

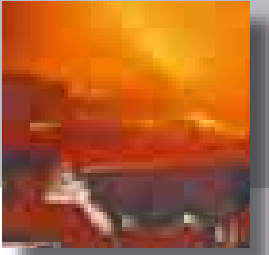


2007 REPORT FROM THE MINISTERIAL  
TASKFORCE ON BUSHFIRE RECOVERY



A Victorian  
Government  
initiative





## Foreword from the Premier

The 2006/07 bushfire season in Victoria was one of the worst on record. The fires started earlier, burnt longer and took hold in extremely dry conditions caused by 11 years of below average rainfall.

Lightning strikes in the Otway Ranges and the State's far North West sparked fires as early as September 2006. On 1 December, a band of lightning ignited more than 50 fires across North East Victoria and Gippsland.

Many of these fires were quickly contained. However, a number of fires in remote wilderness areas joined. Those fires burnt for 69 days and destroyed almost 1.2 million hectares of private and public land – roughly the equivalent of 10 million average sized house blocks.

At the peak of the bushfire season, around 5,000 personnel were committed to the fire suppression effort each day. In total, around 19,000 people worked on the fires – including 14,000 volunteers.

On behalf of all Victorians, our Government expresses our profound gratitude and appreciation to those emergency service workers and volunteers, together with the communities they were protecting. Without their hard work, courage and dedication, the bushfire toll would have been much higher.

Our Government began to work with fire-affected communities immediately.

This Final Report from the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery is about taking the next step. The \$138 million response and recovery package outlined in this Report sets out both immediate and long term actions to help fire-affected communities rebuild their lives.

The consultations that myself and the other Ministerial Taskforce members undertook in response to the 2006/07 fires gave us a clearer picture of the major challenges ahead. Seeing the devastation first hand and engaging with fire affected communities enabled us to make decisions that will help individuals, families, farmers, businesses and regions move forward.

This multi-million dollar package is about providing support to those communities in the immediate aftermath of the fires, while at the same time looking ahead so that affected towns and communities can not only recover, but continue to grow.

A stylized signature of Hon Steve Bracks MP.

Hon Steve Bracks MP  
Premier



# Foreword from the Chair

The Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery was established on 16 January 2007.

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established to support the taskforce, to coordinate its functions and to work with the Regional Recovery Committees (RCCs) established in each fire affected region.

Members of the taskforce visited fire affected areas and engaged directly with the community at forums and specially convened community meetings. Community meetings such as those at Mansfield and Bright were attended by more than 100 people and I wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who volunteered their time and contributions. I also wish to thank the local groups and councils who made these meetings possible for their support and work.

Once again, the level of community engagement from a very early stage in the fire response was outstanding. ABC Radio's continuous coverage during the emergency period was again a significant factor in enhancing the level and quality of information provided to communities during the fires.

Being prepared, equipped and confident, and simply knowing what to do as a fire approaches, has ensured that many Victorians and their assets in rural and remote communities have been able to survive the passage of wildfire. In total, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and its partner agencies attended 990 fires on public land that burnt 1,192,934 hectares (the total area burnt on both public and private land exceeded 1,200,000 hectares).

Direct contact with communities informed much of the government's response effort, and this report outlines measures undertaken to assist these communities, and the many communities that are already dealing with the worst drought in Victoria's history.

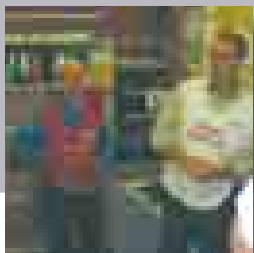
The measures include almost \$18 million in initiatives to get communities back to business including opening key tracks and parks by Easter, more than \$51 million to regenerate the natural environment that includes \$22 million to allow VicForests to salvage timber, as well as new infrastructure including two new or upgraded alpine roads.

Central to the recovery package is almost \$69 million in initiatives to ensure that communities are stronger and safer including a \$30.3 million boost for the State Emergency Service (SES) to ensure it is well-equipped to continue providing rapid and effective response. An additional \$34 million worth of initiatives for emergency services will be brought forward in recognition of the fires' impact.

This report details practical on-the-ground support for communities, significant spending on walking track and road rebuilding projects that will drive the tourism industry forward, important initiatives to ensure both public and private land impacted by fire regenerates and importantly, that communities maintain involvement in the recovery process.



Hon John Brumby MP  
Chair



## Taskforce Members

The ministers appointed to the taskforce were:

**The Hon John Brumby MP**

Treasurer and Minister for Regional and Rural Development (Chair)

**The Hon John Thwaites MP**

Deputy Premier and Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change

**The Hon Joe Helper MP**

Minister for Agriculture

**The Hon Gavin Jennings MLC**

Minister for Community Services

**The Hon Richard Wynne MP**

Minister for Local Government

**The Hon Tim Holding MP**

Minister for Tourism

**The Hon Bob Cameron MP**

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

In attendance:

**The Hon Kaye Darveniza MLC**

Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development

Submission:

**Mr Peter Ryan MP**

Leader of The Nationals

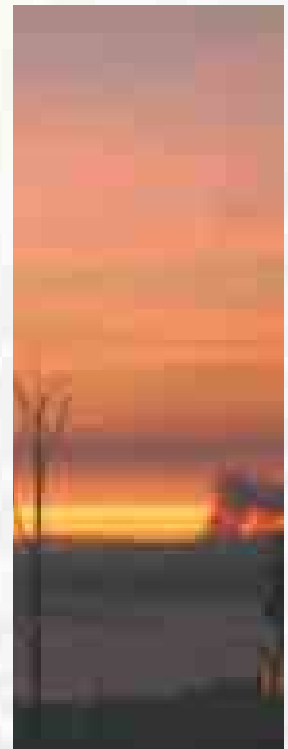
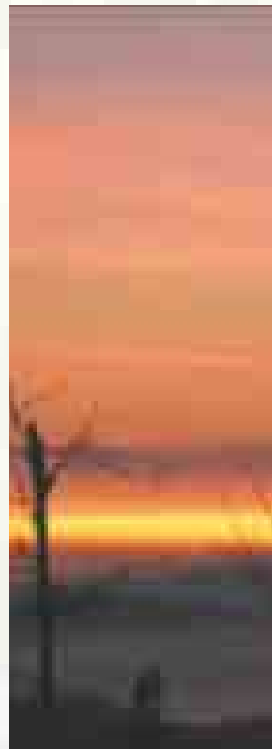
Secretariat:

The taskforce was supported by an Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) jointly chaired by senior officers of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Regional Development Victoria (RDV).



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Establishing the Ministerial Taskforce

On 16 January 2007, the Acting Premier, John Thwaites MP, convened a Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery in response to the bushfires that had a significant impact on communities during December 2006 and January 2007 and continued to March 2007.

The taskforce followed a similar approach to that of previous taskforces, and was led by the Treasurer and Minister for Regional and Rural Development, the Hon John Brumby MP.

The role of the taskforce was to assess the impact of the fires, to quickly put in place a range of recovery measures (in addition to recovery programs already undertaken by communities) and to develop policies to foster recovery from the fires.

The terms of reference governing the taskforce were to:

- utilising local assessments, analyse the impact of the fires on the economy, environment, infrastructure and communities in the affected parts of Victoria;
- assess the need for any immediate additional short term programs to assist communities and individuals recover from the fires;
- liaise and work with business, media organisations and local emergency recovery structures and arrangements to focus recovery efforts in the affected areas;
- work with Tourism Victoria and local operators to identify ways to assist the industry;
- determine whether existing government programs and projects can meet needs and be fast-tracked to boost confidence in affected areas; and
- recommend to Cabinet any medium and longer term policy initiatives to restore growth opportunities and confidence.



## 1.2 Bushfire recovery - Ministerial Community Consultation Program

Because the fires started much earlier in the bushfire season than usual, the government was keen to begin the recovery process as soon as possible, working with local communities to assess the full impact of the fires and developing practical measures to help rural and regional communities to get back on their feet.

The taskforce's immediate role was to assess first hand the impact of the fires on communities, the environment and the economy. The taskforce achieved this through an intensive Ministerial Community Consultation Program, visiting the fire affected areas to inspect damage and engage with communities.

The Premier and members of the ministerial taskforce visited the following fire affected areas:

<b>15 December 2006</b>	Premier, Ministers Brumby and Cameron: Toongabbie
<b>3 January 2007</b>	Minister Thwaites: Mansfield
<b>16 January 2007</b>	Minister Thwaites: Benalla
<b>22 January 2007</b>	Whole taskforce: Lakes Entrance
<b>23 January 2007</b>	Minister Holding: Walhalla and Yarragon
<b>25 January 2007</b>	Ministers Brumby, Helper, Jennings, Wynne and Holding, and Parliamentary Secretary Kaye Darveniza: Benalla
<b>31 January 2007</b>	Premier and Minister Holding: Craig's Hut, Mt Stirling
<b>7 February 2007</b>	Minister Brumby: Wangaratta
<b>14 February 2007</b>	Ministers Brumby, Holding, Wynne and Cameron: Bright
<b>10 March 2007</b>	Minister Holding: Walhalla

The co-chair of the IDC and Chief Executive of Regional Development Victoria, Dan O'Brien, visited Warrnambool on 2 March 2007 as an emissary of the taskforce. Mr O'Brien met with the mayors and chief executive officers of four councils – Warrnambool City Council and Corangamite, Moyne and Glenelg Shires – to discuss the impact of fires in their regions.

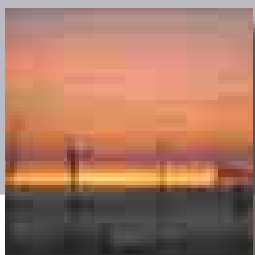
It quickly became apparent to the taskforce that local industries, particularly tourism, were feeling the impact of the fires.

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established to support the taskforce and work across government and with fire affected communities to develop recovery measures aimed at giving families and

businesses affected by the fires the best opportunities to recover quickly.

This approach recognised that while rebuilding must occur at individual and community levels, there were ways in which government assistance could speed the recovery process. Accordingly, this year's approach to bushfire recovery was much more locally driven than previous recovery efforts, with community recovery committees established to assess local needs and identify proposals for the taskforce's consideration, in conjunction with local councils.

The focus of the taskforce was not only to facilitate recovery through assistance measures, but also to reposition communities for growth and to enable them to be in a stronger position to survive future challenges.



## 2. The recent bushfires

### 2.1 Profile of the fires

#### Size

Fire agencies responded to more than 1,000 fires across Victoria from mid-December 2006 to mid-March 2007, with a total area burnt on public and private land exceeding 1,200,000 hectares. This compares with the 30 year average season of 510 fires and a total area burnt of 126,724 hectares. The two most serious fires occurred in the North East (the Great Divide North fire) and Gippsland (the Great Divide South fire). These fires were eventually contained in mid-February 2007.

The Great Divide North and South fires burned 1,048,238 hectares, almost entirely on public land. Other significant fires burning concurrently with the Great Divide fires were the Tawonga Gap fire (33,590 hectares) and the Tatong Watchbox Creek Track fire (31,810 hectares).

Despite some unfortunate losses of private assets, the potentially serious threat that hung over many small towns and communities as fires approached did not eventuate, thanks largely to the efforts of ground-based fire crews and aircraft, and good planning and preparation by property owners.

The government extends its deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Mr Donald Dosser who tragically lost his life during a motor vehicle accident while fighting fire at the Coopers Creek fire on 14 December 2006.

A comparison with past major Victorian bushfire events is shown in the table below.

Table 2.1

Losses	1939	1983	2003	2006	2007
Fatalities	71	47	1	4	1
Houses	650	2,000+	41	57	51
Stock losses	Not known	27,000	11,600	64,265	1,741
Area burnt (hectares)	1.5 million	200,000	1.3 million	160,000	>1.2 million

#### Fire affected areas

These significant fire events affected a large number of communities and towns, sometimes more than once over a number of weeks, within the following shires:

- Alpine Shire
- Benalla Rural City
- Indigo Shire
- Mansfield Shire
- Corangamite Shire
- Golden Plains Shire
- Baw Baw Shire
- East Gippsland Shire
- Latrobe City
- Wellington Shire
- Moyne Shire
- Wangaratta Rural City



## 2.2 Management of the fires

### Fire suppression

Considerable resources were committed to combat the 2006/07 fires. In addition, countless personnel and volunteers from government departments and agencies, local councils, community groups and not-for-profit organisations were involved in suppression activities and/or recovery efforts.

Community and volunteer efforts played an essential part in the implementation of state emergency recovery arrangements, and this involvement ensured that recovery initiatives were put into place quickly and effectively.

The taskforce acknowledges and extends its gratitude to the more than 19,000 volunteers and paid firefighters who were involved in the suppression of the fires and to those who provided back-up support to them. The efforts of Victorian firefighters were assisted by personnel from New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, as well as from New Zealand, the United States and Canada. These arrangements reflect the strong cooperative spirit that has developed in recent years between national and international fire agencies and the contribution made by Victorian personnel when other communities have been under threat.

The taskforce also acknowledges the many individuals and businesses who contributed time, goods and services during the fire emergency. Local business and community groups offered facilities and services at no cost. Staff from community health services, bush nursing centres, hospitals and neighbourhood houses supported communities with health care, information and counselling. Many employers across the state supported their employees serving as volunteers during the prolonged bushfire period.

### Local government support

Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres (MECCs) were established by local governments in the affected municipalities and operated on a 24-hour basis over the duration of the bushfires.

Local governments quickly activated relief centres to provide initial support and shelter to people who chose to leave their homes. These relief centres also provided an initial opportunity to deliver a range of recovery services. For longer term support, local councils also provided advice, immediate assistance and referral to appropriate local service providers by establishing recovery centres and recovery call centres, or through council offices.

The taskforce commends the strong leadership and commitment displayed by local government in responding to the needs of their communities. Particular acknowledgement should also be made of the efforts of those councils that, although not directly affected by the fires themselves, provided a range of support and assistance to bushfire affected communities, such as assisting with

### Recovery Centres

#### Hume Region

Wangaratta Rural City Offices

Alpine Shire Offices

Mt Buller Alpine Resort Management Office

Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Office

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Office

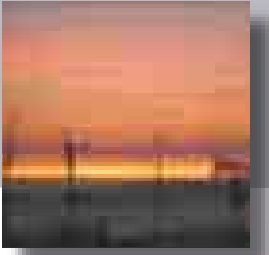
Mansfield Shire Offices

#### Gippsland Region

East Gippsland Recovery Centre

Wellington Shire Offices

Latrobe City Council Offices



the staffing of Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres and the setting up of relief centres, providing mentoring and sharing response and recovery experiences from previous bushfires.

### Community support

Recovery information and intervention activities began alongside immediate response activities to ensure that respite and support actions were implemented at the first available opportunity.

A record number of community meetings were held in the fire affected areas, with more than 320 meetings conducted over a period of 69 days. This was a significant increase on previous years, and compares with 101 community meetings held during the 2005/06 fires, and 82 meetings held during the 2003 fires.

The higher number of meetings held during the 2006/07 season reflects the heightened level of interest and awareness about fire events among community members, and the growing commitment and capacity of fire agencies to inform and involve local communities throughout fire suppression activities and into recovery. Feedback to the taskforce indicated that communities strongly supported and appreciated these meetings.

Community meetings served a number of purposes, including informing residents of the current fire situation; providing predictions and key messages around preparedness; reinforcing 'stay or go' messages where a fire was imminent; confirming that preparedness actions were appropriate; allowing residents to ask questions and have specific needs addressed; and enabling people to share their feelings with others. Meeting attendances varied from 10 to 500, with people passing on information to those unable to attend, further extending the reach of the meetings.

Residents at the community meetings regularly praised the information provided by ABC Radio, the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) and the CFA and DSE websites. The high demand for these services is reflected in the levels of activity on the DSE and CFA websites during December and January, with a combined total of 3,157,272 user sessions/visits. The VBIL was also extremely busy, receiving 49,639 calls from December to January.

The response to the 2006/07 fires benefited from the lessons learned from the fires of 2005/06. Improvements covered a range of response and recovery activities, including improved coordination between the emergency service agencies at regional and state levels, and timely activation of emergency management arrangements, especially municipal and recovery elements (including stock loss management). The establishment of agreed processes to gather data and information, particularly relating to loss assessment, for dissemination to relevant users was a key – and much improved – element in the recovery process.



## 2.3 Immediate impact of the fires

### Impact of the fires on individuals and communities

Previous large bushfire events (for example, the 2002/03 fires) have shown that the social impact on people and communities can be significant, long lasting and dynamic. This impact can be compounded by the duration and re-occurring threat of the fires on communities.

Stress is one of the intangible features of an emergency incident and the taskforce recognises the need to provide appropriate support to mitigate stress at an individual and a community level.

Personal support following emergencies assists with the social aspects of recovery. It aims to lower stress, help people to understand their reactions to the event, prevent division within the affected community and link people back into their normal social support networks.

In the early stages of the 2006/07 bushfire emergency, personal support activities included immediate, short-term, and medium to long-term activities and plans. Activities coordinated by the Department of Human Services (DHS) included disseminating information, providing personal support workers, working with local government to organise community meetings and referring individuals for counselling.

Personal support workers were sent to bushfire affected regions and provided:

- information (such as fact sheets, cards and verbal information from trusted sources);
- an opportunity for people to talk through their experiences; and
- referral to counselling and support services.

In the early stages of the emergency, DHS developed and distributed kits to assist individuals and families affected by the bushfires. Approximately 5,000 kits, known as 'After the Fires: Practical Advice', were distributed through DHS regional offices, local government relief centres and other agencies such as the Red Cross.

The kits contained information about:

- stress after emergencies;
- caring for pets in emergencies;
- preventing heat-related illness;
- bushfire smoke and health; and
- food safety and emergency power failure.

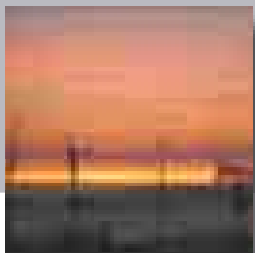
The kits also included the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) brochure 'Rural Recovery' and advice for people with water tanks living in bushfire areas.

*This year's recovery process has been an interesting and challenging one for the North East region. Not only is the region recovering from the fires of December/January, it is also trying to recover from severe drought, frosts and the demise of major industries in some parts. I am, however, very pleased to say that the process of preparing for recovery has been considerably less challenging with the emergence of a fabulous partnership between all state government departments and the local government authorities and resort management boards involved. The level of commitment, understanding and willingness to work together to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive recovery strategy has been terrific. The Department of Human Services has been especially instrumental in this process and in supporting local government and the community in the early stages of recovery and in the preparation for the long term.*

*The early stage recovery process was particularly helpful, with the staging of community recovery meetings in all areas. These meetings ensured that the community could talk to all relevant local, state and federal agencies to gather as much information as possible to help them get back to normal as soon as possible. Another key initiative was the availability of funds to immediately be able to respond to the needs of the community, in staging events, and rebuilding social networks. It's amazing how much a quick response and some small financial assistance for an event can galvanise the community and boost their spirit.*

*I am sure these established networks and partnerships will only serve in the community's best interests into the future and they certainly make facing adversity somewhat easier.*

**Ronnie Beauchamp**  
**Manager Development Services**  
**Alpine Shire Council**



### **Impact on small business and tourism**

Industry, particularly tourism and tourism-related businesses in the fire affected areas, has been hit hard by the impact of the bushfires. The effects are likely to be felt for some time, with the impact also resonating in neighbouring communities.

In the North East region and Gippsland, tourism is a significant industry. Combined tourism expenditure in these two regions is worth more than \$1 billion per year, and the industry includes at least 1,600 tourism businesses and employs more than 7,000 people. The bushfires have had a major impact on the industry, with regional tourism officials estimating a \$200 million downturn for the 12 months from December 2006.

The bushfires occurred during the peak period for the tourism industry in these areas. This is particularly so in Gippsland, where many operators experience 70% of their annual turnover over the summer period.

Reduced bookings and cancellations of up to 90% in areas such as Mansfield and Walhalla have been reported. Licensed tour operators working within the Alpine National Park and surrounding areas have been particularly affected. Some businesses have been forced to close completely, making the accelerated opening of visitor sites and tracks on public land critical to the future of the tourism industry in these areas. In addition, a loss of confidence in the marketplace has begun to affect bookings for the 2007/08 season.

Businesses and communities are also suffering from non-recoverable losses resulting from the cancellation of scheduled events.

The 2006/07 bushfires were not confined to the North East and Gippsland. There was a significant fire north of Warrnambool in the Framlingham Forest, as well as fires in the Otways and other regions of Victoria. However, there was no sustained major impact on tourism from these fires.



## Impact on agriculture

During the 2006/07 bushfire season, 25 fires caused significant damage to 658 private properties, including:

- 50,044 hectares of private land burnt (17,914 ha of pasture);
- 1,375 hectares of cereal or horticultural crops destroyed;
- 1,966 kilometres of fencing destroyed;
- 1,050 tonnes of hay burnt;
- 1,741 animals killed or needing to be put down because of serious burns;
- 220 farm buildings lost (plus 21 farm houses);
- significant smoke damage to grape vines in North East Victoria; and
- significant losses of private forestry plantations and farm forestry blocks.

The physical and financial impacts of fires on agriculture are substantial, but significant personal stress and hardship are also experienced by owners of properties. Experience from previous bushfire recovery projects has indicated that many people take six to 12 months to recover personally from the trauma of a bushfire. The negative impact of the fires on the financial status of an agricultural enterprise may be felt for many years after the event.

## Environmental impact

In response to the 2003 bushfires, DHS developed public information in relation to bushfire smoke and health, cleaning up after bushfire, and water tanks and bushfires. In late 2006, this information was updated and made available on the DHS website and distributed in the form of fact sheets.

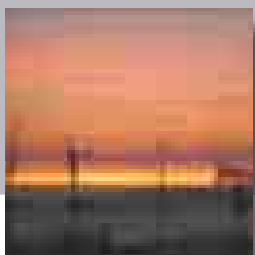
Following a briefing from the CFA in 2006, at which DHS was notified of the potential for the more extensive use of fire retardants, public information on fire retardants and health was prepared and made available on the DHS website. New public information relating to heat stress and ways of minimising the effect of heat on health was also made available on the website during the fire season and formed the basis of several public health warnings issued by the Chief Health Officer.



Parts of Victoria experienced poor air quality and visibility because of bushfire smoke. Affected areas included the North East (such as Wangaratta), Gippsland and the Melbourne metropolitan area. DHS worked with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to:

- increase air monitoring capacity for smoke particles;
- link this monitoring data to graduated 'smoke severity levels';
- link the 'smoke severity level' to graduated EPA media releases containing health protection advice from the Chief Health Officer;
- set up an EPA webpage, 'Bushfires and Air Quality', to inform and assist the Victorian community.

Regular advice on smoke impacts and air quality was provided by the EPA. DHS issued twice daily updates on current and future smoke impacts for different areas of the state.



### Impact on water quality

Water supply catchments were already suffering the effects of long-term drought, with stream flows and water storages at record low levels. Prior to the fire season, the government recognised the impact on the community of record low water levels and committed to a one-off arrangement to replenish domestic farm supplies of water from these essential water sources where it was necessary for fire suppression activity.

This situation meant that while fire suppression agencies had access to water, additional significant hardship would be experienced by individuals as a result of ongoing drought conditions.

For an extended period during the 2006/07 fire season, Melbourne Water catchments feeding the Thomson Reservoir were under direct threat, which could have had a major impact on the quality of Melbourne's water supply. Significant resources were employed in the construction of containment and fall-back lines, with crews working day and night in remote and difficult country. Following containment of these sections of the fires, the government announced its intention to maintain the lines as a strategic break for continuing protection of the catchments.



The fires had a severe impact on the catchments of most rivers in Gippsland and North East Victoria. Vegetation has been almost entirely denuded in many areas and protective works on stream sides lost. Water authorities needed to provide additional water treatment for town supplies, while rural users and small communities drawing water directly from rivers saw water quality deteriorate sharply because of sediment and ash.

Water quality was further affected by localised storms following the fires, which led to landslips, flash flooding and increased silt and debris being washed into waterways.



## Ecological impact

In the period after a fire event, the opportunity exists to undertake works to control weeds because the canopy is opened up and overgrown areas can be tackled more effectively. Animal pest control programs are also more effective after fires, with the removal of undergrowth and reduced food supply providing a window of opportunity for targeted control programs.

These opportunities arise on both public and private land and coordinated programs need to be undertaken with cooperation from both private and public land managers.

There are also opportunities to assist private land owners in fencing remnant vegetation and to mitigate the loss of topsoil with erosion control programs. For some landholders, the fires also provide an opportunity to review aspects of their whole farm plan.

## Impact on national parks and the environment

Approximately 403,500 hectares in national parks and conservation areas and 675,900 hectares of state forest were burnt in the fires. This has resulted in the destruction of, or damage to, the habitats of a number of endangered species, including the long footed potoroo, the mountain pygmy possum and the barred and mountain galaxias.

The fires have also further damaged fragile alpine ecosystems, such as alpine moss beds. Some of these ecosystems were fire affected in 2003; since then, these areas have been further weakened by drought. Final assessments of damage will not be complete for some time, as it has not been possible to gain access to many burnt areas because of the risk posed by fire-damaged trees. However, analysis based on fire boundaries and asset data indicates that almost 7,000km of roads and vehicle tracks and 680km of walking trails have been affected, as have 344 road bridges and 800 road signs. Hundreds of picnic tables, fireplaces, toilets and shelters have been damaged or destroyed. Historic high plains huts are among the structures affected.

Impact on tourism operators who use parks and public land in the area is significant. Parks Victoria has offered employment to licensed tourism operators to assess damage within the parks and to assist in rehabilitation.

## Impact on infrastructure

The bushfires had a significant impact on the road network. The closure of roads during the fires severely restricted the ability of people to travel and to maintain their business activities. From early December 2006, many key rural roads were closed while many others were restricted to local traffic only.

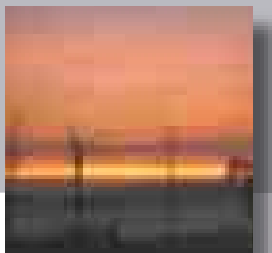
At the height of the fires, more than 70 roads were closed, while more than 110 roads were closed throughout the bushfire season. The large scale of the road closures led to advice being provided to the public via the VicRoads website in both map and text formats. Information on road closures was also available through the VicRoads Traffic Management Centre. During December 2006, the centre received 30% more calls than other typical months. On the busiest days in December 2006, more than 1,100 calls were answered, with most seeking road closure information.

In addition to road closures, significant roadside furniture was damaged. This included destination signs, distance markers, roadside delineator posts and location information signs.

Key tourism assets lost or damaged included:

- Craig's Hut on Mt Stirling;
- Cresta Lodge on Mt Buffalo; and
- visitor facilities such as walking tracks, 4WD tracks, camp sites and information boards within the Alpine National Park, Mt Buffalo and other public land.

It is likely that other facilities were damaged within fire affected areas that are yet to be assessed.



### **Impact on local government**

Local government staffed and operated Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres and emergency information/relief centres on a 24-hour basis over several weeks. Local councils also participated in a range of response activities, including the protection of important infrastructure, providing shelter for stock and assisting people who had lost their homes to find alternative accommodation. Local councils also kept their communities informed of developments through community meetings and other forms of communication, and assisted with the organisation of volunteer efforts.

This level of involvement placed a significant strain on the capacity of local councils as they coped with additional demands on top of normal council operations and services. The Victorian Government provided funding support to assist affected local councils to meet the additional costs of these activities. The extended length of the bushfire season increased the challenges that local councils faced, especially in meeting their staffing requirements.

Beyond response activities, local government has a significant role in coordinating recovery efforts and in boosting community morale. Local councils have played a major part in the recovery process, with the aim of supporting and promoting community rebuilding and resilience. Councils continue to collaborate with government and non-government agencies to assist and support communities and local industry to address the economic and social challenges generated by the bushfires. This task has been made more difficult because all communities affected by the bushfires have also been affected by the drought, with some communities further affected by the severe frosts that occurred in the North East in September 2006.

Local councils in bushfire affected areas will continue to face immense challenges as their communities try to recover. As the level of government closest to communities, local councils are well placed to coordinate recovery efforts and will continue to be supported in that role.



## Impact on forests

Initial estimates are that approximately 55,000 hectares of harvestable forest have been burnt, about 19,000 hectares of which is high value ash eucalypt-type forest.

These forests make an important contribution towards the annual sustainable yield of native hardwood logs, which are supplied to industry in various regional centres and small towns to the north and south of the Great Dividing Range.

Fire affected towns and communities that rely heavily upon the forest and timber industry, or that have timber mills or other wood processing facilities located within them, include Bairnsdale, Benalla, Bruthen, Corryong, Heyfield, Mansfield, Maryvale, Morwell, Mt Beauty, Myrtleford, Noojee and Whitlands.

VicForests estimates that around 1.2 million cubic metres of logs will potentially become available through an intensive salvage operation over the next 12 to 18 months.

The aim of the salvage operation, which in terms of volume could equal nearly two years' worth of normal harvesting for the industry, will be to recover as much of the high value ash-type logs as possible for supply to industry.

In addition to native forests, approximately 2,500 hectares of privately-owned plantation softwood was burnt.

This material also requires salvage harvesting and will add to timber already available from a significant area of plantation softwood in New South Wales that was also burnt.

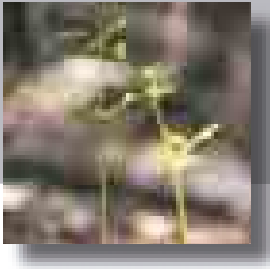
In addition to being directly threatened by the fires, many industry employees, including log harvest and haulage contractors, assisted in the efforts to combat the fires. In doing so, the normal day-to-day activities of these businesses were put on hold or disrupted. At the peak of the fires, it is estimated that around 200 industry personnel and approximately \$30 million worth of industry-owned equipment was being used in the fight against the fires.

In response to the fires, forest growers such as VicForests and other private

plantation owners have sought to redirect harvest and haulage contractors from their normal harvesting operations in unburnt areas into areas where early salvage operations are possible. However, salvage logging is inherently more difficult and dangerous than logging in unburnt stands, with a higher than normal incidence of unstable dead and damaged trees, and a high proportion of logs covered in charcoal that cannot be removed.

VicForests is developing a salvage harvesting plan, which will contain a detailed summary of the expected costs and returns from its proposed salvage harvesting operations and related actions to ensure that salvage harvesting is conducted in the most safe, efficient and environmentally sensitive manner.





## 3. Meeting fire recovery needs

### 3.1 Immediate actions

#### Honouring Victoria's volunteers



The 2006/07 bushfire season imposed a significant workload on volunteer firefighters, over and above the normal fire season workload. The Great Divide fires saw volunteers undertake as many as five tours of duty in the fire affected areas. Many volunteers were already weary from the effects of drought, which required many people in the fire affected areas to feed and water stock on a daily basis.

Family and community members supported these volunteers with feeding and watering stock while they went to assist with the bushfire efforts. These efforts were augmented by individuals and businesses who also contributed time, goods and services during the fire emergency.

In appreciation of the commitment and dedication of emergency services volunteers and staff during the 2006/07 fire season, the Premier announced that at least 5,000 AFL tickets would be made available to volunteers and staff for the round one Melbourne v St Kilda AFL game on 30 March 2007, including food and drink vouchers and free V/Line travel to the match.

CFA volunteers also received recognition for their efforts by being invited to attend sessions at the 12th FINA World Championships, the biggest aquatic event in the world, on 26-28 March 2007.

Volunteers were also honoured for their efforts with a series of regional recognition events scheduled in more than 20 regional locations on 22 April 2007. These events were designed to acknowledge the strong and unwavering support of employers and the families of volunteers during the fire season.



## Providing initial government support for recovery

It quickly became apparent that the significant additional volunteer workload meant that the government needed to focus on providing an immediate response to the extraordinary fires, in addition to community and volunteer efforts in firefighting and fire suppression.

Alongside this immediate response, the government also assigned the ministerial taskforce the critical role of assessing the need for any immediate, additional, short term programs to assist communities and individuals recover from the fires.

A wide range of immediate and targeted decisions were announced by the ministerial taskforce after its establishment in January 2007. Many of these decisions and announcements resulted directly from the ministerial consultation program. Listed below are the immediate actions taken by the government to support individuals, families and communities to recover from the bushfires.

## Supporting individual and community recovery

The Victorian Government offered a range of immediate financial support to individuals directly affected by the bushfires who had to evacuate or who had lost their homes.

### *Emergency grants*

This grant pays up to \$900 per household (\$360 per adult and \$180 per child) to assist people who have been affected by an emergency and need to obtain essential items. The grant provides for temporary accommodation, clothing, food, personal items and one-off transport costs. Although the grant is 'needs based', it is not means-tested and is not affected by the insurance status of the applicant. Up to mid-March 2007, the Department of Human Services paid 158 emergency grants totalling \$76,467.

Additional financial support of up to \$21,900 was made available for people of limited financial resources whose homes had been destroyed or damaged to the extent that the home was inaccessible or unfit to live in for more than one week.

### *Temporary living expenses grants*

This grant assists people with temporary living expenses. The grant provides for up to \$730 a week, to a maximum of \$7,300, for individuals and families. The grant is income-tested and can cover temporary accommodation and transport costs not covered by insurance. By mid-March 2007, DHS had paid three temporary living expenses grants totalling \$4,530.

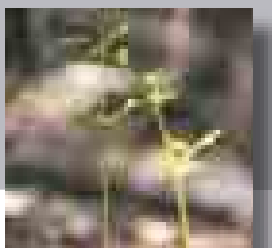
### *Re-establishment grants*

This grant assists with the re-establishment of an individual's or family's principal place of residence. The grant has two components, each worth up to \$7,300. One component provides for necessary structural repairs; the other component can be for essential household items not covered by insurance. The grant is income-tested. By mid-March 2007, five re-establishment grants had been paid by DHS, totalling \$48,820.

### *Community Recovery Fund*

In December 2006, the Prime Minister and Premier announced a joint Community Recovery Fund (CRF) of \$700,000 to assist bushfire affected Victorians in the North East and Gippsland. Access to the fund was later extended to the South West.

The fund is distributed via clean-up and restoration grants of up to \$15,000 for charities, not-for-profit organisations, small businesses and primary producers to assist with recovery from direct bushfire damage not covered by insurance. These grants are administered by the Rural Finance Corporation and are based on need. An initial maximum grant of \$3,000 was made available for immediate clean-up and/or stock welfare.



A further \$12,000 was made available for clean-up and restoration following a more detailed assessment, subject to a separate application. This grant may be supplemented with a concessional interest rate loan.

Due to a higher than expected take-up rate, the Victorian Government announced a further \$350,000 for the Community Recovery Fund in mid-March 2007, seeking a matching contribution from the Commonwealth to bring the total in the fund to \$1.4 million. These additional funds reflect the extent of the devastation of the fires and the recognition that recovery will be a long-term process.

Summary of CRF Grants provided to 16 March 2007:

Applications	Initial grant (Tier 1 – max \$3,000)	Supplementary grant (Tier 2 – max \$12,000)
Received	153	56
Approved	140 (total \$381,500)	34 (total \$369,500)
Being assessed	7	18
Ineligible	6	4

#### *Community assistance*

The government provided funding of \$480,000 to employ Community Development Officers (CDOs) in six fire affected municipalities (\$80,000 was provided to each of the municipalities of Alpine Shire, Mansfield Shire, Wellington Shire, Latrobe City, East Gippsland Shire and Wangaratta Rural City to employ CDOs for this purpose). The CDOs engaged with communities through information provision and health promotion, and by encouraging individuals and families to access services to assist their recovery. This funding also enabled CDOs to immediately undertake community wellbeing activities within these affected areas.

#### *Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)*

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was extended to give special consideration to families affected by the bushfires. Parents/guardians who had received the DHS personal hardship grant were able to apply for the allowance for 2007 under the 'special consideration' category. The total annual combined EMA payment for primary students is \$210, and for secondary students the payment is \$420.



### *School support*

Forty-one schools affected by the fires each received a \$1,000 grant (\$41,000 in total) for activities that helped school communities to recover. These grants were used to get the school year off to a better start and for a broad range of school community development activities. For example, the package provided financial support for schools that employed relief teachers when permanent staff were called away to help the firefighting effort, as well as classroom resources for teachers to help students to work through issues associated with the bushfires.

### *Neighbourhood Houses*

Fifteen Neighbourhood Houses in communities that were directly affected by the bushfires received special one-off grants of \$2,000 to help with emergency relief. These grants also assisted Neighbourhood Houses to provide support to their communities in the recovery phase following the fires. The houses to receive grants were in Mt Beauty, Mansfield, Beechworth, Benalla, Bairnsdale, Briagolong, Buchan, Swift's Creek, Dargo, Lakes Entrance, Maffra, Orbost, Wangaratta, Heyfield and Kinglake.

### **Supporting emergency responders**

#### *Payroll tax exemptions for volunteers*

The government introduced an exemption from payroll tax to employers for wages paid or payable to employees performing certain volunteer services during bushfires and other emergencies. This exemption took effect from 1 November 2006 and applies to employees not on official leave.

### **Supporting farmers and rural landholders**

#### *Fodder*

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) coordinates the allocation of donated fodder to landholders who have lost pasture and fodder to feed their remaining livestock. The government provided a total of \$36,000 to pay for the cost of transporting donated fodder to areas of need.

#### *Fences*

Private landholders who have had crown land boundary fencing destroyed and who have fencing insurance can apply to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) for reimbursement of the excess deducted from the insurance payment, up to \$400. The government has provided \$28,000 to cover these payments.

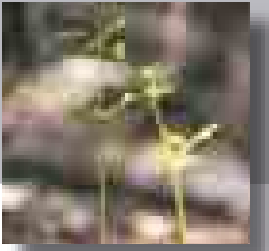
### *Case management*

DPI has established a 'case management' approach to support farmers and rural landholders affected by bushfires. Under this approach, a DPI officer maintains contact with each landowner to facilitate the provision of recovery services on behalf of government. Each landowner's specific needs are identified and brokered by the DPI officer. This approach was used after the 2006 bushfires and has proved successful in ensuring that the services required are offered, and in reducing the need for multiple agencies to visit properties offering assistance. This program is coordinated by DPI and is aligned closely to local recovery steering committees.

### *Clean-up and restoration*

Primary producers are eligible for assistance with recovery under the Community Recovery Fund, a joint Commonwealth/State program of clean-up and restoration grants, as administered through the Rural Finance Corporation (see above).

DPI has also allocated \$100,000 for the operating costs of volunteer groups that assist in the clean-up and restoration process.



### *Concessional interest rate loans*

Concessional loans are available from the Rural Finance Corporation to primary producers, small businesses, not-for-profit organisations and householders who suffered losses as a result of physical bushfire damage in the 2006/07 bushfire season, regardless of the location of the fire event. Applications for loans are considered on the basis of need, taking into account the cost of repairs or replacement, insurance recoveries and the financial resources available in each case. Capacity to service borrowings is a prerequisite for any assistance.

Loans will generally be limited to \$100,000 for any single advance. Where more than one advance is made, the aggregate limit is \$150,000. Loans bear interest at 2.9% per annum for an initial period, not exceeding five years. At the end of this period, an extension for a further period of up to 10 years is possible, but the interest rate on any extended loan is subject to review and is set at, or close to, commercial housing interest rates prevailing at that time.

## **Supporting business and tourism operators**

### **Tourism industry**

A key element of the immediate response package was tourism recovery. Fire affected regions responded to this issue by forming the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group (GTRRG) and the North East Tourism Response and Recovery Group (NETRRG).

The recovery groups showed excellent leadership and communication with the tourism industry, preparing accurate media releases for key markets, commencing assessment of tourism impacts, and considering short to long-term recovery strategies.

Tourism Victoria assisted the groups by preparing the *Crisis Communications Handbook* (which outlines the needs and operations of regional response and recovery groups), providing public relations and administration support, providing key messages to the Emergency Control Centre, funding the 'Inspired by Gippsland' food and wine event, and undertaking radio interviews and newspaper advertisements encouraging visitors to return to bushfire affected areas.

The first major marketing activities to commence after the fires included the launch of the 'Inspired by Gippsland' brand campaign that targeted Melbourne media. The campaign was previously funded through the Community Support Fund and included public relations activities, marketing of Gippsland events, newspaper promotions and exposure through television programs such as *Postcards*.



## Tourism recovery and promotion package

A tourism recovery package of more than \$4 million was announced by the government on 31 January 2007. The package is for promotion and recovery and includes \$300,000 for the rebuilding of the iconic Craig's Hut on Mt Stirling.

Craig's Hut is recognised as a key marketing image for Victoria, in Australia and overseas. The hut was a replica of a high country cattleman's hut built in 1983 as a set for the movie *The Man from Snowy River* and attracted about 80,000 visitors a year. It was destroyed by fire on 11 December 2006.

The package also includes improved directional reassurance signing to Walhalla township from the Princes Freeway, King Valley wine region from Hume Freeway, the Great Alpine Road along key visitor access routes, and the Gippsland Lakes along key visitor access routes.

The country came to the city on 14 January 2007 for the 'Taste of Falls Creek' event, which received \$25,000 funding from the tourism promotion package. Traditionally held at Falls Creek, the event was relocated to Federation Square for 2007 to encourage Melburnians to sample local food and wines and discover the many activities on offer in the region.

Encouraging tourists to return to the regions devastated by bushfire is

essential to helping local communities and businesses to get back on their feet. To assist in the recovery of tourism in bushfire affected areas of North East Victoria and Gippsland, the tourism promotion and recovery package is being rolled out over the next 18 months.

Key elements of the package include: *Brand marketing*

To increase visitation to the regions, the brand campaigns for Victoria's High Country, Snowfields and Gippsland will be extended or refreshed. Each of these campaigns will focus on the traditional product strengths of these regions that can still be enjoyed after the fires.

The 'Blame it on the Alpine Air' brand campaign for Victoria's High Country was developed as part of the bushfire recovery process after the 2002/03 bushfires and will be updated to reflect current market conditions and emerging product strengths.

The 'Victorian Snowfields, Never Come Down' brand campaign was launched in 2006. Additional funding will be used to extend the campaign to a broader audience, aiming to attract more visitors to the snowfields and surrounding areas in the High Country and Gippsland.

The 'Inspired by Gippsland' brand campaign was launched in March 2007. While the campaign so far has not included bushfire affected areas,

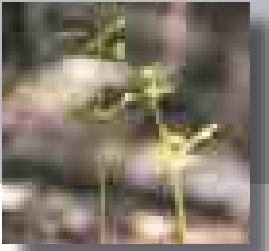
additional elements of the campaign will be developed to feature these areas.

### *Public relations activity*

An initial public relations campaign was undertaken to counteract negative perceptions of the bushfire affected regions and to stimulate visits to these regions. The campaign focused on generating publicity primarily in the Melbourne, regional Victoria and southern NSW and ACT markets to renew confidence in the regions and to reassure potential visitors that these destinations can be enjoyed, explored and visited. Priority has been given to communicating that the regions are open for business, and to generating media interest and support for key regional events in both Gippsland and Victoria's High Country.

### *Tactical marketing in print media including a focus on event development and promotion*

Tactical marketing initiatives will be undertaken to encourage visitors to return to bushfire affected areas in the short term. Promoting regional events is a key strategy to encourage visitors to return to bushfire affected areas. Events provide a strong reason for visitors to return to the region in the short term and do not rely upon having access to areas that have been burnt. Regional events also highlight the key product strengths of the region and can help to unite the local community and boost morale.



*Operator subsidy for marketing campaigns*

Reduced business turnover resulting from the reduction in visitors to bushfire affected areas prevents tourism operators from undertaking marketing activities for which they may have already budgeted. This compounds the negative impact on operators as they can no longer afford to promote their business through scheduled marketing activities, such as brochures and tactical advertising. To assist these operators, subsidised marketing opportunities are being developed to enable them to continue to participate in marketing campaigns.

*New photographic images and film footage*

New images for bushfire affected areas will be collected and updated by Tourism Victoria in conjunction with other regional campaign committees. Motivational photography to encourage people to experience these regions is also being developed, along with film footage to enable regions to leverage opportunities in new technology (such as increasing use of film footage on the Internet).

*Industry development support including operator business development programs*

The government is providing funding to support local councils to undertake a range of initiatives aimed at boosting the professionalism of businesses in the fire affected regions, including workshops, one-on-one mentoring and accreditation support.

*Independent assessment of the impact on the tourism industry*

The government will commission an independent economic impact study to accurately measure the extent and impact of the recent bushfires on the tourism industry. In addition, the study will determine a methodology for measuring the impact of bushfires on regional tourism, creating a benchmark for future studies.

*Subsidy of project management costs to the region*

The government will allocate funding for additional project management and administration resources to implement the bushfire recovery program in each region. With regional committees comprised primarily of volunteer members, adequate resources and support are required to ensure the bushfire recovery program achieves its objectives and is implemented to schedule.



### **Fast-tracking the reopening of tourist destinations**

The government has made available \$1 million to fast-track the reopening of iconic tourist destinations in Gippsland and the North East. This funding is aimed at reopening camping, hiking, 4WD and horse riding areas prior to public holidays.

The Howqua track from Buller Road to Stockyard in the Merrijig-Timbertop area and Powers Lookout and picnic area were opened for visitors to enjoy over the Labour Day long weekend in March 2007. Significant areas were also targeted for reopening for the Easter holidays, including The Pinnacles, walking tracks around Walhalla historic area, and the remainder of the Howqua track.

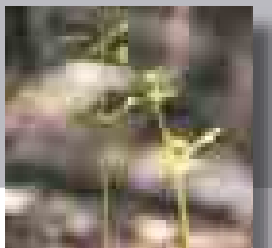
### **Restoration of Walhalla Goldfields Railway**

Funding of \$195,000 was provided by the government to support the reopening of Walhalla's popular tourist railway, damaged in the December 2006 bushfires. This funding was brought forward to assist in the completion of repair works in time for the Easter holidays. The funds are being used to repair the small bridge known locally as the 'Three Span Bridge' and to support a strategic development and business management plan that will provide a guide for the sustainable operation and future development of the railway. This funding also provided the opportunity to employ local people on a short-term basis, including some local tourism operators.

### **Business recovery**

To enable businesses and operators to get back to business as soon as possible, the Victorian Government announced a \$500,000 Bushfire Business Continuity Package. A component of this package will support immediate one-on-one business counselling and advice, and is being delivered by Regional Development Victoria. This advice covers taxation/finance, marketing, inventory management, employment, business planning and other relevant areas, including relationship management, human resources, seeking finance from the Rural Finance Corporation, insurance and service delivery.





### **Rehabilitation of the environment and restoration of damaged assets**

Due to the destruction of the environment in rainfall catchments, moderate rainfall is needed over the coming months to establish adequate groundcover to protect catchment areas from erosion. Heavy rain prior to sufficient regrowth of vegetation is likely to have major consequences for drinking water quality. In Gippsland, the main towns of concern are Maffra, Stratford, Boisdale, Cowwarr, Coongulla and Glenmaggie. Water quality in these towns will be monitored closely.

#### *Water replenishment*

Landholders who experienced significant hardship as a result of a reduction in essential water supplies due to firefighting efforts were directed to seek assistance for water cartage and replenishment by contacting their local council.

#### *Identifying and managing the environmental impact of the fires*

In 2003 and 2006, analysis of the impact of fires was supported by the purchase of satellite and aerial imagery. The government has committed a further \$1.265 million to purchase imagery to identify the impact of the fires on vegetation and those areas where the impact was most intense.

These images will be used in conjunction with data held by DSE and Parks Victoria to develop maps to support the efforts of those delivering services on the ground. This new technology will help to direct recovery efforts where they are most needed to manage risk and support community, environmental and economic recovery.





## Supporting local councils

The government has made financial assistance available to local councils to assist with the costs of restoring municipal assets and for expenses incurred for emergency protection works. This assistance to councils is administered by the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) under the Natural Disasters Relief Fund.

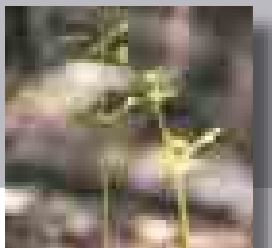
Through the fund, up to \$150,000 has been made available per council towards the costs of operating Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres at Mansfield, Bairnsdale and other communities, in recognition of the extraordinary lengths of time these centres were required to operate during the 2006/07 bushfire season.

Bushfire relief funding of \$300,000 was also provided for six local government areas affected by the fires. Alpine, Mansfield, Wellington, Latrobe City, East Gippsland and Wangaratta municipalities each received \$50,000 to assist in assessing and coordinating their bushfire recovery needs. This funding enabled local recovery staff to immediately engage with the community, and allowed individuals, families and communities to manage the recovery process in a timely manner.

The Alpine Resort Management Boards of Mt Buller, Falls Creek and Mt Hotham were provided with \$20,000 each to coordinate local recovery services. Baw Baw Shire was also provided with \$50,000 to coordinate local recovery services.

As part of the \$500,000 Bushfire Business Continuity Package, support will be provided to councils to stage community events to stimulate economic activity in fire affected communities. A number of smaller grants have been provided to support recovery in local communities through economic development and planning, organising events and supporting tourism:

- \$25,000 to employ a staff member in East Gippsland Shire to ensure infrastructure projects produced desired outcomes within specified timeframes and budgets;
- \$20,000 for the development of an economic development and tourism website in East Gippsland Shire, allowing visitors to the region to make online bookings with tourism businesses and enabling other businesses in the shire to be linked to the site;
- \$10,000 to East Gippsland Shire to support the East Gippsland Regional Business and Tourism Association in developing leadership skills and planning tools in communities across the region;
- \$15,000 to East Gippsland Shire over two years to support the 'Feast on the East Festival', a food, wine and arts festival held in March 2007;
- \$25,000 to Wellington Shire to employ an economic development and project management trainee for 12 months;
- \$5,000 to Wellington Shire to support the 'Back to Maffra Mardi Gras' held on 9-12 March 2007;
- \$5,000 to Wellington Shire to support the Golden Beach Surf Fishing Competition at Ninety Mile Beach held on 26-28 January 2007;
- \$10,000 grant to Mystic Mountains Tourism Inc to run the Wirreanda Festival at Marysville held on 23-25 February 2007, as part of the Provincial Victoria Local Events Program;
- \$10,000 to support the Benalla Festival held on 16 March 2007; and
- \$20,000 to Benalla Auto Club to complete a strategic marketing plan for the Winton Motor Raceway.



## Other community support

### *Red Cross Appeal*

The Commonwealth Government and Victorian Government have provided \$50,000 each to the Red Cross Bushfire Appeal. The Red Cross is working with the municipalities of Alpine, Mansfield, Wellington, Latrobe, East Gippsland and Wangaratta to distribute this funding through community recovery committees. Funding is based upon giving priority to individual hardship cases and community events that support community social recovery.

### *CFA Bushfire Relief Appeal*

The CFA Bushfire Relief Appeal is designed to raise funds for farmers who have been directly affected by bushfires. The appeal has been very successful, with \$21,440 raised by mid-March 2007. The CFA is donating the funds to the Victorian Farmers Federation Emergency Relief Fund, which helps farmers directly affected by fires.

The appeal was launched at the start of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's popular free concert season at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne on 14 February 2007 by the Premier and CFA members.

### *Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund*

This fund is supported by the six local governments in the Gippsland region and provides relief and assistance to people who suffer injury, loss or damage from natural disasters living in the municipalities of Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland and Wellington. Representatives from DHS, DSE, the Country Fire Authority, State Emergency Services (SES) and local water authorities assist in the fund's administration. As of 7 March 2007, the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund received \$214,500 in donations and distributed \$205,300 to 112 families affected by the bushfires and associated events (including flooding in Licola).

Many communities have rallied to raise funds for this appeal. For example, on 23 January 2007, the Minister for Tourism, Tim Holding, applauded the efforts of the Yarragon community in raising \$10,046 for the appeal. Local businesses donated 10% of their total turnover from the 'Yarragon Village Reach Out' event held the preceding weekend, which featured live music, boutique shopping and a display of hot rods and other collectable cars.



## Commonwealth support

### *Australian Taxation Office*

The Australian Taxation Office once again offered reassurances to bushfire victims about their tax matters and outlined a package of assistance measures. This involved an offer to fast-track refunds, provide additional time to pay debts without penalty, extend deadlines for lodgement of documentation and provide assistance with the reconstruction of tax records.

### *Centrelink assistance*

Centrelink provides immediate assistance (of up to \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child to a total of \$5,000 per family) for people who, as a direct result of the bushfires, are unable to live at their principal residence because it has either been destroyed or is deemed uninhabitable for a period of two weeks.

21 Feb 2007

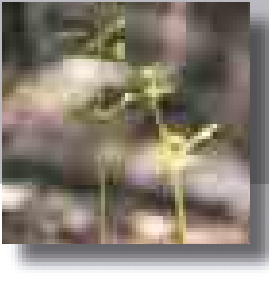
*Yesterday I opened my Christmas mail. Couldn't face it until now. My property at Licola was scorched beyond recognition in the fire storm of December 14. But the worst suffering of all is that we had 79 cattle perish and have 145 missing because of the steep terrain and no fences. One hundred head – a mixture of cows and calves are standing. We are feeding them on donated hay. The road ahead is long and windy.*

*The day your cheque arrived I showed the family at tea time. We couldn't believe such kindness could happen to us. The money was put to good use – but to think that people (strangers) came to our aid, is heartfelt.*

*Gratefully yours*

*(Letter from Gippsland resident sent to Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund)*





## 3.2 Next steps in funding recovery

### Understanding longer term impacts and community needs

The ministerial consultations in response to the 2006/07 bushfires were very well received, and the Premier and taskforce members were able to gain a clear picture of the major challenges ahead. Viewing the devastation first hand and engaging with fire affected communities informed decision making at the highest level and shaped the government's response to assist individuals, families and communities to rebuild their lives.

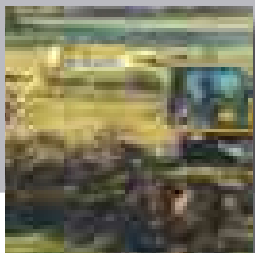
Regional Recovery Committees (RRCs) in each region, comprising representatives from government agencies and community groups, played a pivotal role in the recovery effort by informing the taskforce of the impact of the fires in local communities and by coordinating submissions for recovery strategies and funding bids from local governments, community groups, agencies and government departments. These bids, which were forwarded through the Bushfire Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) to the taskforce for consideration, helped shape the recovery package.

The committees held workshops and convened recovery sub-committees to identify the impact on the social, economic, built and natural environments caused by the fires. Local governments and Alpine Resort Management Boards used these forums to bring local issues to the regional level where they could be further addressed.

The government acknowledges that in this time of rebuilding, key issues will emerge that will present longer term challenges for communities: economic challenges, environmental challenges and social challenges.

Accordingly, the government's response is based upon reacting to the immediate emergencies presented by the fires, but also upon helping bushfire-affected communities to become more resilient so that they can adapt to the vagaries of the climate and their particular circumstances in order to recover and grow.





## 4. Rebuilding and driving recovery from the ground up

The major impacts of the 2006/07 bushfires have placed additional stress on already strained communities grappling with confronting environmental conditions and structural change.

Through extensive consultation with affected communities, the taskforce identified and responded to the wide ranging issues that have arisen following the 2006/07 bushfire season. Drawing on lessons learned from the 2002/03 and 2005/06 bushfires, the taskforce has recognised the importance of community initiated and driven recovery. Importantly, the Victorian Government has responded to feedback from communities in outlining roles and responsibilities for recovery in what is sometimes a delicate balance.

Working in collaboration with communities, local councils and key government agencies, the government has given priority to developing and delivering the most appropriate and effective responses. While immediate issues of financial hardship, asset loss and business downturn have been addressed through targeted financial and promotional packages, medium and long term issues will require ongoing monitoring and assistance.

Early in community consultations, the taskforce was made aware of the possible longer term and often intangible issues bushfires bring to a community. These include added pressures placed on families, the possible onset of mental health issues and the indirect impact on industry and small business. Communities in the North East and Gippsland regions have welcomed the funding of Community Development Officers to provide support and assistance in working through these issues and in helping to drive a prompt recovery and secure a sustainable future.



## 4.1 Community driven sustainable recovery

When communities are faced with natural disasters, the impacts can be significant and long lasting, with the potential to affect different sections of the community to varying degrees over a number of years. These communities need support to manage their own recovery, to respond to immediate needs and to address long-term issues. In these circumstances, it is important to initiate community-driven sustainable recovery processes as soon as possible.

The impacts on communities from the 2006/07 bushfires have included stress and anxiety associated with the frequent and repeated evacuation alerts, direct fire threats and loss of farming and residential property. Further economic impacts, both direct and indirect, have taken a toll on commercial, environmental and tourism interests in these communities.

The impacts of the bushfires have been exacerbated by other regional events, including severe frosts, mudslides and localised flooding, drought and climate change, and a recent poor snow season.

The experience of the taskforce is that communities with a high degree of involvement in the recovery process recover more quickly and cohesively.

The government encourages communities to take the lead in managing their recovery by not only responding to immediate needs, but also by addressing longer-term issues.

The most effective mechanism to drive recovery at a local level has been the establishment of Community Recovery Committees (CRCs), which oversee the recovery process and provide a formal means for consultation, advice, planning and coordination to assist affected communities.

CRCs have worked with their respective Regional Recovery Committees to develop appropriate recovery strategies that target short, medium and longer term initiatives. These strategies have focused on recovery at individual, community, business, municipal and regional levels to support future economic, environmental and community wellbeing. Regional Recovery Committees collated and analysed the strategies and forwarded them for consideration by the Ministerial Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

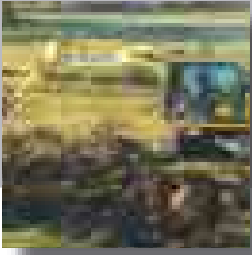
The Victorian Government will continue to work in partnership with CRCs in monitoring recovery actions and developing new strategies to further strengthen communities.

**Michele Morrice**  
**Stephen's Fine Foods and Ajax Ski Club**  
**28 February 2007**

*The bushfire started on the 5th of December and the threat to Mt Buller continued for over seven weeks, which seemed like a lifetime. While it was tough time for everyone the most positive thing to emerge from the situation, other than Buller not losing any assets, was the community spirit which arose from the emergency. This was particularly evident at our daily community meetings, where we really had the opportunity to bond through common experience.*

*While businesses suffered throughout the fire period, with the only access road into the resort being closed to the public, the community has really rallied together to try and recover. Mountain operators and residents are now working with the ARMB to implement a ten week program of summer recovery events, which will hopefully encourage people back into the resort and help us to return to some normality.*

**Michele Morrice**



## 4.2 Getting back to business

The impact of the bushfires has caused major disruption to local businesses, both directly and indirectly. Many small businesses, particularly tourism operators, suffered and continue to suffer downturns due to the destruction of natural assets and attractions. For many businesses, the bushfires occurred during, or when preparing for, one of their busiest periods of trading for the year.

A number of immediate financial assistance measures were made available to eligible small businesses, from emergency grants to clean-up and restoration funding (see section 3).

### Tourism

A key element of the immediate response package was tourism recovery, with a \$4 million tourism promotion and recovery package announced in late January 2007. This package aims to encourage tourists to return to bushfire affected regions and is considered an integral part of getting communities and businesses back on their feet (see section 3).

### Opening our parks

Victoria's parks provide valuable leisure and recreation opportunities and support nature based tourism. The rehabilitation and restoration of damaged public assets in these parks is essential to encouraging the rapid return of tourists to fire affected regions. As soon as the fires were declared safe, DSE and Parks Victoria commenced works to re-open key visitor sites in parks and forests, consulting with local tourism interests on priorities.

The government provided \$1 million toward the short-term employment of staff, including tourism operators, to assist in the opening of additional sites in time for the peak Easter holiday period.

Following lessons learned from the 2002/03 and 2005/06 bushfires, DSE and Parks Victoria implemented an accelerated program of mapping the damage to assets, vegetation, Indigenous and other heritage sites, roads, tracks and visitor amenities. Working with communities and other users of public land, DSE and Parks Victoria developed priorities and planned works to ensure that parks are accessible as soon as possible.

Fire severity mapping has become an essential modern tool to analyse the impact of fire on the landscape in order to plan how to mitigate its impact. The government has provided \$1.265 million to support the purchase of satellite and specially commissioned aerial imagery, to be overlaid on data already held by DSE. From this imagery, fire impact is being mapped to augment the thematic maps produced from existing data.



Using these mapping tools and internal data bases, initial desk top assessments have identified a large number of roads, bridges and other built assets affected by fires. For example, an estimated 7,500 kilometres of roads and walking trails have been damaged or are unsafe because of tree risk, loss of signage and guard rails, or damage to bridges.

Public land roads are important in providing access to small communities and to key tourist sites. Infrastructure such as picnic sites and lookouts is critical to supporting tourist visitation, and the economic revival of fire affected regions. DSE and Parks Victoria have identified priorities for reopening key roads, tracks and sites to support tourism, structured around public holiday periods over the next year. Reopening roads and tracks is also important in preparing for future fire seasons.

Some roads and trails have already been opened by redirecting staff effort once the fires were contained. The government's larger works program will also be supported by contractors drawn from local communities, offering employment opportunities in fire affected communities and also drawing on valuable local knowledge.

**Recovery Action**  
*The Victorian Government will provide \$8.9 million to restore priority roads, railings, signage and bridges throughout parks and forests to provide access for local communities and tourists throughout the year, as well as access for land and fire managers. The government will provide \$2.5 million to rebuild, replace and renew visitor site assets in parks that were lost or damaged in the fires.*

### **Business and community recovery**

After consulting with affected businesses, the taskforce announced additional funding of \$500,000 as part of Regional Development Victoria's Business Continuity Program, a component of which will provide one-on-one counselling to develop recovery strategies and to assist communities to stage events in fire affected areas. The package recognised the desire of communities to get back to business, restore confidence and determine their own path to recovery (see section 3).

To better understand the longer term socio-economic impact of fires on regional economies, the government – in consultation with industry stakeholders – is developing a framework to examine the changes which result from these types of emergency incidents.

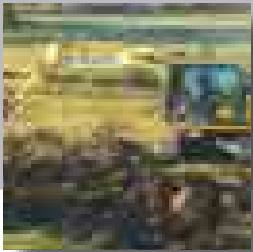
**Recovery Action**  
*The Victorian Government will provide \$65,000 to fund a study on the socio-economic impact of the recent fires to better inform government policies and decisions for recovery processes.*

### **Specialist technical advice to landholders to support recovery**

In the immediate aftermath of the fires, rural land managers faced numerous decisions relating to the re-establishment of businesses, human and financial issues, land use and natural resource management.

Some landholders will require assistance in the identification of family and business recovery initiatives to ensure maximum understanding and uptake of available recovery programs.

**Recovery Action**  
*The Victorian Government will provide \$90,000 for farmers to access specialist industry advice to plan the steps towards recovery in industries such as livestock, horticulture and farm forestry.*



### 4.3 Positioning for growth

The 2006/07 bushfires caused significant damage to farms, businesses, communities, and both public and private land. While it is inevitable that the immediate focus is on response and short-term recovery, the taskforce is funding a series of measures that will position fire affected communities to achieve sustained future growth.

With the destruction comes the need to rebuild, repair and restore. As difficult as this time is, it also represents an opportunity to invest to position communities for growth.

#### Farmers and rural landholders

Recovery programs for farmers and rural landholders need to be planned over a number of years because recovery can be protracted and many landholders are unable to take up support immediately after fire events.

The government will provide a staged assistance package to private landholders for agricultural recovery. The package will provide for the management of immediate and longer-term issues and help the farming community to position itself for future growth.

#### *Pest plant and animal management*

Pest animals are known to increase their impact on private land after fire. This includes increased predation by foxes on vulnerable stock and the increased susceptibility of bared soil to erosion caused by rabbit activity.

Ground denuded by fire encourages germinating weed species. These may be existing or new weeds that have been transported into the fire area by vehicles, machinery, fodder and livestock movement. All programs will be undertaken in conjunction with adjacent public land managers to ensure the maximum impact of the programs.

#### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide \$1.885 million to assist private land managers with pest plant and animal control over the next two years. Components of this integrated program will include:*

##### *Pest animals*

- *A targeted fox control program*
- *A wild dog fencing (100km) and feral animal control program*
- *An integrated rabbit control program (2,300ha) (baiting and ripping)*

##### *Pest plants*

- *Woody weeds control grants program (3,000ha)*
- *Priority weeds control program*
- *Support for local government in roadside weed control*



### *Soil conservation and improvement*

Longer term consequences of damage to pasture, feed and fences has implications not only for remaining stock over the autumn/winter period, but also for soil erosion, on-farm and catchment water quality in the medium to longer term.

Experience from previous fire emergencies indicates a clear need for stock containment areas and stock watering facilities, soil erosion works, desilting of farm dams and land class fencing to prevent long term damage to the environment and community assets.

### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$1.816 million to assist land managers on private land with soil conservation programs to reduce the likelihood of short-term soil erosion and long-term environmental damage.*

*The government will provide \$120,000 to fund expert one-on-one advice on strategies for pasture re-establishment and management, including the re-establishment of pastures on rehabilitated control lines*

### *Securing fishing stocks*

Fishing is a major recreational activity in Victoria, with more than 550,000 Victorians participating in recreational fishing. The bushfires have affected the health of streams and may affect populations of trout and native fish.

### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$455,000 for a program to:*

- carry out site, stock and habitat assessments;*
- monitor the recovery of populations of trout and native fish; and*
- determine and carry out remedial fish stockings where appropriate.*

### *Securing our wine industry*

Wine growers, particularly in the Alpine and King Valley regions, expressed concern to the taskforce about the potential impact of smoke on their vines and grapes. These regions have also been affected by severe frosts in 2006 and by the ongoing drought.

### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$84,000 to support research into the precise tolerance of grapes before smoke taint occurs.*

*The government, through Regional Development Victoria, will also provide \$163,250 to the Rural City of Wangaratta to undertake a series of projects to assist vineyards and wineries meet current challenges and reposition for the future. This package will include further research into smoke taint, developing business plans for marketing and a feasibility study to assess the viability of establishing a wine bottling plant in the region.*

### **Environment**

#### *Securing our water*

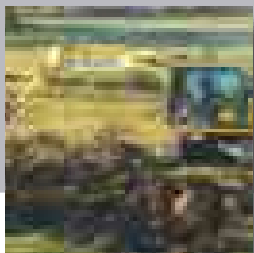
Water quality in bushfire affected catchments, already depleted by drought, has been significantly affected by the fires. Vegetation has been stripped from the catchments and, until it is regenerated, there is an elevated risk of sediment affecting rivers and water storages.

After years of drought, the underlying dryness of the soil has made stabilisation difficult. Post-fire thunderstorm activity has already led to localised flooding, land slips and the re-imposition of road closures around Licola.

Sedimentation into the rivers is expected to continue for at least several months. Due to the widespread damage to the catchments, the ability to prevent this sedimentation from occurring will be limited. Works will be required to stabilise river banks and streamside reserves to encourage revegetation, as well as to remove sediment once it has consolidated in waterways. This work will be critical to supporting longer term river health and to prevent damage to iconic downstream sites such as the Gippsland Lakes.

### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$6.755 million for urgent short-term works to trap sediment and provide water quality monitoring, as well as longer term works to protect stream sides and remove silt deposited in rivers and streams.*



Water authorities in fire affected areas have incurred greater than normal expenses in maintaining the quality of town water supplies because of the need for elevated turbidity monitoring and increased water treatment costs. Elevated monitoring and treatment will be needed for some time.

Water authorities have also, where possible, assisted individuals and smaller communities that normally are not serviced by them. Gippsland Water has provided technical support and advice to communities which draw water directly from the Macalister River, and Wellington Shire has been carting water to the small communities of Dargo and Licola, following turbidity issues in their non-potable water supplies as a result of the fires.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide up to \$200,000 to Wellington Shire to assist Dargo and Licola in the construction of a bore for each community as a solution to ongoing turbidity issues in their non-potable water supplies stemming directly from the bushfires.*





## Ecological recovery

Ecological recovery includes:

- regeneration of vegetation cover, including reseeded forest, to stabilise the soil, support improved water quality and provide habitat for surviving native animals;
- control measures for weeds, introduced predators and other feral animals such as goats; and
- measures to protect surviving populations of rare and threatened species.

The post-fire environment provides both opportunities and threats. For example, prompt action can minimise regrowth of weeds, but failure to act can result in even more dense infestations of fire-responsive species, which will choke regeneration of native species and potentially spill over onto neighbouring private land. If action is not taken against animal predators and feral animals, recovering vegetation may be damaged by over-grazing and already weakened native fauna populations may be further threatened.

### *Better pest control*

Programs to combat weeds and pest animals on public land can contribute indirectly to recovery on private land by minimising flow-through across the public/private land boundary. These programs also offer local employment opportunities for contractors to carry out works.

#### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$1 million over six months for fox and wild dog bounties to decrease populations of predators.*

*The program will target known habitat for rare and endangered native animals, as well as areas where predators could cross from public land to neighbouring private land.*

*The government will provide \$3 million for better pest control in parks. Two geographic priorities will be targeted: public land close to private land boundaries made accessible by fire and sites of vulnerable native vegetation or fauna. Activity will focus on invasive and fire sensitive weeds such as blackberry and English broom to limit regeneration.*

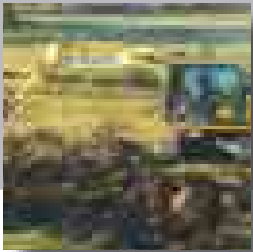
### *Protecting ecosystems and threatened species*

The bushfires damaged the habitat of rare and endangered species, triggering the possibility of the relocation of populations to ensure their survival. Addressing these issues may require the provision of new protective works for vulnerable sites, such as alpine moss beds, which contribute to broad environmental health as well as being part of an attractive landscape for visitors.

#### **Recovery Action**

*The Victorian Government will provide \$830,000 to protect vulnerable ecosystems and rare and threatened species affected by the loss of habitat.*

*The government will also monitor the health of threatened species such as the Long Footed Potoroo or Mountain Pygmy Possum and take corrective action to assist their survival.*



## Protecting our Indigenous and cultural heritage

In 2003, many previously unrecorded Indigenous sites were discovered following the fires. This experience was confirmed in 2006, particularly in the Grampians, an area rich in Indigenous tradition. The experience gained in previous recovery efforts will be applied in 2007, offering employment opportunities to local Indigenous people in recording and protecting traditional sites.

### *Safeguarding Indigenous sites*

The Victorian Government values the important heritage significance of Indigenous sites and, building on successful programs from previous fire seasons, land managers will work with the Indigenous community to preserve and safeguard these sites as part of the bushfire recovery process.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide \$650,000 for mapping and protective works for previously unrecorded Indigenous sites. The government will also undertake protective works for known sites damaged by the recent fires.*

### *Preserving our heritage*

High country huts have significance for the heritage of European settlement in Victoria and are an important part of the visitor experience to the area. Funding of \$300,000 for the rebuilding of the iconic Craig's Hut was announced as part of the Tourism Recovery Package.

Following this announcement, the government worked with bodies such as the Victorian High Country Huts Association and its network of volunteers to identify other cultural assets that could be refurbished to assist tourism recovery.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide an additional \$60,000 to assist with the program of reconstruction of high country huts, in partnership with community groups that hold interests in the heritage and tourism values of these historic assets. In total, eight huts will be restored under this initiative, including Craig's Hut.*

## Securing our forests

### *Future timber supplies*

Almost 20 per cent of the mountain ash forest burnt in the 2006/07 bushfires was immature forest that will not regenerate naturally. Concerted action will need to be taken to ensure that these forests remain predominantly mountain ash.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide \$5 million to regenerate 3,500 hectares in fire affected state forests.*



### *Sustainable harvesting*

The scale of damage to the state's forests will require a revision of the current timber harvest allocation to ensure that valuable fire damaged timber is harvested in a sustainable manner and that the state's forests and forest industries continue to be managed appropriately and sustainably.

Significant stands of commercially valuable ash forests within the North East, Tambo and Central Gippsland forest management areas have been fire affected. An accurate survey of fire damage using remote sensing techniques will not be complete until late 2007.

### *Recovery Action*

*The Victorian Government will provide \$800,000 to undertake inventory analysis and survey mapping in order to revise current allocation orders.*

Fire-damaged timber degrades rapidly and only retains its economic value for 12-18 months after the fires. Action will need to be taken to realise the value of this timber and to ensure that the timber industry can adjust to the effect of the recent fires.

In the meantime, initial damage estimates are being obtained using aerial photography and ground-based inspections. Immediately following the fires, VicForests commenced a timber salvage program in the affected areas of its allocated state forest.

The primary objectives of this immediate response were to maximise fire affected timber recovery within immediate operational and commercial constraints, and to minimise the long-term impacts upon sustainable harvest levels.

The Victorian timber industry has indicated its support for an expanded salvage program in addition to the immediate salvage program.

### *Recovery Action*

*The Victorian Government will provide up to \$22 million to support an expanded timber salvage program in fire affected areas of state forest, subject to approval of a final business case by the Treasurer and the Minister for Agriculture.*

### *Better infrastructure*

The taskforce recognises the need to help bushfire affected communities to become more resilient to ensure that they can adapt to current challenges and continue to grow in the face of future adversities.

### *Recovery Action*

#### *Mt Buller – Mt Stirling Road*

*The Victorian Government will provide \$1.55 million towards the construction of a high level link road between Howqua Gap and the existing Cornhill Road, providing access to all vehicle types between Mount Buller and Mount Stirling. The road will deliver all-year access to both mountains, resulting in enhanced emergency response capabilities and tourism opportunities.*

#### *Sealing the dirt section of the Jamieson – Eildon Road*

*The government will provide \$1.22 million towards the sealing of the currently unsealed 14 kilometre section of the road. This will result in the road that circumnavigates Lake Eildon being fully sealed, leading to safer travel and creating new tourism opportunities for the surrounding region.*

#### *Rocky Valley Dam "Round the Lake" Trail*

*The government will provide \$200,000 towards the construction of a shared pathway linking Falls Creek to Wallace's Hut in the Alpine National Park, via the Rocky Valley Dam. The new track will link a network of existing walking tracks and bike trails in the area totalling some 30km in length.*

The taskforce was provided with a number of key infrastructure projects for consideration that met this objective.

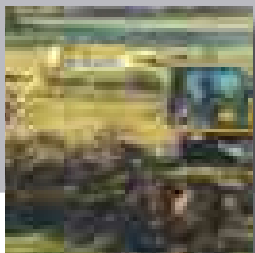
### *Better business capacity*

A critical component for strengthening the industry base of fire affected communities is matching skills to the demands of emerging and expanding industries.

The Community Regional Industry Skills Program (CRISP) contributes to the generation of new jobs, industry development, increased skills and improved services for rural and regional communities. The program provides targeted assistance to tackle skills shortages and create sustainable industries and jobs across country Victoria.

### *Recovery Action*

*The Victorian Government will provide \$3 million under the CRISP initiative for additional training to enhance the skills of employees in fire affected regions and industries.*



## 4.4 Stronger and safer communities

### Building stronger communities

Once communities begin to recover from an emergency, they need to build their capacity to be strong and independent, and to successfully face future opportunities and challenges. Immediate recovery strategies also need to promote long-term sustainability, something that requires a joint effort from governments and communities.

#### *Delivering a more coordinated approach*

The Victorian Government will ensure that fire affected communities benefit from a more coordinated approach to service delivery in the recovery process. The Department for Victorian Communities will:

- prioritise its grants programs to build leadership capacity to complement initiatives funded under the Regional Development Bushfire Recovery Fund;
- build leadership and training criteria into grants funding;
- better link education, training and jobs programs;
- support volunteer organisations;
- streamline grants processes so that applications are accessible from a single point;
- simplify reporting and accountability; and
- encourage pooling of funds from different programs to achieve agreed goals.





### *Community Development Officers*

The taskforce has worked with the most affected local governments to develop a community development package. The Victorian Government has provided \$480,000 to employ Community Development Officers (CDOs) in six fire affected shires in the North East and Gippsland regions.

CDOs will undertake capacity building and community wellbeing activities within the affected areas and are also directed to undertake community engagement, information provision, health promotion and promoting access and assistance to services. The employment of CDOs has been a long-standing and successful practice in emergency recovery.

### *Recovery Action*

*The Victorian Government will provide \$50,000 for an information strategy for the Gippsland Region to ensure that the community is informed of recovery issues. The strategy will include:*

- regular media announcements;*
- regular segments on ABC local radio;*
- production of a Gippsland recovery newsletter; and*
- development and maintenance of a regional recovery website.*

*The government will also provide \$15,000 for Lifeline Gippsland to enable personal support workers to visit fire affected families and individuals.*

### **Better community infrastructure**

#### *Community halls*

The government recognises the importance of appropriate infrastructure for community meeting places, which play an important role in community life and can be vital in times of emergency. The recent bushfires saw communities fill neighbourhood centres and community halls to attend public meetings, briefing sessions and coordinate firefighting operations.

#### *Recovery Action*

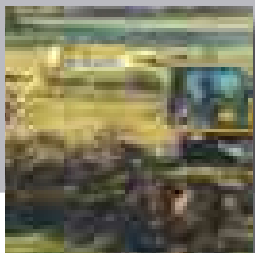
*The Victorian Government will provide up to \$1 million towards the rebuilding and refurbishment of community halls in bushfire affected areas. These projects will assist community strengthening and assist recovery.*

*The government will provide \$100,000 for the refurbishment and upgrade of community facilities and installation of a waste water main and watering system for the Whitfield Recreation Reserve.*

*The government will provide \$132,500 to support the upgrade of the Allansford community hall.*

*A \$40,000 capital works improvement project for the Corangamite Shire will improve two key community facilities serving the Stoneyford district in the Barwon South West Region, which was affected by bushfire in December 2006. The Berrybank Community Hall and the Pomborneit Recreation Reserve, which is a key community facility for the Stoneyford community, will be upgraded. These upgrades will include improvements to amenities such as toilets and water tanks, ensuring that these facilities can better serve the local community for local events and activities, as well as in times of need.*

*This program will also support refurbishing of community halls in Merrijig, Tolmie and Gaffneys Creek in the Mansfield Shire. The program will also provide \$200,000 to the East Gippsland Shire to upgrade the Bairnsdale Racing Club into a multi-purpose community facility and emergency relief centre.*



## Government case management

Victorian Government agencies have worked closely together to help minimise the impact of trauma on rural communities. The case management approach, first implemented after the 2005/06 bushfires, resulted in a decrease in community frustration arising from multiple property visits.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide \$664,000 for a case management service to assist farm families and businesses to recover from the bushfires. Case managers will offer a single point of contact for rural landholders that will facilitate access to the full range of government services, support programs and specialists. Case managers will:*

- *work with farmers to develop priorities for recovery;*
- *liaise with various professionals and agencies to coordinate the provision of appropriate services in a holistic manner;*
- *undertake necessary follow-up as it relates to the extent and quality of the service provided and ensure the level of servicing is appropriate to landholder needs over time; and*
- *maintain direct communication with local recovery committees to coordinate service delivery.*





## Community partnerships: immediate feed and fencing program

The extensive bushfire damage that has occurred across 658 properties has resulted in the loss of more than 17,000 ha of pasture, 1,375 ha of crops, almost 2,000km of fencing and 1,050 tonnes of supplementary feed.

Immediate stock feed needs are currently being met on remaining pasture, agistment and/or fodder generously donated by the farming community. The Victorian Government's announcement of \$36,000 to the Victorian Farmers Federation will provide assistance with fuel costs associated with the transport of this donated fodder to fire affected areas.

After fires, there is an urgent need on rural properties to repair fences to contain stock on the property, enable supplementary feeding and confine animals to stable areas (to avoid soil erosion). Volunteer groups have responded to the need for extra labour to help with fencing and clean-up operations.

### Recovery Action

*The Victorian Government will provide \$100,000 to assist in covering the operating expenses of volunteer groups to assist recovery activities such as fencing repair and clean-up.*

## Camp Welcola

Camp Welcola was destroyed in the recent fires, resulting in the town of Licola experiencing a serious decline in visitor numbers. Wellington Shire is leading the way in planning for the future of the town, including a role for Camp Welcola and the Lions Village.

### Recovery Action

*The government will provide \$20,000 to Wellington Shire and the Lions Village to develop a plan for the growth of Licola including the future of Camp Welcola.*

## A stronger emergency service

The efforts and contribution of volunteer firefighters combating the 2006/07 bushfires have set a new benchmark. This contribution is often at a great personal, emotional and financial cost that cannot be overstated. While sacrifice and selflessness are intrinsic to the efforts of volunteers, more can be done to both value volunteers and support their efforts.

The recent bushfires and those in 2006 and 2002/03 highlight the need for a strong and effective state emergency response. The SES and the CFA are integral to this response and their capacity to meet the inevitable challenges of the future will depend on more resources, more equipment and better facilities.

## Recovery Action

*The government will provide \$3 million over four years to extend the Valuing Volunteers Program to encourage more volunteers to join the state's emergency services and to reduce the strain such participation represents to those volunteering.*

*The government will provide \$11 million over four years in capital grants to eligible emergency services volunteer groups under the Community Safety Emergency Support Program.*

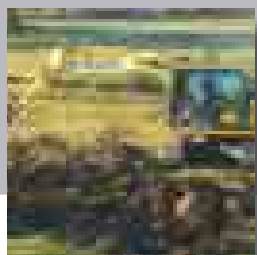
*The government will provide \$3.131 million over four years to the SES to purchase new rescue and recovery equipment for volunteers such as the jaws-of-life and chainsaws.*

*The government will provide \$8.016 million to establish new SES units at Hepburn, Wyndham and Whittlesea, improvements in Geelong, Mitta Mitta, Moe and Swan Hill as well as upgrade training facilities in Carrum, Peshurst, Wangaratta and Fiskville.*

*The government will provide an additional \$26.332 million over four years to the operating budget of the SES to reflect increased operational costs in meeting challenges such bushfires.*

*The government will provide \$8.818 million to replace or upgrade 18 CFA stations at Geelong, Geelong West, Dandenong, Mildura, Traralgon, Wangaratta, Wallan, Warburton, Whittlesea, Toora, Bonegilla, Badger Creek, Halls Gap, Erica, Christmas Hills, Mitta Mitta, Reefton and Castlemaine in line with previously announced policy.*

*The government will provide \$4 million for the SES to replace and upgrade equipment such as trucks, trailers, four wheel drives and communication equipment.*



## Summary table of expenditure

<b>GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS</b>		
Farmers and Landholders		
Fodder - transportation costs of donated fodder	\$36,000	
Fences - crown land boundary fence repair subsidy	\$28,000	
Specialist Industry Advice to Farmers	\$90,000	
Tourism Recovery, Events and Signage Package	\$3,860,000	
Fire severity mapping	\$1,265,000	
Opening our parks		
- Fast-tracking the reopening of tourist destinations by Easter	\$1,000,000	
- Restoration of priority roads, railings, signage and bridges through parks & forests	\$8,900,000	
- Rebuilding Park Assets	\$2,500,000	
Business and Community Recovery		
Business Continuity Support	\$200,000	
Funding of study into socio-economic impact of the 2006/07 fires	\$65,000	
<b>sub-total</b>		<b>\$17,944,000</b>
<b>POSITIONING FOR GROWTH</b>		
Specialist Advice to Improve pastures on farms	\$120,000	
Soil Conservation and Improvement	\$1,816,000	
Better Pest Control		
- On Private Land	\$1,885,000	
- Fox and wild dog bounties	\$1,000,000	
- On Public Land	\$3,000,000	
Securing our Water		
- Water Quality and desilting	\$6,755,000	
- Bore water for Dargo and Licola	\$200,000	
Securing Fishing Stock	\$455,000	
Securing Wildlife and Endangered Ecosystems	\$830,000	
Securing Wine Industry	\$247,250	
Securing our Heritage		
- Protecting Indigenous Sites	\$650,000	
- Rebuilding and Refurbishing High Country Huts	\$360,000	
Securing our Forests		
- Future Timber Supplies	\$5,000,000	
- Inventory Analysis and Survey Mapping	\$800,000	
- Timber Salvaging Program	\$22,000,000	
Training and Investment - CRISP	\$3,000,000	



Better infrastructure		
- Restoration of Walhalla Goldfields Railway	\$195,000	
- Mt Buller - Mt Stirling Road	\$1,550,000	
- Jamieson - Eildon Road	\$1,220,000	
- Rocky Valley Dam "Round the Lake" Trail	\$200,000	
<b>sub-total</b>		<b>\$51,283,250</b>
<b>STRONGER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES</b>		
Personal Hardship Grants	\$130,000	
Community Recovery Fund (Victorian Government contribution to clean-up & restoration)	\$700,000	
Supporting operating costs for volunteer groups in the clean-up and restoration	\$100,000	
Community Assistance - Community Development Officers	\$480,000	
School support	\$41,000	
Neighbourhood Houses	\$30,000	
Bushfire relief funding to six councils for assessment of their recovery needs	\$300,000	
Coordination of local recovery services grants to Alpine Resort Management Boards and Baw Baw Shire	\$110,000	
Contribution to costs of operating Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres (estimate) in exceptional circumstances	\$500,000	
Supporting various local events and assisting councils manage local infrastructure projects	\$145,000	
Red Cross Appeal	\$50,000	
Information Strategy for Gippsland Region	\$50,000	
Personal Support Workers services provided by Lifeline Gippsland	\$15,000	
Better Community Halls	\$1,000,000	
Upgrading of facilities of the Whitfield Recreation Reserve	\$100,000	
Upgrading of Allansford Hall	\$132,500	
DPI Case Managers for Farmers	\$664,000	
Fencing volunteer support	\$100,000	
Planning for the growth of Licola including the future Camp Welcola	\$20,000	
A Stronger Emergency Service		
Valuing Volunteers Program	\$3,000,000	
Grants for Emergency Services Volunteer Groups	\$11,000,000	
New Equipment for Volunteers	\$3,131,000	
New and Improved SES Units	\$8,016,000	
Strengthening the SES	\$26,332,000	
New and Upgraded CFA Stations	\$8,818,000	
New Equipment for the SES	\$4,000,000	
<b>sub-total</b>		<b>\$68,964,500</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$138,191,750</b>	

