With the latest on the fires Megan Flamer.

[11.05pm]

MEGAN FLAMER: Thanks, Tim. The Murrindindi Mill fire is now burning in a north-easterly direction. The communities of Taggerty, Acheron, Thornton, Rubicon, Snobs Creek, Eildon, Alexandra and Molesworth can expect thick - thick smoke and ember attack and all residents in these areas are advised to implement their fire plans immediately, if they haven't already done so, and to remain on high alert and they're also asking that you stay away from the Mount Despair State Forest.

There's an urgent threat message for Redesdale, the Coliban Park Road, Baynton and Glenhope. The grass fire that started 9 km west of Redesdale South at Lake Eppalock is estimated to be over 10,000 hectares in size. The fire has spread approximately 10 k's in a south-easterly direction, that's to Annex Lane, south of Sidonia. The eastern boundary is just west - that's approximately 2 k's west of Baynton. Residents of Glenhope will see the fire burning to the south and west of their township.

Residents of Baynton, Glenhope and in the vicinity of Franklins Road, Randalls Lane, Dead Dog Lane and Heathcote Springs Plain - Spring Plains Road, there we go, may be impacted directly by this fire and, as I said, it is now burning in a north-easterly direction. There are 235 CFA and DSA - DSE personnel there fighting that fire, including

43 tankers and three bulldozers, so that's certainly the one to watch at the moment and we'll keep you updated on that one. And Kilmore East fire is the other one, concerning the communities of Broadford, the grass and scrub fire is now burning fewer than 4 km south of Broadford, burning in a north-easterly direction also. It's estimated to be 30,000 hectares in size.

The communities in the area of Broadford are under direct threat of being impacted by this fire. It includes Broadford, Broadford East in the area of O'Grady's Road, south of Broadford, Broadford near Sunday Creek Road and Reedy Creek and Tyaak. And firefighting resources are currently fully committed. Residents are reminded they cannot expect firefighting trucks to be in attendance if the firefront approaches their properties but you can get more information at the emergency relief centre, which is located at the Wallan Community Centre and I'll have another update for you within 20 minutes. Thanks, Tim.

[11.08pm]

TIM COX: Thank you Megan Flamer. 8 minutes past 11. Wind picking up around Lilydale Coldstream we're told, but raining at Tallarook, lightening and thunder in Phillip Island, some rain too. So we're happy to have rain, obviously; you can keep your lightening, thank you very much.

[11.08pm]

On the roads now, Mary-Jane Fenech. Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Thank you, Tim. Now, this is the most up-to-date information that we have at this stage from VicRoads. East link is closed between Cheltenham and Dandenong Southern Bypass. Also Burwood Highway east-bound only between Glenfern Road and Dawson Road, Upper Ferntree Gully; the Melba Highway at Coldstream; Maroondah Highway at Coldstream; Melba Highway between Yea and Healesville-Kinglake Road; Maroondah Highway between Alexandra and Healesville; Eltham, Yarra Glen Road at Yarra Glen and MacIntyre Lane at Melba Highway. The Hume Freeway in both directions between Wallan and Broadford. That affects Heathcote, Kyneton Road, 9 km west of Lake Eppalock; Loddin Valley Highway, Eaglehawk Road between Marong and Holdsworth Road in Bendigo; Golden Square Long

Gully Road between Calder Highway, which is Marong Road; and Loddin Valley Highway. Heathcote, Kyneton Road at 9 km east of Lake Eppalock. Also, Buckland Gap Road between Beechworth and Great Alpine Road. That affects Healesville-Kinglake Road, Whittlesea-Kinglake Road and Whittlesea-Yea Road between Yea and Whittlesea.

Glenelg Highway through Coleraine, local detours are in place. That also affects Hamilton Highway east of Mortlake, Princes Highway west between Camperdown and Colac, and Foxhow Road at Lake Corangamite. The Western Highway at Grampians Road in Horsham affects Henty Highway at Toolonda; Wimmera Highway at Natimuk; and Horsham Drung South Road. Also the south Gippsland Highway is closed between Sale and Foster.

Also affected is the Princes Highway between Stammers Road Traralgon and Sale, Princes Freeway between Pakenham and Warragul , Highland Highway at Grand Ridge Road, Highland Highway at Traralgon Creek Road, Traralgon Creek Road at Traralgon, Boolarra-Churchill Road at Boolarra and Walhalla Road at Tyres-Thomson Valley Road.

Now, that is the most up-to-date information that we have from VicRoads on our road closures and we'll have some more information for you as soon as possible.

[11.10pm]

TIM COX: Terrific. Thank you. Mary-Jane Fenech there. At 10 past 11. 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC local radio, your emergency services broadcaster, reminding you that the fire information line is 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667.

Let's cross to Adam Dent, State Manager of Emergency Services with the Red Cross, whose people are working across the state and, of course, the Red Cross contactable on 1800 727 077. Adam, hello there.

ADAM DENT: Good evening Tim, how are you?

TIM COX: Look, okay. What - where is the area of greatest need or what are the areas of greatest need for your people at the moment?

ADAM DENT: At the moment our people are working hard right across the state in catering and looking after relief

centres. There's at least 18 across Victoria that our volunteers are currently working at looking after people, but one of the big areas for us is our State Inquiry Centre. The number you have just mentioned, 1800 727 077, which is a service available for people who are looking for people who may have been evacuated from, you know, the number of areas across Victoria. So if you're trying to find somebody, that's the number to call. Our volunteers are taking all the registrations from relief centres around the state and feeding them through our State Inquiry Centre.

TIM COX: How difficult is it for your - your people, Adam, and - and for you to provide information on certain areas of the state where telecommunications have been worst affected?

ADAM DENT: We have had some trouble, obviously, in particular parts of the state. Fortunately we've got some terrific technology that helps us to surpass some of that, so there are some areas where we are finding it hard to get hold of our information but it is coming through slowly, but in the main we are - we are getting our hands on the information.

TIM COX: All right. A couple of queries that have come through about what sort of relief is available for people being evacuated but endeavouring to take pets with them. What can you tell us there, Adam?

ADAM DENT: It will vary across the state from relief centre to relief centre. The best thing they can do is contact the information line you've mentioned earlier and find out what might be available to them, but certainly there'll be people at the relief centre who will do their utmost to - to help people, particularly with issues like pets and looking after children, of course, too, who'd be in - in a particularly difficult situation right now.

TIM COX: Do you have enough of what you need?

ADAM DENT: For us at the moment we're certainly very stretched, just like everybody else, and certainly the fire organisations are, but we are getting by, we've still got a little bit of capacity left, so we'll continue doing what we can.

TIM COX: Are you expecting to have to put the call out for more tomorrow?

ADAM DENT: We'll - yeah, we're certainly expecting our volunteers to be working through the night tonight and all day tomorrow and obviously right through next week.

TIM COX: All right. Are you able to just recap for us, Adam, where your - where evacuees are being taken for assistance from the Red Cross?

ADAM DENT: The relief centres are all across the state. There's probably too - too many to mention --

TIM COX: Okay.

ADAM DENT: -- right now. You've mentioned some of them earlier, so those relief centres are in each municipality that has been impacted by fire at the moment. The bushfire information line will be able to direct you to that and the State Inquiry Centre, which is looking after reconnecting people, is 1800 727 077.

TIM COX: All right. That's worth repeating: 1800 727 077. Adam, thank you for that.

ADAM DENT: My pleasure, thank you.

[11.14pm]

TIM COX: Adam Dent there, the Red Cross Manager of Emergency Services for Victoria at 14 past 11.

Just repeating, the main head line news in this, that Victoria Police confirm 14 deaths in the wake of today's fires but fear the toll could rise as high as 40 once fire investigators are able to get into some of the areas that are most affected and most isolated. Kieran Walsh said earlier:

> Based on the fact that we're only just getting into areas, these have been very significant fires. Our concern is that it can get worse.

The news will continue through the night. The deaths were at Kinglake, Wandong, Strathewen and at Clonbinane and I'm

not sure what further information will come on other deaths through the night but you'll hear it here when that news does occur.

[11.14pm]

A couple of questions about power outages and, of course, there was specific concern about the Beechworth Hospital, which lost its power supply and was not able to get the backup going. Hugo Armstrong from CitiPower is on the phone. Now, Hugo Armstrong, hello.

[11.15pm]

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Hello, Tim.

TIM COX: Are you able to stretch as far as Beechworth?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Unfortunately we're not. That's - SPLS runs the network, the distribution network in that area, so I can't give you an update on that situation, although from what I understand the power was off and the - and the local generation was holding, it's just a matter of whether it was continuing to do so but I don't have an update on that, I'm afraid, Tim.

TIM COX: Okay, we'll have that in a moment. Sorry, go ahead.

HUGO ARMSTRONG: That's all right.

TIM COX: How are you going in your part of the state?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Well, the very best news is that in CitiPower - the CitiPower network in the inner suburbs of Melbourne is virtually no customers off but that would - wouldn't be entirely a surprise. The power core area, which is the outer western suburbs of Melbourne and all of western Victoria and the northern part of Victoria, we're down to about 7,000 customers off supply now. The two major areas that people are off are in the - still in the Horsham area, where we have about 4,000 customers off, and that area - our work today has been hampered by those fires that have really burnt on three sides of Horsham - the south, the west, and the east - but we do believe we'll have half of those customers back on overnight. There's - most of the work that's going on at the moment is just

replacing poles, basically, which were burnt or destroyed during the - during the fires and as we get those pole lines and those high-voltage lines established, then we'll get the bulk of those customers back on but there will be more going into tomorrow and we've said this earlier on this evening, Tim, but isolated customers, where they're off or just a handful of customers, regrettably those customers - you know, we have to deal with the big faults first, so some of those customers may take us tomorrow, conceivably into Monday to do all the mopping up because as other authorities have reported, we're still just - we're not fully on top of the damage that's been done. We're doing what we can.

The other area is Bendigo. We had about 9,000 customers off there early this evening as a result of the fire that was burning in the town there. We're down to about 1500 in Bendigo but we have to say if you're off - if you're off power in Bendigo now, you're not likely to be back on before tomorrow because again it's just difficulties with access and being able to get in and do - do what you can in safe conditions. So we'll be out there early tomorrow morning to - to review the situation and to get in there but if people are off supply now, make alternative arrangements and please be patient tomorrow. Perhaps if you're not back on by tomorrow afternoon, then give us a call.

TIM COX: Are you finding, Hugo, that people are, given the extraordinary circumstances and the remarkable conditions, being patient and being understanding?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Oh, I - I certainly think that's the case and, I mean, I have to say that having services like ABC Radio broadcasting is allowing people to get information. Obviously this afternoon, when it was, you know, 45 or 47 degrees in some places and people were off supply for a few hours, it gets a bit harder to be understanding then and that's - we understand certainly the lack of understanding, if I can get a bit tortured there, but, yeah, look, I think everybody knows how bad the situation is. The conditions are extreme, we've all experienced that virtually without exception around Victoria, and the sad truth is that, you know, no matter how uncomfortable we feel, there are people who've suffered a great deal worse and, you know, some of the news bulletins that you have run tonight have just been

absolutely tragic and I think we all - all Victorians understand that and everyone is doing what they can.

TIM COX: Indeed. A final question from Stuart, in fact, on the infrastructure, the main powerlines that - that carry electricity into Melbourne.

[11.18pm]

There was some concern around fires there. What - what are you - what are you aware of in that regard?

HUGO ARMSTRONG: Well, there's a - I think the - my impression, and this is only an impression, is that there are still issues to do with some of the fires at Bunyip and some of the fires around the Latrobe Valley. The good thing, of course, is that the demand for power has gone down significantly, not just because it's got cooler but also because it's got - it's night-time, so many things are shutting down. So what that means is the power that's needed - there's enough power, even with the fewer - the transmission lines being curtailed, to meet that need. So my understanding from NEMMCO is that there's certainly no expectation there'll be any kind of major switch-offs or things like that, which is what happens sometimes when the demand far exceeds the supply of power and with tomorrow being cooler, it should be all right but we all have these difficulties of more localised outages with fire and I'd be loath to try and predict what will happen with a fire. There's always a chance that, you know, it could get into the transmission or - into the transmission lines, it's been burning around the easements and there's some possibility tomorrow, I guess, that that might come back but in a sense it's good that this is - if this is ever going to happen, that it's happened on a Saturday and into a Sunday when industry and schools and things like that are not on and we've got an extra day to try and, you know, mop up and get things organised.

TIM COX: Small mercies, Hugo. Thank you for that. Hugo Armstrong there from CitiPower.

Off to SP Ausnet and in particular, of course, concerns about electricity supply to the Beechworth Hospital. Louisa Graham, hello there.

LOUISA GRAHAM: Good evening, Tim.

TIM COX: Let's start with Beechworth. What's the latest on the power supply to the hospital?

LOUISA GRAHAM: Sure. Look, the fire in that area has affected the infrastructure into the township at this point in time, that's all we can gauge at the moment. So the township is actually without power and that includes the hospital. In working closely with the fire agencies it is unsafe for our crews to be able to get in there at the moment and investigate the extent of the damage and also to get in there and to restore power, so at this stage of the evening we will be sending our - monitoring closely with fire crews and sending crews in at first light to see that it's safe for them to go in there and start to reconstruct any damaged infrastructure that we've seen.

TIM COX: Right. The - what we heard earlier was that they'd not been able to get the backup power supply generators going at the hospital. Do you know if that's changed?

LOUISA GRAHAM: Look, at this stage I'm not sure. I - maybe our control room has been in contact with the hospital but I'm not sure of - of the situation there, however, I do know that the main supply heading into the town has (Inaudible) by the fire, so that's what's preventing us from getting power back on up there at the moment.

TIM COX: Okay. So what about in the wider SP Ausnet network?

LOUISA GRAHAM: Sure. Look, we've also had a very similar experience to power core, where we've had a lot of fires affecting powerlines and power supplies, particularly up in that - that north-eastern area in that Wandong fires, Kilmore, et cetera, that's affected powers - power supply way up to Seymour, Yea, Alexandra areas as well. We still have around about 15,000 homes that are without power at this point in time, due to those fires. We're trying to isolate townships and get them back on as we can but, again, because it's just too - it's not safe for our crews to be able to go in there at this point in time due to the fires, so again waiting for first light to get the okay from fire agencies to be able to go in there and start to reconstruct, if we need to, or reconnect. So people that

are without power in those areas will probably still remain without power for tonight and hopefully the crews will be able to get in there tomorrow morning, if it's safe, and be able to reconstruct any damage that we've come across due to the fires.

TIM COX: Louisa, for a - an infrastructure provider like your organisation, how many of your crews would, in fact, rather be or need to be at home making preparations, fighting fires and instead are out doing what they can to restore electricity?

LOUISA GRAHAM: Yeah, look, we have a lot of regional workers and I understand that a lot of people do live in the areas that are affected by fires. Obviously we make provisions for that. We also have volunteers that are part of the CFA as well and make provisions for that too. However, we are in an emergency situation, we've resourced up, we have people from all different areas of the business working to - even in the emergency, so people from perhaps your nontypical operational fields, such as finance and HR, all hands on deck helping us to manage the emergency as much as we can. We do a lot of training in that area, so people that are from non-operational backgrounds can actually get in there and help when needed. So we're on full emergency alert, we have everyone working as much as they can to help us keep on top of the information, keep on top of what we need as far as logistics and - and equipment to make sure we can get in there and - and rebuild and reconstruct powerlines and the other infrastructure that's damaged by fire as soon as we can.

[11.23pm]

TIM COX: Thank you for that. Louisa Graham there from SP Ausnet. Before we go to the Bureau of Meteorology, we go to Jemina Energy covering Melbourne. Scott Parker, g'day.

SCOTT PARKER: Good evening, Tim.

TIM COX: All right, what's it like for you?

SCOTT PARKER: Well, Tim, we - we're a distribution company that manages two networks in Melbourne and down to the Mornington Peninsula in one case, so our customers have been relatively free of the major outage problems

throughout Victoria today. Nevertheless, we've currently got 3,800 customers without supply and that's been caused with a combination of heat-related and vegetation-sourced faults; other words, trees or tree branches with the wind this afternoon falling on parts of our network, but we're pretty - pretty confident that overnight and certainly by midday tomorrow those 3,800 currently without supply will have supply returned.

TIM COX: So you're optimistic that it - it won't get worse than it has been already?

SCOTT PARKER: We've been pretty lucky post the 6 o'clock weather change that didn't come with the expected winds.

[11.25pm]

The - the problem that we may still have is, um, pole fires throughout the metropolitan area, so that's, you know, light showers that fall on very dusty, um, timber and metal parts of the - the network and that's been a problem for us post last week's events and so we're very much planning for some more of those to occur overnight and certainly tomorrow as things heat up, albeit not as bad as things were today.

[11.25pm]

So - but we've got all crew available, so we maintain that until at least Sunday evening. We've doubled our manpower in the call centre to ensure people get as much information as possible and for us - our head office is to some extent all hands on deck too as we get out there and make sure that the crew that we have in these extraordinary circumstances are kept safe and well hydrated and so forth --

TIM COX: Mmm, mmm.

SCOTT PARKER: -- so they continue to minimise the inconvenience for people.

TIM COX: Are you able - are you watching as well those - those fires around Bunyip and beyond that have been causing concerns for the - the - the main lines from the - the Latrobe Valley?

SCOTT PARKER: Oh, certainly, yes. Our emergency management team are well and truly aware of the - the issues there, have been all day and are planning on an eventuality that means transmission may be cut, which would affect our distribution network, so, yes, our planning very much does include the worse-case scenarios out of those fires and particularly Bunyip.

[11.26pm]

TIM COX: Now, can you tell me, Bob from Mitcham wanted a power outage from you. Can you tell me if Bob's still got the power.

SCOTT PARKER: Bob from Mitcham?

TIM COX: Yep.

SCOTT PARKER: Um, I --

TIM COX: Just Bob's place.

SCOTT PARKER: (Laughter).

TIM COX: Never mind, Scott --

SCOTT PARKER: (Inaudible) off guard.

TIM COX: -- thank you for that.

SCOTT PARKER: Thank you. Thank you.

[11.27pm]

TIM COX: (Laughter). Okay, mate. It's - Scott Parker there from Jemina Energy and at 27 minutes past 11 a reminder of a couple of numbers that you may need through the night. The fire information line is 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667. The number for the Red Cross at State Inquiry Centre as it's running relief centres across the state for evacuated Victorians is 1800 727 077. 1800 727 077. And the number you can call for ABC local radio across Victoria, 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster: 1300 222 93 - 1300 222 774.

{Music}

MALE SPEAKER: I've been involved in firefighting for nearly 30 years but I've never seen a weather forecast as extreme as this one.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Victoria's fire, weather and health services are warning that special care must be taken across the state in the next few days, with temperatures set to soar and bushland and private property being extremely dry. Keep listening to your local ABC station for specific updates in your area. ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster.

TIM COX: Tim Cox with you on this Saturday night. Also our program going to ABC News Radio in the wake of the remarkable fires through Victoria today, where it's feared more than 40 people may have died in fires continuing across much of the - the country part of the state. 14 deaths so far confirmed: six at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Stratewen and one at Clonbinane and firefighters are still working on almost a dozen major firefronts across the state.

[11.28pm]

Through the rest of tonight, so the next half hour or so and well and truly into the morning, we will keep you abreast of developments as they occur. The emergency information you require will be broadcast here on ABC local radio, your emergency services broadcaster. At the Bureau of Meteorology, Dean Stewart. Dean, hello there.

DEAN STEWART: Good evening, Tim.

TIM COX: Dean, a very good evening to you. We've had reports of some rain but sadly of a lot of lightening. What are you seeing?

[11.29pm]

DEAN STEWART: Yes, well, on the radar we - we've continued to see a line of - of rainfall echos extend from - at the moment it's probably from the Yea area down towards Sale and there has been some lightening strokes along that line. A lot of it's - it's complicated by the fact that you've got this heat source underneath, being the fires, so they're providing the extra lift and the moisture from the vegetation as well. Even though it is still very

dry, there's still some moisture and that's enough to give it that extra bit of lift and instability and hence the further lightening strikes.

There has been the odd one or two elsewhere but generally a lot have been out through the Gippsland and around the Marysville area as well. Rainfall totals haven't been all that high. The highest is hill on Gippsland called Murderer's Hill, 7.6 mm being the highest.

[11.30pm]

Mount Baw Baw around 6 mm and then once you go past those, falls of just 1 or 2 mm. So unfortunately not much rainfall with them but, as you say, there's been quite a few strikes.

TIM COX: What's the relative humidity doing because whether there is rain or not, the relative humidity is a very big factor for those fighting these fires.

DEAN STEWART: Well, look, it is - it is increasing over southern Victoria. Unfortunately up in the north-east still very hot and dry conditions up in that north-east corner of the state. The change is currently just past Wangaratta. It is slowly working its way up into the north-east, although I think what's likely to happen is it'll probably weaken out completely in the early hours of the morning and then eventually pushing through that north-east corner during the day tomorrow during the latter part of the morning. But over southern Victoria the humidity's come up quite markedly. Around the Melbourne area, for instance, the humidity's up around 80 per cent. So that will provide some assistance. The fire activity tends to be subdued as the humidity increases but we can do with more of the rainfall, that would certainly help, but unfortunately there's not a lot of that in - in sight at the moment.

TIM COX: Of course, Dean, some of these firefronts will be burning for some days, so can you give us a bit of a picture perhaps as to what you're looking at Monday into Tuesday?

DEAN STEWART: Yes. Well, well, firstly for tomorrow the isolated shower and thunderstorm activity is still expected over a fair portion of the state. It will gradually

contract northwards and eventually clearing out of the north-east during Monday and then on - over the early part of next week, Tuesday, Wednesday and even into Thursday, there'll just be some isolated shower activity over southern Victoria but up north of the divide it basically looks like a dry period right the way through.

Importantly - well, it's - it's some importance: the temperatures over northern Victoria will actually fall away during the week, so we're looking at temperatures back to the high 20s over northern Victoria by Tuesday and mid to high 20s Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, across northern Victoria and around 20 degrees over southern Victoria. So a substantially cooler period coming up but still the south-westerly winds will be moderate to fresh at times, so it's still going to be a little bit windy and, of course, without the rainfall to put the fires out I think we'll still have some concerns.

TIM COX: All right, Dean. More from you perhaps in - in another couple of hours time. Thanks so much for that.

DEAN STEWART: Okay, thanks, Tim.

TIM COX: Dean Stewart there at the Bureau of Meteorology in Melbourne.

[11.32pm]

It's 28 minutes to 12. Now, that's in - in Victoria because we now welcome listeners across the nation and beyond online at ABC News Radio. You're listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC local radio throughout Victoria. Tim Cox with you until breakfast as your emergency services broadcaster keeps you abreast of developments in the state where 14 deaths have been confirmed following the bushfires today, about a dozen firefronts - large firefronts still being fought and many smaller ones as well, and the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby has, in fact, we understand, been, well, manning the tools today. He's at the staging centre in Bendigo and with me now. John Brumby, a very good evening to you.

PREMIER BRUMBY: Yeah, good evening, Tim.

TIM COX: Look, I - I don't really know where to start here. I've got a text that's just come in from a listener

to say:

> My mum just went to Whittlesea Showgrounds to help and spoke to a couple who've lost their two children.

Where does Victoria go now, John Brumby?

PREMIER BRUMBY: Oh, well, I think we've had 14 confirmed deaths, as you know, and I think that number will get higher. My own look climatically has been the worst day in our history and our hearts go out to - to family, to friends, to relatives, to all of those who've lost family, to those who've been injured, to those who've lost property and our hearts go out. We hope and pray for them and support them and I think at a time like this there'll be a lot of - there'll be a lot of grief and I think it's so important for those families to know that the thoughts of all Victorians are with them and I'm in Bendigo at the moment at the staging post here. There's hundreds of people still out, there's about a hundred that have just come in the changeover.

TIM COX: How are they looking, Premier?

PREMIER BRUMBY: They're looking hot and frazzled, you know. You just - people have never seen conditions like this before. These are - these are seasoned volunteers, they have been out plenty of times and the guys from DSE and you know, you've had temperatures across some parts of the state today that hit 47 and 48 degrees with blistering northerlies and it's just been a devastating day and there have been some casualties here, I've been advised of that, and they'll be officially released in the near future. So unfortunately we're going to see more casualties tomorrow.

I don't think - you know, I've been briefed on the operations here, I've obviously been on the phone and - all day with the emergency centre and emergency services coordinator and kept abreast of everything across the state all day. I don't think there's anything more that could have been done today. You know, we all said on Friday and I said on Friday that Saturday was going to be probably the worse day climatic in our history. If you don't need to be out, don't be out, don't travel, don't go out, keep cool at home, and it was an horrific day. It's - it's - if anything it was worse than predicted. Something like 400

fire events across the state. They were hit early, they were hit hard but some of these just weren't possible to control and the - you know, the one here in Bendigo is a classic example. It just - you know, it doubled back when the wind changed and headed straight for the - straight for the, the city and it was only the work of hundreds of firefighters, DSE, CFA volunteers and others that got the containment lines in place, people throughout the region, virtually the whole of the north-west of the state's been here in Bendigo --

TIM COX: Mmm.

PREMIER BRUMBY: -- that stopped this from being an unbelievable tragedy, where you literally would have had hundreds of houses in the built-up area of Bendigo just gone.

So, I'll be out tomorrow at Kinglake, Pakenham, we'll have ministers out in every site across the state. We've activated emergency relief, the grants are available, there are DH centres - DHS centres being set up but it's just - it's just a day that I hope in my lifetime I never see repeated.

TIM COX: Can you just confirm, Premier, that there have been deaths in the fires around Bendigo as well?

PREMIER BRUMBY: There'll be official announcements about that but there have been casualties and the process here is that Victoria Police announces those but I've been briefed here tonight, there have been casualties here. I think the number of deaths and casualties across the state, I regret to say, will increase tomorrow and there are a number of burns victims being treated at the Alfred. I think the Minister for Health will be there tomorrow.

Again, you had, apart from obviously civilians and many, you know, people just trying to escape the fires, they moved so quickly with such ferocity and you've had firefighters that, you know, were literally facing flames that were four storeys, high. My - my own parents live at Coleraine in western Victoria and you might know one of the fires there today was out of control, and that was an intense few hours for me. I wasn't - I was too far away to get there, four hours away. Dad's in his early 80s and mum a bit younger, but we wouldn't get them on the mobile, we

couldn't get them at home. Power had gone out, no-one knew where they were and thankfully they were - they were safe. A fire across the road in four areas there and threatened - threatened their property and threatened them but, again, the CFA and DSE guys were just - just magnificent and they have been in so many spots across the state.

TIM COX: You're listening to John Brumby, The Premier of Victoria on ABC local radio through Victoria. 774 ABC Melbourne and on ABC News Radio carrying continuous rolling coverage of the bushfires in Victoria.

Premier, have you given very much thought to declaring a state of emergency in the wake of today and with what's to come.

PREMIER BRUMBY: Well, look, there are - there are powers to do that but - but those powers would - would only be utilised if the - the systems and arrangements that were planned to be put in place weren't working and the fact is across the state today they've been - they've been working and it's a day which is - it's not just a one in a hundred year event, you know. This might end up being a one in a thousand year event. It's just so far out of the ordinary and, as I said, worse than Ash Wednesday, worse than Black Friday in terms of climatic conditions. So those powers are available but they would only be used if - if the systems in place had failed to work and in all areas today, whether you're talking about the trunk power supplies, the firefighting effort, the SES, everybody did their job according to their plan, and that's not to say that when we review this in the future that there may not be things that could be improved. I'm sure there will be; there are after all of these major incidents but, I mean, you know, I'm here at the staging post, so the fire that started here today in Bendigo less than 12 hours ago, they've assembled here a team of 400 to 500 people. I have been at the incident centre. They've got 200 people out. All of the volunteers - by the way, ABC Radio is - is pouring out there in the background, the Red Cross is there, the CFA, you know, Country Women's have been out but, you know, SES volunteers as trees have fallen across roads and so on, so - I have been talking to the guys and girls here, like, you know, the systems have worked, we just had an horrific day. So at this stage there is no plan to call emergency powers but I will be out tomorrow and I will be looking, obviously, at some areas of the

state that have even been worse hit but I'll obviously speak to you again tomorrow about that.

TIM COX: All right. Appreciate your time, Premier John Brumby and glad to hear that your parents are getting through okay.

PREMIER BRUMBY: Terrific, thanks Tim.

TIM COX: Thank you. John Brumby, the Premier of Victoria on 774 ABC Melbourne, ABC local radio through Victoria and ABC News Radio giving you continuous rolling coverage of the bushfire situation in Victoria. For fire information: 1800 240 667. Write it down. If you're in an area where you're going to need it, write it down. Write it on your arm so you've got it with you: 1800 240 667.

The Red Cross, as the Premier said, is providing the sort of evacuation support that is impossibly vital at this time: 1800 727 077. 1800 727 077.

{Music}

FEMALE SPEAKER: 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services network. Bushfire information.

[11.42pm]

TIM COX: Let's get the very latest bushfire information now. Here's Megan Flamer.

[11.42pm]

MEGAN FLAMER: Thanks, Tim. The Bunyip Ridge fire north of Drouin is burning in a north-easterly direction due to a recent wind change. The towns of Tarago, Jindivick West, Jindivick North, Neerim, Neerim South, Neerim East are experiencing ember attack and heavy smoke. Visitors are advised to stay away from the following areas: Bunyip State Park, Kurth Kiln Regional Park, Tarago Forest and surrounding areas. Emergency relief centres there are located at Warragul Leisure Centre and the Cardinia Cultural Centre and unfortunately they're letting us know there's no accommodation for pets there.

There's also an urgent threat message for the Bracewell fire in Bendigo. That's burning at the edge of Bendigo. A

number of houses have already been damaged in the Long Gully and Sparrowhawk Estate area. The progress of the firefront has been largely contained within a perimeter along Marong Road, Eaglehawk Road, Bracewell Street and Upper California Gully Road. The fire is still burning inside that perimeter, though. Some fires to the north of Eaglehawk Road are still subject to ember attack.

Relief centres have been set up at Kangaroo Flat Senior Citizen's Centre and we did have an address for that, I'll give that to you in just a moment, and the Eaglehawk Leisure Centre as well. There are a significant number of firefighters working on that scene, including tanker crews from Ballarat and Swan Hill. Gas and electricity to the area have been cut off to prevent leaks and, as you were just talking to Premier John Brumby, he has arrived. He's received a briefing on the current situation from the incident controller.

There's also an urgent threat message for Beechworth, that's at Barwidgee Creek, Mudgegonga, Rosewhite, Murmungee and Carrolls Road. A fire's burning 4 km south of Beechworth and it's moving in a south-easterly direction. The fire is spotting well ahead of the fire, in some cases as much as 4 km ahead. The communities of Barwidgee Creek, Mudgegonga, Rosewhite, Murmungee and residents along Carrolls Road should prepare to be directly impacted by this fire.

And a change in wind direction later on tonight could push the fire north-east towards Stanley, Yackandandah and Bruarong. Residents of those three towns should remain on high alert for ember attacks as well. A strike team from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service has been dispatched to Beechworth to assist with asset protection.

And I can tell you, the latest on the Murrindindi fire: continues to burn in a north-easterly direction but there's been an update from the DSE on the Maryville - Marysville township. The DSE understands that everyone's safe in Marysville and they're assembled at Gallipoli Park. So just repeating that: the DSE understands that everyone is safe in Marysville and they're all assembled at Gallipoli Park. There are reports that a number of houses have been burnt but stay tuned to ABC Radio as further details come to hand.

[11.45pm]

You can also log on to cfa.vic.gov.au or abc.net.au/news for all the latest fire threats and keep listening to 774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Victoria, your emergency services broadcaster. Thanks, Tim.

TIM COX: Thank you, Megan Flamer. Also we are going out tonight and into tomorrow morning, which is not very far away, on ABC News Radio. The Mount Alexander Shire has told us that the Castlemaine Relief Centre is now closed because they have accommodated all the people who were there, so a little good news there.

[11.45pm]

At a quarter to 12 in Melbourne and the latest news, just to touch on again what the Premier and I were discussing a moment ago: that 40 people may have been killed in the bushfires across the state today, 14 so far confirmed and the Premier, without giving anything away, also saying that there will be casualties from the fires around Bendigo.

More on the roads in just a moment but first of all on 1300 222 774 here's Denise at Kinglake. Hello Denise.

CALLER DENISE: Hi, how are you?

TIM COX: I'm okay, how are you?

CALLER DENISE: Um, not too bad, thank you.

TIM COX: I can hear it, Denise. Tell me what - what sort of day you've had.

CALLER DENISE: Ooh, very scarey day, actually. Very scarey day. It's been something I don't ever want to experience again.

TIM COX: Tell me what happened.

CALLER DENISE: Well, I came up to my mother-in-law's, actually, to pick my son up, he does horseriding up here, and we stayed for a couple of hours. It was nice and clear when we came, nothing, no sign of fire or anything and then when I went to leave I got down the end to - end of the mountain, where you either turn left to Whittlesea or right

to Yea and the roads were on fire, so we were told to just go back. Got back here to my mother-in-law's and within 15 minutes the place was ablaze.

TIM COX: Wow.

CALLER DENISE: So we were quite lucky, actually.

TIM COX: That's how quickly it happens.

CALLER DENISE: Yep.

TIM COX: It sounds as though it's still quite windy there.

CALLER DENISE: It is. It's picked up again. It did quieten down for maybe half an hour or so, but now it's - it's picking up again now --

TIM COX: All right. Has it cooled down very much?

CALLER DENISE: Just starting to now with that breeze that's picking up now. We had a little bit of rain, about five minutes or so, but there were a lot of fires, we're just surrounded by fire.

TIM COX: How's your son? What's it been like for him?

CALLER DENISE: He's been pretty scared but I've kept him inside mostly all night and just told him that "It's okay, he'll be fine", so that's all I can do, really, but we're just keeping an eye out for - there's a lot of embers blowing around and things like that but the whole - everything around us is just burning. There's just trees are burning, things are blowing up and a lot of houses burnt to the ground. A lot of houses burnt to the ground. Apparently the whole town is gone, so it's pretty devastating, actually. So --

TIM COX: All right. Well, it looks, Denise, as though you and I will be enjoying each other's company through the wee small hours.

CALLER DENISE: Yes, I think so.

TIM COX: All the best to you. Thank you so much for the call.

CALLER DENISE: Okay, thank you.

TIM COX: Good luck, thank you.

CALLER DENISE: Bye bye.

TIM COX: Dianna's at Kilmore as well. Dianna, hi.

CALLER DIANNA: G'day, Tim.

TIM COX: How are you going?

CALLER DIANNA: Yeah, I'm - I'm here to tell you that I've got a couple of heros in my life today.

TIM COX: Let's hear them. Let's have some good news.

CALLER DIANNA: My husband Graham our son Benjamin, they told me to evacuate with the dog. Well, I'm here in Kilmore with the dog at our business and I left them there, they were going to take chooks because we needed to evacuate chooks. Well, the chooks came into Kilmore but my husband didn't, so my son went back to the property and as soon as he got back there they were just inundated and our house is the only house standing anywhere at the base of the Spur Road at Clonbinane and everything else around us is just gone. The whole lot. I don't - I haven't seen it. I'm sort of steeling myself to think that I will have to go there in the morning.

TIM COX: What were you able to take with you?

CALLER DIANNA: I've got a car with clothes and bits and pieces. Some of my most precious artwork and I have all the old videos and - of the children growing up. That's the most important thing.

TIM COX: Mmm.

CALLER DIANNA: They're the few things I've got. My husband's car is also full with stuff but it's obviously at the property. I presume that the car is okay. The two boys basically fought the fire on their own. Fortunately we have very good water pressure, town water pressure, so they were able to fight with three of our own hoses and our other son had had it totally set up so that we were - we

were really quite safe --

TIM COX: Gee.

CALLER DIANNA: -- for fire but you just - I mean, it's like - being there earlier, because my husband was here at work and I went home and I'm watching, you know, like, way, way up in the sky you can't believe that there's these flames mega, mega far in the distance but way up in the sky, and they're - they're just fireballs. It was incredible and we felt safe all afternoon because it was all heading on the northerly. We were above that. It was all to the south of us.

TIM COX: And that's how quickly it can change.

CALLER DIANNA: And within moments my friend - my friend was in our driveway and she said "Our house has burned down". She's - she's one of our staff. Her house had burned down, just as the crow would fly 2 km south of us, and it just - from there it went crazy. It just was chaos but there's not a house standing around ours and we're there and I've got two heros in my life and I can't even get to them and thank them.

TIM COX: All right.

CALLER DIANNA: So, mmm. Tomorrow.

TIM COX: Dianna, look, I'm so happy to hear your good news on such a --

CALLER DIANNA: Thank you.

TIM COX: -- such a grim day and good luck to you and congratulations to husband Graham and son Benjamin.

CALLER DIANNA: Thank you. And thank you so much to the ABC. Having you there has been sensational.

TIM COX: Thanks Dianna.

CALLER DIANNA: Thank you very, very much.

TIM COX: Thank you very much.

CALLER DIANNA: Bye now.

TIM COX: All right. Just before a call of the traffic with Mary-Jane Fenech, John Deering is the incident controller of the Redesdale fire. John Deering, good evening to you.

JOHN DEERING: Tim, yeah, how are you going?

TIM COX: Fine, thanks. John Brumby was appraising us a little earlier or just how quickly the situation changed there.

[11.52pm]

What can you tell us at 8 minutes to 12?

JOHN DEERING: We've - we can't say we've contained the fire, it's still listed as going, but we're satisfied that the flare-up areas are only small and we've got processes in place. One area is difficult, fires spotted over road and is in very difficult country which we're very reluctant to do much about tonight, just in terms of crew safety, but it's not threatening any assets, but the main part of the fire --

TIM COX: So is that in open country, or --

JOHN DEERING: No, no, it's quite rocky country. Part of the country called McHarg's Range and it's quite difficult country. The fire's sort of - I guess the word's stooging around in there with the light weather conditions. The main bulk of the fire - and this fire is over 10,000 hectares tonight at the moment - is - it's not spreading. We wouldn't say contained but it's - we're confident that we'll be able to perform that probably within the next hour.

TIM COX: All right. The Premier hinted at, but more than hinted at, a fairly serious concern for casualties around the Bendigo area today. Are you able to tell us anything along those lines, John?

JOHN DEERING: Look, I - I haven't been across the Bendigo fire. Even though we're in Bendigo our focus has been on the Redesdale fire and that Bendigo one started secondly. Of course I've got a - little bits and pieces of information that's come through our office door but our

second incident control centre is - is looking after that, so they will have the details and my understanding is Premier Brumby is actually out there now.

TIM COX: John Deering, are you optimistic that you have the crews - fresh enough crews you need to - to contain what's - what's the greatest concern of the fire there at Redesdale?

JOHN DEERING: Yeah. We - we're comfortable that overnight we will contain this fire and there - will have crews on it for the next day or so should bring this under control, which I think is a good news story. It's probably one of the few fires in the state that we could say that for.

TIM COX: Give it hell, John. Thanks so much.

JOHN DEERING: Okay, thank you, Tim.

TIM COX: John Deering there, incident controller at the Redesdale fire near Bendigo and a little bit of optimism there.

[11.53pm]

Let's get the latest on traffic and the roads with Mary-Jane Fenech. Mary-Jane.

MARY-JANE FENECH: Hello, Tim. Well, the latest that we have at the moment is that MacIntyre Lane at Melba Highway has actually reopened, so that means that you can actually get into Yarra Glen. I'm trying to get as much current information on our roads for you, guys, as - aspossible.

Also with our train services, I have been told by V/Line the Warrnambool line will not return to service until Monday at the absolute earliest, at least over - at least, sorry, 2,000 sleepers have been burned and Gippsland and Seymour lines will be closed until midday tomorrow at the earliest, could be longer, as they have not been able to assess the damage. V/Line cannot run any bus services to Gippsland, so cancel any plans that you had, pretty much, to Gippsland.

[11.54pm]

Seymour will have some buses and we hopefully will have - however, they have been told that with the Broadford fires this may change pretty quickly as well. We'll have more up-to-date information for you I reckon in the next 20 minutes.

TIM COX: Thank you very much. Mary-Jane Fenech there.

[11.54pm]

Tim Cox with you on 774 ABC Melbourne, ABC local radio across Victoria and on ABC News Radio with continuous rolling coverage of the Victorian bushfires which have claimed more than a dozen lives today. 14 confirmed: six at Kinglake, four at Wandong, three at Strathewen and one at Clonbinane. And the fear is that the number will rise as high as 40 as the full scale and the full extent of the damage and destruction is confirmed.

Now, what will occur, certainly for ABC local radio listeners over the coming hours, is that we will remain here, providing you with the information you need as you go through the night. If you can't wait for an update here, the fire information line is 1800 240 667. 1800 240 667. And with so many evacuations taking place across the state, the last we heard was that there were 11 major firefronts across the state and of course there are many other smaller ones as well but a dozen or so major fires. And some good news there from a fire at - the fire near Bendigo, that they will have it under control through the night, they believe. So that's some good news.

The Red Cross in charge of coordinating evacuations and caring for those who have been evacuated, if you are curious or anxious, I should say, about the welfare of your friends or relatives who have likely been evacuated from the affected areas, the number you can call for the Red Cross is 1800 727 077. 1800 727 077. Again, the bushfire information line is 1800 240 667 but, as I'm sure you understand, given the nature of what's occurred today, it is being absolutely bombarded and they are experiencing very heavy traffic and some delays there but the number is 1800 240 667.

[11.56pm]

The number you can call for ABC local radio: 1300 222 774.

1300 222 774. And the Whittlesea Country Music Festival has been cancelled. Campers were - two a man - safely evacuated and informed of the decision, so that's been cancelled, obviously, due to the fire. All on the committee and related parties wish to thank those who are affected by the fires and - sorry, would like to wish all a safe and happy return, a healthy return and pray that they are still standing. Whittlesea Country Music Festival already looks forward to 2010, its 10th year of operation, and will be back stronger than ever. So the Whittlesea Country Music Festival has been cancelled in light of what's occurred.

Let's hear from Renae, who's at Camberwell. Renae, a very good evening to you. Hello.

CALLER RENAE: Good evening.

TIM COX: How are ya?

CALLER RENAE: Not too bad, better now that I know my uncle's okay.

TIM COX: Now, tell me about your uncle.

[11.57pm]

CALLER RENAE: My uncle Michael, he's on the Buxton-Marysville Road and when I heard about the fires in Marysville I got a bit worried. My aunty's been in contact with him and the fire has gone through his property. He's up there on his own, that's the bit I got worried about, so he's okay but unfortunately the pump went on his water tank, so he didn't have much water power, unfortunately, but he managed to keep the fire away from the house. He thinks the shed might have gone but - yeah, he's there on his own and I just want to send a message of support, even though he probably can't hear me because there's no electricity, I don't believe, and apparently the - the smoke is very, very thick up there. Very, very bad.

TIM COX: All right. And do you know if he had a plan that he put in place or did he do what he could?

CALLER RENAE: I would say so and that's - yeah, that's why he was there all day today and, look, he is on his own. I know everyone's safe in Marysville but if anyone is along

that Buxton-Marysville Road, his property actually has a big telecommunications receiver in the front of it so people probably know him up there, it's Michael, but he is on his own. So if anyone's in the area - because obviously we can't get through to him - just check on him. That'd be great. He's exhausted.

TIM COX: I'll bet he is.

CALLER RENAE: Yeah.

TIM COX: All right. You sound pretty done in yourself, Renae, but nowhere near ready for sleep.

CALLER RENAE: No. I - well, as long as I know he's okay, that's great.

TIM COX: Okay.

CALLER RENAE: But, yeah, I think I'll be tuning in a bit further.

TIM COX: Good on you. All right, thank you for the call.

CALLER RENAE: No worries.

[11.59pm]

TIM COX: 1300 222 774 is the number you can call. The fire information line is 1800 240 667. Tim Cox with you until breakfast, probably 6 o'clock, we'll see, and Tonya Roberts will be along after that.

Just repeating that for ABC local radio listeners there'll be a special edition of AM on Sunday morning, tomorrow morning, at 8 o'clock before Jon Faine returns to the airwaves at 8.30. You're listening to ABC local radio across Victoria, 774 ABC Melbourne, your emergency services broadcaster and ABC News radio. It's time for the latest news.

{Music}

[12 midnight]

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