



# 2006 REPORT FROM THE MINISTERIAL TASKFORCE ON BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

A Victorian  
Government  
initiative





# Foreword

The bushfires in Victoria during December 2005 and January 2006 were widespread with significant fires in Gippsland, the Grampians region, Brisbane Ranges, Kinglake, Yea and south-west Victoria. While not as large as other fires in Victoria's history, the 2006 fires did result in the loss of a large number of private properties and significant stock losses.

Moreover, these fires witnessed the tragic loss of Campbells Creek firefighter Trevor Day, and Malcolm Wilson and his 12 year old son, Zeke, from Stawell. The Government extends its deepest sympathy to their families, friends and colleagues. Another firefighter, Rebecca Helwig of Barnawartha, lost her life later in the fire season. The Government also extends its sympathy to her family, friends and colleagues.

In the wake of the 2002-03 fires, a Ministerial Taskforce was established to assess the impact of the fires. It quickly put in place a range of recovery measures. In its Final Report the Taskforce outlined actions required for the recovery phase and detailed additional policy and funding initiatives to support the rejuvenation of the fire-affected communities and to restore public assets and help private landholders whose properties were affected.

That Report was followed by a detailed examination of the 2002-03 Victorian Bushfires chaired by Mr Bruce Esplin, Emergency Services Commissioner, Victoria (the 'Victorian Bushfire Inquiry'). It made numerous recommendations, one of which was support for the Auditor General's May 2003 Report 'Fire Prevention and Preparedness'. These reviews sought to identify ways in which fire prevention/mitigation, response and recovery could be enhanced and organisational structures and systems improved.

It was this spirit of co-operation that minimised individual tragedy and loss in the 2006 fires, as did the dedication of volunteer and paid fire fighters, support staff and other volunteers. Other factors that reduced the loss of life and property were improvements in operational fire management, the preparedness of local communities and the high level of co-operation between local councils during and after the fires.

This Ministerial Taskforce was established by the Premier on 30 January 2006.

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established to support the Taskforce and to co-ordinate its functions with those of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. This ensured a whole-of-government approach to the management of the recovery process.

Members of the Taskforce visited fire affected areas and engaged in community forums. This dialogue with communities shaped much of the response effort, and this Report outlines measures undertaken to assist with their recovery.

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One of the outstanding features of the response to these fires was the level of community engagement from a very early stage in the fire response. There were 101 community meetings undertaken during the January 2006 fires, attended by 16,000 people. These figures are indicative of the greater commitment of fire agencies to inform and involve local communities throughout fire suppression and recovery. As well, ABC Radio's continuous coverage during the emergency period significantly enhanced the level and quality of information to communities during the fires.

The Government will continue to support the recovery process, assess the impact of the fires on communities and respond to any outstanding issues that need to be addressed.



The Hon John Brumby MP  
Chair





# Taskforce members

The Ministers appointed to the Taskforce were:

**The Hon John Brumby MP,**  
Treasurer and Minister for State and Regional Development (Chair)

**The Hon John Thwaites MP,**  
Deputy Premier and Minister for Water, Environment and Victorian Communities

**The Hon Bob Cameron, MP,**  
Minister for Agriculture

**The Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP,**  
Minister for Community Services

**The Hon Candy Broad MLC,**  
Minister for Local Government

**The Hon John Pandazopoulos MP,**  
Minister for Tourism

**The Hon Tim Holding MP,**  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Secretariat: The Taskforce was supported by an Interdepartmental Committee jointly chaired by senior officers of the Department of Human Services and Regional Development Victoria.

# Contents

Foreword .....	i
Taskforce members .....	iii
1. Introduction .....	1
2. The recent bushfires .....	3
3. Meeting fire recovery needs .....	9
4. Issues, responses and actions .....	13



# 1. Introduction



## 1.1 Establishing the Ministerial Taskforce

In response to the bushfires that significantly impacted on communities during December 2005 and January 2006, the Premier, Hon Steve Bracks MP, convened a Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery on 30 January 2006.

The Taskforce followed a similar approach to that of the 2003 Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, and was led by the Treasurer and Minister for State Regional Development, the Hon John Brumby MP.

The role of the Taskforce was to assess the impact of the fires and quickly put in place a range of recovery measures that would complement recovery programs already undertaken by communities. The Terms of Reference governing the Taskforce were to:

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



## 1.2 Bushfire recovery - Ministerial Community Consultation Program

The Taskforce's immediate task was to assess firsthand the impact of the fires on the communities, environment and economy. It achieved this through an intensive Ministerial Consultation Program visiting the fire affected areas of the State to inspect damage and engage with communities.

The Premier visited Stawell and the Grampians region on 24 January 2006 prior to the Taskforce being announced. Members of the Ministerial Taskforce visited the following fire affected areas:

3 January 2006	Stawell
29 January 2006	Erica
31 January 2006	Grampians Region
2 February 2006	Murrindindi Shire
6 February 2006	Anakie and Brisbane Ranges
8 - 9 February 2006	Dunkeld, Halls Gap, Pomonal, Moyston and the Grampians National Park
17 February 2006	Moe, Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and Traralgon
23 February 2006	Tyrendarra, Macarthur and Mt Eccles National Park
7 March 2006	Moondarra in Gippsland

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) was established to support the Taskforce and has worked across Government to develop recovery measures to ensure families and businesses affected by the fires have the best opportunities to recover quickly from the devastation. This approach recognises that rebuilding must occur at the individual and community level, but that there are ways in which Government assistance will speed this recovery process.

## 2. The recent bushfires



### 2.1 Profile of the fires

#### Size

Across Victoria more than 500 fires broke out in January 2006 (including New Year's Eve). The fires with greatest impact on the Victorian community occurred in the Stawell (Deep Lead), Yea, Moondarra, Grampians, Kinglake and Anakie areas. These fires burnt around 160,000 hectares, of which approximately 60% was public land and 40% private property. Fifty seven houses were destroyed and 359 farm buildings lost, including 39 woolsheds and 22 haysheds. Stock losses totalled more than 64,000, including 63,243 sheep, 557 cattle and over 2,500 commercial beehives.

A comparison with past major Victorian bushfire events is shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

Losses	1939	1983	2003	2006
Fatalities	71	47	1	4
Houses	650	2000+	41	57
Stock losses	Not known	27,000	11,600	64,265
Area Burnt (hectares)	1.5 million	200,000	1.3 million	160,000

#### Fire affected areas

Communities and towns within the following municipalities were impacted by the significant fire events:

- Ararat Rural City
- Baw Baw Shire
- Glenelg Shire
- Golden Plains Shire
- Greater Geelong City
- Horsham Rural City
- Latrobe City
- Moorabool Shire
- Moyne Shire
- Murrindindi Shire





- Northern Grampians Shire
- South Gippsland Shire
- Southern Grampians Shire

## 2.2 Management of the fires

### Fire Suppression

Considerable fire fighting resources (including interstate support) were committed to combating the fires. In addition, countless personnel and volunteers from across numerous government departments and agencies, local government, volunteer and community organisations were involved in supporting suppression activities and continue to support recovery efforts. The community and volunteer efforts are an integral part of successful response activities under of the State Emergency Response Plan.

The Taskforce acknowledges and would again like to extend its gratitude to the more than 5000 volunteers and paid personnel who were involved in the suppression of the fires and to those who provided a range of backup support to them.

The Taskforce would also like to acknowledge the many individuals and businesses who contributed time, goods and services during the fire emergency. Local businesses 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 bushfire period.

### Local government activities

Acting as the first point of contact for a range of recovery services, local government established a number of emergency relief centres to provide initial support and shelter to those people who chose to leave their homes. Once the immediate threat of the fires had passed, recovery centres were established at Anakie, Ararat and Stawell to provide advice, immediate assistance and referral to appropriate local service providers.

The Taskforce congratulates local government, who have shown strong leadership in responding to the needs of their communities. Particular acknowledgement must go to those councils that, although unaffected by the fires themselves, provided a range of support and assistance to their neighbouring councils.

### Community interaction

Community meetings were held both pre-fire and during the actual fire events. The meetings were an excellent opportunity to inform and advise residents as to what they could expect when fires occurred and what they could do to protect themselves and their properties. The level of attendance at these community meetings was more than double that of previous fires, which is an indicator of greater community involvement and enhanced empowerment, and of the lessons learned from 2003.

Community meetings also proved a great opportunity for the community to provide specific fire area information (eg. correct road names on fire maps) that assisted Incident Management Teams in providing accurate and up-to-date information. Some community interactions were less formal but none the less effective (eg. an officer available at local stores/locations at certain times each day) and provided individuals with a chance to ask questions, gain information and support, and provide feedback to the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) personnel throughout the incident. The combination of activities in some places provided a much better link between community members and fire management staff.

The recommendations in the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry leading to Integrated Municipal Fire Management Planning are currently in an advanced stage of development. This improved approach will formalise and facilitate much closer community-agency interaction in the provision of local knowledge for fire control personnel.

Recovery information and activities began in parallel with response activities, which also meant that respite and support were available very early on in some cases.

## 2. The recent bushfires (continued)

### 2.3 Immediate impacts of the fires

#### Impact on individuals and communities

The effects of bushfires on individuals and communities can be significant and long lasting. A distinguishing feature of the 2006 fires was that they directly damaged more private land and assets than the 2003 fires. Livestock losses of over 64,000 far exceed the 11,600 lost in 2003. Fifty seven houses were destroyed, 19 of which were principal places of residence, and a number of other residential properties suffered damage to fences, water tanks and other utilities. Some areas also had to cope without power for extended periods of time.

Many people were displaced, including tourists from the Grampians National Park area.

The fires threatened many communities for over a week particularly those in the Gippsland and Grampians areas. The timing of these fires also disrupted the start of school for some Victorian students.

One of the outstanding features of the response to these fires was the level of community engagement from a very early stage in the fire response. There were 101 community meetings undertaken during the January 2006 fires, compared with 82 during the Alpine fires in 2003. There was a total approximate attendance of 16,000 people at these meetings which were run over a short period of 9-10 days, compared with 58 days during the 2003 fires. These figures are indicative of the heightened level of interest about fire amongst community members, more towns and surrounding communities impacted by this series of fires, and a greater commitment by fire agencies (both CFA and DSE) to inform and involve local communities throughout fire suppression and into fire recovery. A number of other activities supported people who found community meetings uncomfortable, such as letter drops and informal meetings in local stores.

The complex issues created by the loss of life, property, income, and the threat posed by the bushfires can have adverse health and social outcomes for individuals. While most people cope, some of the possible health outcomes can include anxiety, depression, poor nutritional status, grief and bereavement, exhaustion and in a small number of cases post traumatic stress.

#### Tom, Sarah, Pollyanna and Ford Guthrie "Thermopylae", The Grampians Australia Day, 2006.

Our house and woolshed were saved but otherwise there was not much left and it was a similar story with many of our neighbours.

The fire burnt 95% of our estate Thermopylae, approximately 3,500 sheep, machinery, sheds, hay, vines and fencing. Our pony is also presumed to have been lost in the fires.

The fire came with a ferocity that matched the gale force winds blowing at the time, surprising us by its speed and magnitude. Within minutes it was dropping fireballs into the paddocks.

The fire trucks and the Parks Victoria units were brilliant and no doubt prevented the grass fire getting up to the house or into the woolshed.

The biggest job following the fire is to put down suffering sheep and bury all dead stock. A terrible task, but fortunately we had a team of about 15 to help with the job.

We have had fantastic support from so many. It's been tough going but we have great friends and that's kept our spirits up. We're fit and well, our pets and sheep dogs safe and Thermopylae will soon return to being that special place we know it to be.



### Impact on small business and tourism

Industry, particularly that related to tourism, was hard hit by the immediate impacts of the bushfires, and is likely to feel the effects for some time to come. In areas such as the Grampians, this impact also resonates across neighbouring communities that rely indirectly on the tourism industry. Businesses immediately lost revenue through the almost instant cessation of tourism activities, putting pressure on their viability and having an impact on their supply chains and on existing and potential employment opportunities.

A survey of 102 tourism-related Grampians businesses compiled by Tourism Alliance Victoria, in partnership with the newly formed Grampians Region Tourism Recovery Group (GRTRG), identified that the loss of revenue during the peak season will have a significant impact as businesses rebuild. Fifty nine per cent of the businesses responding to the survey indicated that over 75% of their business turnover was related to the Grampians National Park. This critical connection between the natural landscape, visitor activity and tourism businesses is what underpins the \$187 million per annum tourism industry in the Grampians region. The survey also highlighted concerns over the impact on cash flow during peak season, bookings lost in advance some as far out as eight weeks, and at least 112 staff laid off as a result of the fires. Businesses and communities are also suffering from non-recoverable losses resulting from the cancellation of scheduled events.

The capacity to bounce back after the bushfires will be tested for many businesses with 61% of respondents indicating difficulty in being readily able to finance future business growth, and the Wimmera Development Corporation estimating that tourism downturn resulting from bushfire devastation will cost the Grampians regional economy up to \$100 million.

### Impact on agriculture

The agriculture sector affected by the fires consists of sheep, cattle, horticulture (vines, orchards, olives and nursery), forestry and apiary enterprises. Forty-four per cent of affected properties were of a commercial nature with the remainder classed as lifestyle or hobby farms.

Estimates on agricultural losses are that approximately 62,000 hectares of farming land owned by 603 property owners/lessees were burnt. Assets lost included 57 houses, more than 350 other buildings and over 64,000 head of livestock (63,243 head of sheep, 557 head of cattle and 464 other stock). Fencing losses equated to over 364km of crown land boundary fencing and 2,281km of other boundary or internal fencing. Over 2,500 beehives managed by 18 apiarists were also lost as was 900ha of plantations (pine and eucalypt).

### Impact on national parks

Approximately 98,000 hectares of national parks and conservation areas and 6,000 hectares of State forest were burnt in the bushfires. National and State parks that were significantly impacted were the Grampians National Park, the Brisbane Ranges National Park and the Moondarra State Park.

A desk-based analysis of infrastructure destroyed in the National and State Parks has been undertaken, however, field checking is taking place to confirm this. It is expected that the field checking will corroborate that there has been significant damage to existing infrastructure.

Parks Victoria has already trained tourism operators to conduct site assessments and this will provide alternative employment opportunities.

## 2. The recent bushfires (continued)

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### Environmental Impact

Unlike the Alpine fires of 2002-03, the fires of January 2006 occurred across the State and had greater direct and short-term impacts on private land and communities. The environmental impacts therefore are more diverse and demand varied responses from the relevant agencies, including DSE, the Department of Primary Industry (DPI) and statutory bodies such as Parks Victoria, water authorities and catchment management authorities.

By far the largest of the fires was in the Grampians, which affected large areas of the National Park as well as water catchments serving communities in the west of the State. However, while other fires may have had smaller areas burnt, their impacts on local environments have also been significant.

The experiences of the 2003 fires and the reports on their impacts have helped preparedness and the management of risk, which has been reflected by the response to the 2006 fires.

### Impact on water quality

Following the Grampians and Gippsland fires, where the impact on water quality was most pronounced, Wimmera Mallee Water and Gippsland Water moved quickly to identify immediate risks to supplies of potable water and, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services (DHS), offered short-term supplies of bottled water and fresh supplies of domestic water.

Recognising risks to catchments in the event of rain, fire crews commenced immediate rehabilitation works to fire trails and breaks as soon as it was safe to do so. These short-term works were treated as part of the fire suppression effort, with the aim of ameliorating immediate risks from run-off and erosion.

### Ecological Impact

The opportunity will also be taken to undertake works to control weeds and animal pests. These opportunities arise on both public and private land, in co-operation with land owners. There are also opportunities to assist private land owners in fencing out remnant vegetation as part of erosion control and broad land management works.

### Impact on Roads

Of critical importance to helping people and industries get back on their feet has been the reopening of road networks. Even short-term road closures make it difficult for communities to easily access critical supplies, for farmers to move stock to better feeding areas or move fodder, to allow access to insurance or counselling support and to enable visitors to the area to move around freely.

The Grampians fires affected over 240km of roads across the local and state road network. All state declared roads are now open and most of the local roads outside the Grampians National Park region have also now re-opened.

Most of the significant damage to the road network occurred on the forest road system. These roads vary in quality from sealed tourist roads to fire access tracks. DSE, through Parks Victoria, is continuing to re-open these roads, although the scale of the fires makes this a time-consuming activity. In the Grampians National Park alone more than 1200km of forest roads were affected.

### State declared roads

These fires did not have a significant impact upon the state declared road network, with the exception of the Northern Grampians Road from Halls Gap to the Horsham Rural City Council boundary, where more than 3000 roadside guideposts were destroyed.



## Local Roads

Table 2.2 shows the municipalities that have had local roads affected by fire damage.

Shire	Extent of Damage	Progress of recovery
Rural City of Ararat	45 local roads affected totalling 180km. One minor bridge.	Most local roads open. Most remaining roads will be opened by the end of March. Mint Road requires a bridge to be constructed. A second check by arborists to re-assess trees (and related works) will take approximately three months, however, roads will be open during this period.
Shire of Northern Grampians	Approximately 62km of local roads. Dead and dangerous trees and roadside furniture.	Most works complete. All local roads open.
Latrobe City	15 local roads. Grading work. Cleanup of dead/ damaged trees.	All local roads open.
Baw Baw Shire	14 local roads. Virtually no local losses.	All local roads open.
Murrindindi Shire	2 local roads. Damage to roadside furniture.	Signs have been replaced and roads open. Bridge railing to be replaced by June.
City of Greater Geelong	Minimal damage to roadside furniture.	Works completed .

While some assessments are still progressing, the damage to local government road infrastructure is significantly less than in 2003. Councils have worked quickly and effectively to ensure the impact on local communities is minimised.



# 3. Meeting fire recovery needs



## 3.1 Immediate actions

### Initiating emergency recovery



The Government and Community responded swiftly to the fires through the quick implementation of the State Emergency Recovery Plan. Municipalities immediately established recovery committees to monitor the impact of the fires and coordinate the delivery of services to the affected communities. They were supported by DHS, which established regional coordination committees in the Grampians, Hume, Gippsland and Barwon South West regions. Membership of these committees consisted of a range of local service providers, local government and Government agencies and departments.

Paralleling these efforts, a whole-of-government recovery response was initiated with the convening of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. Its role is to coordinate the planning, and to oversee and monitor the response to all major emergencies such as the bushfires.

An immediate focus for the Government was to provide aid that was of a particular need in these fires, in addition to the community and volunteer efforts in fire fighting and fire suppression. This was augmented by individuals and businesses contributing time, goods and services during the fire emergency.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) contacted all rural landholders where practical to assess losses and to identify and attend to urgent needs such as animal welfare assessment, the humane destruction of stock, and the provision of advice relating to stock disposal. Advice was also provided by DPI to other recovery agencies and organisations to ensure more effective targeting of assistance measures (eg. emergency fodder and agistment, volunteer fencing and counselling).

### Victorian Government initial support for recovery

A critical role for the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery was to assess 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 have been announced since the Taskforce was established. Many of these decisions and announcements resulted directly from the Ministerial Consultation Program. Listed below are immediate responses made by the Government to date to support individuals, families and communities, farmers, tourism operators and other small business recover.



Also listed are actions aimed at aiding the rehabilitation of the environment and the restoration of damaged assets:

### Supporting individual and community recovery

- The Government is offering a range of immediate financial supports to individuals directly affected by the bushfires due to the need for evacuation or loss of homes. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services activated major Personal Hardship and Distress grants (up to \$21,900) for both the Stawell fires on New Year's Eve, and the Mount Lubra and Brisbane Ranges fires. These grants enable those people with limited financial resources to access assistance with temporary accommodation expenses, and to assist them re-establish their principal place of residence. The Temporary Living Expenses Grant of up to \$7,300 is payable to eligible households. The Re-establishment Grant has two components, both of up to \$7,300, that are payable for replacement of essential content items, and to effect structural repairs. Applications have been received and by the end of February 2006, just over \$80,000 had been approved.
- 390 payments of Emergency Grants totalling over \$280,000 have been made up to the end of February. These grants pay up to \$900 per household (\$360 per adult and \$180 per child) for essential needs.
- Accessing assistance for individuals following emergencies is difficult due to their reduced coping capacity from stress. Funding for personal support, case management and outreach services to better assist individuals with complex needs has been provided. A case management approach is taken which enables an affected individual to deal with one representative of the recovery system. \$60,000 has already been allocated to assist the Grampians Community Health Service and agencies in the Geelong region provide this service to individuals affected by the Mount Lubra fire and the Brisbane Ranges fire. At the end of February, over 100 families had sought case management assistance in the Grampians area and in Anakie.
- Immediate funding of \$255,000 to local governments to enable recovery coordination. The Rural City of Ararat, City of Greater Geelong, Shire of Northern Grampians, Shire of Murrindindi, Baw Baw Shire and Latrobe City will each receive assistance to help them meet their primary responsibility of coordinating and managing their local recovery activities. This includes undertaking impact assessment, establishing recovery centres, undertaking community engagement and coordinating local agencies.
- Provision of information and referral to service providers through the Victorian Bushfire Information Line.
- Extension of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) to those families with children affected by bushfire. Parents/guardians who have received an Emergency Grant may apply for the EMA for 2006 under the 'Special Consideration' category.
- \$500,000 package of assistance to support economic and social renewal projects in fire affected communities. This includes grants for up to \$20,000 to 11 local councils for out-of-pocket expenses incurred towards the economic recovery process.
- The Government contributed \$444,400 to fast-track three projects (totalling \$666,600) under the Government's existing Small Towns Development Fund to boost confidence in affected regions:
  - A Southern Grampians Tourism project (total cost: \$375,000) to provide tourist maps and interpretive story boards to link 12 small towns and communities;
  - The redevelopment of the Moyston Community Centre (project cost: \$165,000); and
  - Upgrading the Willaura Memorial Park (project cost: \$60,000).
- The Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) provided a \$4,000 grant to the Anakie and District Community Group Neighbourhood House as it effectively became the local headquarters during the fires in its surrounding area, and a \$2,000 grant to the Kinglake District Neighbourhood House in recognition of its support of the emergency relief effort.

### 3. Meeting fire recovery needs (continued)

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#### Supporting emergency responders

- The provision of an extra \$1million to a State Government program to help emergency services organisations across Victoria purchase specialist rescue and protective equipment. Under this program, the following CFA brigades will receive approximately \$800,000 towards the cost of new tankers – Wooragee, North Hamilton, Brewster, Waubra, Lancefield and Huntly.

#### Supporting farmers and rural landholders

- The Rural Finance Corporation (RFC) is making Concession Loans available to householders whose principal residence has been damaged or destroyed, and to voluntary not-for-profit organisations, primary producers and small businesses that have suffered property loss or damage as a direct result of the bushfires. Loans at 2.6% per annum, with a maximum term of the concessional period of five years, for an amount up to \$100,000 for a single advance to \$150,000 for aggregated loans are available. Loans of more than \$150,000 will be considered in exceptional circumstances. The RFC is able to assist with the application process.
- The Government has provided \$125,000 to the VFF to fund coordinators and cover fuel costs associated with the transport of emergency fodder and agistment.
- Reimbursement of insurance excess up to \$400 for claims made for Crown land (Park and State Forest) boundary fences damaged or destroyed by bushfires (estimated cost \$55,000).

#### Supporting business and tourism operators

- The establishment of a Grampians Bushfire Tourism Recovery Taskforce with representatives of tourism stakeholders and councils to identify short, medium and longer-term strategies to ensure the future growth of the region's tourism industry.
- The production of print media and radio advertisement to promote individual events being held in the Grampian region over February to April 2006 to attract visitors –

the Grampians Jazz Festival at Halls Gap (10-12 February), Moyston Country Music Festival (12 March), 125th Australia Post Stawell Gift (15-17 April) and Grampians Great Escape Food and Wine Festival (29-30 April).

- A \$5,000 grant to help ensure the Halls Gap Jazz Festival proceeded.
- \$100,000 for one-on-one advisers to businesses in relation to taxation/finance, marketing, inventory management, employment, business planning and other relevant areas.

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

- Gippsland Water and Wimmera Mallee Water are working with DSE to assess risk to water supplies in their catchment areas. Initial stabilisation works have been carried out and further works will be implemented. Longer-term proposals for revegetation will support catchment health and soil stability in affected areas.
- In association with DHS, water authorities provided emergency supplies of potable water to communities during the active phases of the fire emergency. The Government offered to assist those landholders experiencing significant hardship as a result of the reduction in their essential water supplies due to fire fighting efforts, with financial assistance for water cartage and replenishment.

#### Supporting Councils

- Financial assistance to municipal councils is available to assist with the cost of restoring municipal assets and for expenses incurred for emergency protection works. This Relief Fund is administered by the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) and a teleconference was organised with the four shires in the Grampians region and DTF officials to discuss the Fund. DTF officers are currently providing advice to councils to assist them with applications to the Fund.





## Other support

Work gangs from Ararat Prison helped out in fire damaged areas. There are currently two gangs (approximately 30 offenders) sent out to do community work, and a decision has been made to extend both groups until the end of the financial year. Corrections authorities are currently working with other government departments to make sure the offenders are put to work in areas where they can be of most benefit.

Utility providers made efforts to re-instate services quickly. The Australian Taxation Office reassured bushfire victims not to worry 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 assist with the reconstruction of tax records. Centrelink offered ex-gratia payments of \$1,000 per eligible adult and \$400 per eligible child for a person who, as a direct result of the fires, is unable to live at their principal residence because it had either been destroyed or was deemed uninhabitable for a period of two weeks.

Mechanisms exist under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements for the Australian Government to assist Victoria with the extraordinary costs of response and recovery from defined natural disasters. This sets out the cost-sharing arrangements between States and the Commonwealth for costs incurred as a result of an eligible natural disaster. States are primarily responsible for the costs of the natural disasters until a threshold expenditure level (related to the State's revenue base) is reached. In the case of these fires, Victoria's initial expenditure threshold is currently set at \$64.1 million per annum and is unlikely to be exceeded, other than for the Personal Hardship and Distress component, for which the threshold stands at \$240,000 per fire. The Commonwealth will re-imburse Victoria 50% of the amount exceeding this threshold.

A Grampians Region Bushfire Appeal has been launched by the Northern Grampians, Horsham, Ararat and Southern Grampians municipalities. Donations can be made to any ANZ Bank. Cheques can be made payable to the Grampians Region Bushfire Appeal and posted to PO Box 580, Stawell Vic 3380.

## 3.2 Next steps in funding recovery

### Understanding the longer-term impacts and community needs

The Ministerial consultations appear to have been universally well received, with the Premier and Taskforce members gaining a vivid picture of the challenges ahead. Viewing the devastation firsthand and engaging in face-to-face encounters with members of the fire-affected communities has informed decision making at the highest level in Government and shaped the Government's response to assist individuals, families and communities rebuild their lives.

Fire recovery committees established in each of the regions, with representatives from the major government agencies, have also informed the Taskforce of the impacts in their communities.

Given this diverse range of influences, additional funding has been scoped to address issues consistently identified within the broad areas of rebuilding individual and community strength, economic revitalisation and environmental recovery and regrowth.



# 4. Issues, responses and actions



This Report has focused on the development of a range of initiatives and actions, underway and proposed, to support community, environmental and economic recovery.

These responses have been shaped by many of the serious issues resulting from the fires for communities, local industries and the natural environment.

As part of the Taskforce consultation process, issues were identified as being imperative on the recovery agenda. These have consistently included the impact on the environment, farming land, fencing, stock losses, tourism and infrastructure as well as the personal and social cost of the fires on individuals, families and small businesses. Many of these issues are inter-related, for example, a downturn in businesses reliant on access to the amenity of the State parks will in turn impact on other local businesses and the broader community, both in economic and social terms.

The longer-term impact of the fires is not isolated to the communities directly affected but felt throughout the neighbouring regions. Even within those affected communities, the fire's impact has penetrated the community in areas not immediately obvious, particularly for those organisations reliant on voluntary assistance with raising funds, as such help is now limited.

The main issues now facing these communities and the Government for the longer-term recovery broadly fit the following categories:

- Supporting resilience and regrowth across the communities through community development;
- Supporting affected businesses and their impact on other industries and the community;
- Supporting farmers and other rural landholders;
- Protecting and rehabilitating the natural environment and restoration of the natural resource base to support tourism and other impacted industries; and
- Rebuilding the tourism industry.



## Community-based recovery

### Supporting individual and community resilience

The impact on the affected communities has been extensive, including stress and anxiety associated with the loss of lives, frequent and repeated evacuation alerts, direct fire threats and subsequent loss of farming and residential property.

Further, the secondary economic impacts on commercial and tourism interests have taken a toll. The community impacts often manifest themselves as anger at government agencies, division within the community and a decline in the health and wellbeing of affected individuals.

Recovering from any emergency is a long-term process for a community as the effects can be significant and long lasting. It has been found that communities with a high degree of involvement in the recovery process recover quicker and more cohesively. The Government therefore recognises that communities must take the lead in managing their recovery by not only responding to immediate needs but also addressing longer-term issues.

The most effective mechanism to enable recovery at a local level has been through the establishment of community recovery committees (CRCs), with representation from the affected communities, local government, local agencies and state government. They are convened by local governments, which take a lead role in their ongoing operation.

Generating tailored solutions and strategies to meet a community's needs requires detailed knowledge and understanding of local strengths and weaknesses to rebuild their social and physical capital. CRCs are developing local bushfire community recovery plans that target a range of initiatives from the short to long term. Their focus is on recovery at all levels encompassing individuals, community, municipalities and the broader region to support initiatives that will underpin their future economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

The initiatives announced to date have directed resources to support fire-affected communities to manage their own recovery.

### Bruce and Robyn Dalkin

#### "Westgate", The Grampians

#### New Year's Eve (Dec 31, 2005)

It all started on New Year's Eve, while enjoying a belated Christmas with family and friends. A lightning strike started a fire at Deep Lead about 35kms away, and at about 9.30pm we realised the seriousness of the situation.

Our New Year's Eve festivities were put on hold and our Fire Safety Plan put into action. The unpredictable wind changes kept us on alert all night.

A predicted wind change would take the fire towards the Great Western township and until the wind changed, our estate Westgate was in its direct path. Great Western, Armstrong and Ararat were put on alert.

The damage from this fire was fairly dramatic with many neighbours losing stock, fencing etc.

Just two weeks later another lightning strike started a fire at Mt Lubra near Mt William in the Grampians. Many of our neighbours and friends lost property.

The final wash-up has been devastating with approx 50% of the National Park burnt, 1,500kms of fencing, 30 homes and 60,000 sheep lost and a very weary and stressed community.

The task of rebuilding will be huge, but the amazing community spirit is alive and well. The old saying "through adversity comes strength" is certainly our motto at the moment.

Please come and visit the Grampians, we still have lots to see and do and the regeneration of the area will be amazing.

Robyn Dalkin

## 4. Issues, responses and actions (continued)

### Community Development

Community development is a strategy that has been successfully employed to manage the community impacts of large-scale events, (most recently the fires of 2003 and the drought situation). Community development officers can help local communities develop their own solutions to recovery and can act as a catalyst in drawing communities together, ensuring access to services, providing a voice to affected residents and assisting in the development of local recovery plans.

The Government has worked with the worst affected local governments to develop a community development package that focuses on community engagement, information provision, health promotion and promoting access and assistance and services.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$300,000** over the next 12 months to the shires of Ararat and Northern Grampians to fund two full-time Community Development Officers (CDOs) with vehicles. Where required, they will also service their neighbouring municipalities of Southern Grampians Shire and the Rural City of Horsham. This funding is in addition to funds already allocated to fire affected shires to facilitate community development initiatives.

These funds will enable the officers to immediately undertake capacity building and community well-being activities within the affected areas and will also be directed to community activities and professional development and mentoring programs.

It is considered vital that communities continue to be consulted and kept informed throughout the recovery phase. Community Recovery Committees will work to ensure that best practice in community engagement is adopted and that this process be coordinated across the various government departments and agencies and local government.

**\$135,000** will be provided to volunteer Committees of Management for 24 community projects. These grants will largely be for community facilities such as halls and recreation facilities in fire affected communities and a small number for tourism facilities.

### Monitoring recovery

Although the Government supports and recognises that communities must take the lead role in managing their own recovery, the government is required to coordinate assistance. DHS is nominated under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* as the coordinating government agency for recovery from emergencies and will continue to monitor communities during their recovery phase.

### 4.2 Supporting businesses

While some businesses have experienced an upturn in business due to the firefighting efforts and the needs of emergency services personnel, the majority of businesses in the fire affected regions have reported a business downturn. The extent of the downturn seems to be related to the business location with the effect in the Northern Grampians area, for example, more pronounced than in other areas.

Some business operators in the fire affected areas have experienced an immediate and major reduction in demand for their goods and services, especially those reliant on tourism. Apart from tourism, the other group of businesses identified as significantly affected are those that are, or will be, subject to a drop in discretionary expenditure by the townspeople and others in their immediate community. These are, for example, general stores, newsagents and clothing stores. Some businesses that supply the rural area have experienced an initial upturn, but they see this as not being sustainable and in the months ahead conditions will become difficult due to the massive stock losses.

Business operators have and will continue to lose income through a decrease in tourism activity and the flow on to other support industries and services.

The decrease in economic activity has caused reductions in full-time, part-time and casual staff, resulting in unemployment, with the potential to lead to trade and skills shortages in the medium to longer-term. Skills shortages in some areas will be exacerbated during the recovery phase by the increased demand for professional and trades people, particularly in the building and construction areas.



In the longer-term, business capacity to achieve and contribute to economic recovery is intrinsically linked to repairs to damaged infrastructure, agricultural recovery, environmental recovery and ultimately the return of tourists.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

A "Regional Business Capacity Rebuilding Program" was developed to assist bushfire affected businesses. The program, being delivered through Regional Development Victoria, is providing 'one-on-one' advice to businesses in relation to taxation/finance, marketing, inventory management, employment, business planning and other relevant areas, including relationship management, human resources, seeking finance from Rural Finance Corporation, insurance and service delivery. Total funding for the program is **\$100,000**. Over 70 businesses in the Grampians area (including the Dunkeld area) are being assisted, at no cost to the business.

Businesses are now working together to rebuild the area from what was a very competitive commercial environment. There is a strong community spirit emerging of banding together to come through this difficult period. Businesses are now looking at joint marketing campaigns to bring visitors back to the area.

A representative of one company in the Grampians area stated: "It is our belief that the advisers provided through the Business Capacity Rebuilding Program has provided an immediate and direct benefit to our company through the consultancy services provided. The adviser helped us to reassess the situation and provided a very positive slant on a negative situation, in collaboration we developed a marketing and recovery strategy for the business in which we are hopeful the strategies identified will be fruitful".

In the Moondarra area of Gippsland the effect on business seems to have been less with only two businesses to date seeking assistance. Further promotion of the program will take place to encourage companies that may have been affected to apply for assistance.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

As part of the Taskforce's Terms of Reference, the Government has identified a further seven Small Towns Development Fund projects to fast-track and is developing a series to be rolled out through the recovery period.

The Victorian Government will contribute **\$987,400** to fast-track the following projects with a total value of \$1.48 million:

- J Ward redevelopment to restore its heritage value as a tourist attraction and improve its economic viability and attract a range of visitors and users to Ararat (cost: \$165,000);
- Upgrading the Ararat CBD streetscape to improve the appearance and function of the shopping centre (cost: \$250,000);
- Implementation of Stage 2 of Halls Gap Urban Design Framework, consisting of the beautification of the Town Centre and outdoor passive recreation areas (cost \$120,000);
- Implementation of Stage 1 of Halls Gap Community and Tourism Hub, involving the upgrade and expansion of the existing Community Hall and Tourist Information Centre (cost \$375,000);
- Improvements to the Walhalla Visitor amenities through upgrades to car and coach parking areas, toilet facilities, BBQ and picnic facilities. The amenities block will also incorporate an above ground water catchment tank for community use and for use as emergency water supply for the CFA in the event of a bushfire. (cost \$375,000);
- Upgrade and refurbishment of Bells Hall, Rawson, to enable its ongoing use for a broad range of community, social and sporting functions. (cost \$97,500); and
- The development of new community infrastructure at the Yea Wetlands to enhance the eco-tourism experience for visitors. (cost \$97,500).

The Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development's Victorian Business Centres are providing general business support and, as required, referral and access to existing business programs to bushfire-affected communities.

## 4. Issues, responses and actions (continued)

### 4.3 Supporting farmers and other rural landholders

The outstanding efforts of fire fighters across the state limited the damage to private land to 62,000 hectares, with 56 houses and 603 farms affected.

However, the losses that occurred to stock, fencing, fodder, pastures, crops, plantations and beehives will have ramifications to farm businesses and natural resources in the short, medium and longer term.

A staged process to agricultural recovery is planned that provides for the management of immediate and longer-term issues. To help support the farming community, the Government will deliver an assistance package of **\$3 million**.

Features of the package include:

- A case management approach that allows for whole-of-government delivery of recovery services;
- Provision of a strategic planning service as a starting point to establishing immediate and longer-term family and business recovery priorities, and a gateway to other programs to ensure more effective targeting of government assistance;
- Projects that will support the implementation of best practice (continuous improvement) in business and natural resource management that lead to private and public benefits; and
- Incorporation of lessons learnt and recommendations made following the Alpine fires of 2003 and Eyre Peninsula fires of 2005.

#### Government Case Management

The Victorian Bushfire Inquiry that followed the Alpine fires of 2003 recommended that a case management approach be applied to recovery.

This was further endorsed in an evaluation of the Alpine Fires Agricultural Recovery Program, which identified the following benefits:

- Reduction in landholder frustration arising from multiple property visits undertaken by different staff and different Government, non-Government and community organisations;
- Reduction in the huge volume of correspondence delivered to landholders and paperwork required to access assistance;
- Greater uptake of more targeted services and assistance;
- More appropriate and equitable allocation of assistance programs; and
- More efficient use of government resources by minimising further impacts on the delivery of core services.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$400,000** for the provision of a case management service to assist farm family and business recovery. 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. They will:

- 1) Work with landholders to develop priorities for recovery;
- 2) Liaise with various professionals and agencies to coordinate the provision of appropriate services in a holistic manner; and
- 3) 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.

#### Determining Business Priorities

In the immediate aftermath of the fires, rural land managers will be faced with numerous decisions relating to the re-establishment of businesses, human and financial issues, land use and natural resource management. While the government cannot “rebuild” farm businesses or properties to pre-fire condition, it can assist landholders develop priorities for recovery in a way that ensures government expenditure and landowner effort delivers the best possible outcome.



### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$200,000** for strategic planning workshops. The workshops will assist landholders in the identification of family and business recovery priorities and will flag recovery initiatives to ensure maximum understanding and uptake of available recovery programs. Given the importance placed on strategic planning, the workshops will be a pre-requisite activity for some recovery grants.

The Government has commenced work on the rehabilitation of fire trails constructed on both public and private land. Immediate stock feed needs are currently being met on remaining pasture, agistment and/or fodder that was generously donated by the farming community. However, the 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, and weed infestation.

### Farm Business and Land Management

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, DPI worked with affected landholders to identify losses and needs. In addition to assisting with immediate animal welfare issues, information was provided to landholders on matters such as post-fire erosion control, pest and weed control (a weed alert pamphlet has been produced and distributed), feed planning, pasture management/re-establishment, agricultural chemical disposal and agro-forestry.

### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government has made subsidies available to farmers and land managers to train in farm and risk management. Under the FarmBis scheme, farmers and land managers are eligible for 50-65% of the costs of attending registered courses. Other extension programs offered by DPI, including environmental management programs, BestWool, EdgeNetwork, TopCrop, Target 10 and Horticultural "Cheque" Programs, also provide information and technical assistance for reducing risk.

### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government has provided **\$125,000** to the VFF to assist with fuel costs associated with agistment and donated fodder, and volunteer coordination. The Government will consider providing additional funding should it be needed.

It will also reimburse landholders for insurance excess (up to \$400) for claims made for Crown Land (Park and State Forest) boundary fencing damaged or destroyed by fire. The Taskforce reviewed and reaffirmed the general principles of the fencing assistance policy developed following the 2003 fires.

As an immediate priority, an additional **\$1.3 million** will be provided for stock containment areas and stock watering facilities, as well as soil erosion works, which includes the desilting of farm dams.

### On farm works

The extensive physical damage that has occurred across 603 properties has resulted in the loss of 53,000ha of pasture, 1,100 ha of crops, 2,654km of fencing (including 364km of crown land fencing) and 44 tonnes of supplementary feed. The construction of fire trails as part of the fire response has also left a mark on private land.

### Pest Plant and Animal Management

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

62,000ha of ground denuded by fire will encourage germinating weed species, which may be existing or new weeds which have been transported into the fire area by vehicles, machinery, fodder and livestock movement.

## 4. Issues, responses and actions (continued)

### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$1.1 million** to assist land managers with pest animal control as an immediate priority with on-ground works and baiting programs to take advantage of exposed rabbit warrens and reduced food sources for foxes. Pest plant monitoring, awareness raising and control will target local government and landholders to ensure all introduced weeds as a result of the fire are controlled.

### Apiarists

In the Grampians and Brisbane Ranges fires, in excess of 2,500 beehives were destroyed with at least another 2000 affected by the extreme heat and smoke. Some of the hives not destroyed may recover, but it is expected that this will take months, during which time no production from them will be possible.

The loss of hives is compounded by the loss of the floral resources of the National Parks. It is estimated that it will take at least 6-8 years for the Ti Tree to recover in the Grampians and again be a source of pollen and nectar for bees.

The eucalypt and other species within the park will also take many years to recover.

The loss of bees and hives will also impact on the capacity of other agricultural industries reliant on pollination.

### RECOVERY ACTION

Many of the sites affected in the bushfire regions will be of no benefit to apiarists for many years to come. The Victorian Government will ensure that affected apiarists will be able to retain their rights to access the fire affected apiary sites once they are regenerated and will waive access fees to those sites during that period.

Fire-affected apiarists will be given priority access to 700 vacant sites across the State and are encouraged to seek assistance from their local DSE office. There will also be a two-year moratorium on access licence fees at the relocated sites.

They are further encouraged to contact the Rural Finance Corporation (RFC) to determine their eligibility for access to low interest rate loans.

## 4.4 Environment

Unlike the Alpine 2003 fires, the recent fires occurred across the State and had greater direct and short-term impacts on private land and communities. The environmental impacts therefore are more diverse and demand varied responses across a number of government departments and agencies, water authorities and catchment management authorities.

By far the largest fire was at Mount Lubra in the Grampians, which affected large areas of the National Park, as well as catchments serving communities in the west of the State. However, while other fires may have been smaller in area burnt, their impact on local environments has also been significant.

### Water quality

Wimmera Mallee Water and Gippsland Water were swift to identify immediate risks to supplies of potable water and in conjunction with DHS offered short-term supplies of bottled water and fresh supplies of domestic water.

As indicated, recognising risks to catchments in the event of rain, fire crews commenced immediate rehabilitation works to fire trails and breaks as soon as it was safe to do so. These short-term works are treated as part of the fire suppression effort, with the aim of ameliorating immediate risks from run-off and erosion.

Longer-term works for further erosion control, particularly from loss of vegetation, are planned and will require further site inspections as part of the recovery effort. While it would be desirable where possible for longer-term works to be commenced at the same time as urgent rehabilitation, the scale of the task is such that it is more important to complete initial works prior to the possibility of rain.

Immediate works to protect vulnerable catchments from ash and run-off were undertaken by water authorities, following the experience of 2003.





Longer-term works will include repair to infrastructure damaged by the fires. This will be particularly significant for Wimmera Mallee Water, where major infrastructure such as Lake Bellfield was within the fire area. The catchments for Wimmera Mallee Water have also been subject to a long and severe period of below average rainfall, so that water held was well below capacity. This will require particular vigilance in monitoring inflows. Besides damage to infrastructure and catchments, a pine plantation owned by Gippsland Water was within the Moondarra fire area and remediation and possible salvage will be required.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will immediately provide **\$45,000** to assist with the water authority works to protect vulnerable catchments.

### Ecological recovery

As outlined, initial work to stabilise control lines was commenced as part of the fire suppression effort. In accordance with recommendations following the 2003 fires, DSE and its partner agencies will base longer-term recovery on the incident control system used for fires suppression, substituting different skills in management teams as the effort moves from suppression to recovery.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$270,000** for DSE to map fire severity using remote sensing techniques. This is an essential tool for recovery planning, proving valuable when conducted in the wake of the 2003 fires. It will form part of a broader suite of mapping products that will support planning and delivery of longer-term recovery. Existing data sets held by government agencies will be used in conjunction with these images to provide interactive mapping tools and hard copy maps for all personnel involved in recovery. The Grampians region will be given first priority due to pressing short-term recovery needs.

When the templates are developed through this process DSE will also investigate work from the USA to suggest how trigger points (such as area burnt or estimated asset losses) might be applied at an earlier stage of an incident to position agencies for the recovery phase.

### Ecological and cultural heritage

During recovery from the 2003 fires, previously unrecorded sites of indigenous significance were discovered following the loss of vegetation. The Grampians in particular has many known indigenous sites with both the Wotabaluk and Gounditch Mara native title claims connected to the region.

#### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$75,000** to assess and protect cultural values. Planning for recovery in 2006 will build the possibility of indigenous sites into the process from the beginning. Indigenous tour operators whose normal employment has been affected by the fires will be offered opportunities to participate in this initiative.

The suite of mapping products being developed to support recovery will also identify known colonies of ecologically significant plants and animals and will enable the collection of data to provide for future monitoring.

### Asset recovery and risk management on public land

Public assets such as trails, bridges, camp grounds, look outs and structures have been damaged or lost. Initial desk-top assessments have been carried out, but will require confirmation through on-site assessment. Key assets have been identified for priority action to enable re-opening of tourist venues, but a longer-term program of repair or replacement will be required.

Extensive damage to the tree canopy in the Grampians will necessitate a felling program to mitigate public risk. Much of the tree cover overhangs walking trails and roads and the damage is such that it will be an urgent priority to assess and remove the risk, focussing initially on areas of higher visitation.

## 4. Issues, responses and actions (continued)

### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$1.4 million** to extend the summer fire crews for two months and to provide additional workforce to deal with short-term risk and priority repair of tracks. This will cover the priority period for repair of tourism infrastructure prior to Easter. These Project Fire Fighters (PFF) are largely drawn from local communities, so this employment provides an additional stimulus to the economy of fire affected areas.

**\$450,000** will be provided for temporary Park Opening works to ensure the most popular locations in the Grampians are opened as soon as possible. This work will be carried out by the extended summer fire crews with the priority works directed to the restoration of tracks and railings for the Pinnacles, Boroka Lookout and McKenzie Falls – the three major walking tracks for visitation near Halls Gap.

### 4.5 Rebuilding the tourism industry

The fires are having a significant impact on the tourism industry in the Grampians area. A recent survey of 102 businesses compiled by Tourism Alliance Victoria, in partnership with the newly formed Grampians Region Tourism Recovery Group (GRTRG), identified that the loss of revenue during the peak season will have a significant impact as businesses rebuild.

More than 80 tourism operators that primarily utilise the Grampians National Park were forced to close operations, with some still unable to operate at full capacity.

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

In addition, there has been massive destruction of tourism infrastructure within and surrounding the Grampians National Park including access tracks, walking tracks, viewing points and car parks.

The formation of the Grampians and the Gippsland Tourism Recovery and Response Groups has been valuable in determining an appropriate course of action, following the Crisis Communication Handbook developed by Tourism Victoria

following the 2003 bushfires .

While the North East fires were larger than the recent Grampians fire, the impact on the Grampians region is significant as the Grampians National Park is the area's primary tourism attraction and many sites are now damaged, where as in the North East, the Alpine National Park was only one of a suite of tourism attractions.

The Moondarra fire has had a substantial impact on the local tourism industry, especially in the Walhalla area. However, the key tourism assets, such as the Walhalla township and the Baw Baw National Park, were not directly affected.

While there are positive signs of recovery, there would be substantial benefits in the Government providing tourism recovery assistance.

### RECOVERY ACTION

The Victorian Government will provide **\$1.65 million** for a two-year bushfire response marketing and public relations strategy to commence immediately. In addition to the immediate response of press advertising and public relations assistance, the \$1.65 million package of support and assistance includes:

#### Grampians

- \$100,000 staff resourcing (PR, facilitator, project manager)
- \$200,000 industry and product development, especially for the Adventure sector
- \$30,000 market research
- \$100,000 event marketing
- \$120,000 backpacker, international and e-marketing
- \$800,000 winter campaign, including the Space to Think brand campaign; and
- \$125,000 tactical marketing, workshops and direct mail.

#### Gippsland

- \$75,000 support for marketing activities in Gippsland.

#### Brisbane Ranges, Kinglake and Lake Condah areas

- \$100,000 for marketing activities.



<b>BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE SUMMARY</b>	
RDV Recovery assistance package	\$500,000
RDV Business Planning Recovery Program	\$100,000
10 Small Town Development Fund projects	\$1.43 million
New emergency services rescue and protective equipment	\$1 million
Fodder Transport Grant to VFF	\$125,000
DHS funding for recovery co-ordination and management to local governments	\$255,000
DHS funding to community health services and agencies for counselling and case management	\$60,000
Neighbourhood House Grants to Kinglake and Anakie	\$6,000
Fire mapping for the State	\$270,000
Restoring assets in national parks	\$450,000
Recovery of catchment and water protection	\$45,000
Cultural Values Assessment and Protection	\$75,000
Extension of summer fire crews for two months	\$1.4 million
Twenty-four small regional community and tourism projects	\$135,000
Additional support to rural land managers	\$3 million
Community development package	\$300,000
Marketing and industry development activities for tourism	\$1.65 million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$10.8 million</b>

### Other issues

A number of issues were raised with Ministers during their consultation with communities. A number of problems resulted from uncertainty about Government policies and forms of assistance available, particularly during the crisis phase. To address this the Taskforce is recommending a package of relevant information across all government departments be posted on central Government websites. This will provide a central location and will include information on food handling and what types of food can be donated, nature and type of financial assistance to individuals, families and councils and assistance available to rural landholders, particularly in dealing with dead or maimed stock. This latter issue was particularly prevalent as these fires were unprecedented in terms of stock loss.

Communication system problems with smoke were raised and although reported to have significantly improved since the 2003 fires, the Taskforce will refer this to the Emergency Services Commissioner for his attention.

The issue of fuel reduction was raised and the Taskforce notes that following the 2002-03 Victorian Bushfire Inquiry significant budget funding was made available. The priority areas are operational decisions for the CFA and DSE. The Taskforce has referred the proposals put forward by the VFF to those bodies for their consideration.

Finally, there was concern about road closures following the fires and the restrictions this placed on efforts to assist those in need. The Taskforce re-affirms the current policy of VicRoads and local councils to manage the re-opening of roads as quickly as possible once they are satisfied that it is safe to do so, and to keep local communities informed of the status of the local road network.



Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development

Authorised by the Victorian Government

55 Collins Street, Melbourne 3000

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