

Key Issues Identified from Operational Reviews of Major Fires in Victoria 2006/07 Report by Mr Ross Smith

Response by Russell Rees, CFA Director Operations/Chief Officer and Ewan Waller, DSE, Chief Officer, Fire and Emergency Management

The Great Divide Fires of 2006 / 07 were the longest in Victoria's fire history. The fires lasted 69 days with many people making sacrifices to ensure that the fires were eventually brought under control. First and foremost we would like to thank the thousands of DSE and CFA personnel who contributed with great passion and professionalism to the campaign efforts. We would also like to acknowledge and thank their families along with the communities across Victoria for their support and help during the campaign. Furthermore we would like to acknowledge the support and assistance from our New Zealand, US, Canadian and interstate colleagues. Their skills made an invaluable contribution to our campaign effort. The Great Divide Fires have impacted on many peoples lives from social, economic and environmental standpoints. Homes, stock, crops and natural assets have been impacted upon. However, despite the protracted nature of the fire season, the losses were thankfully not as significant as they potentially could have been. No lives were lost as a direct result of fire activity.

Wildfire management requires government and non-government organisations to act in true partnership with communities and each other. Recent experiences in being prepared for and responding to wildfire have proved that our partnerships are strong. We would like to thank all those organisations, groups and individuals who worked with us to prepare and plan for, respond to, and recover from these fires. We have learned a great deal from our experiences and both our organisations are committed to incorporating improvement into our strategies and planning.

Each fire season presents us with the opportunity to review, improve and learn from our experiences. After the fires, and in line with good practice, CFA and DSE jointly commenced a series of operational review processes. The review process was far reaching. It identified where the agencies and our emergency management partners had performed well, where improvements could be made and how we can further consolidate our partnership. This included a comprehensive, coordinated series of debriefs, operations analyses, and investigations of accidents.

Additionally, DSE and CFA commissioned Ross Smith, an independent consultant with extensive experience in wildfire operations, to attend the major fire debriefs and review the outcomes of the operational reviews. Mr Smith reviewed the information derived from other debriefs, and reported on the matters of state-wide significance that arose. Many staff and volunteers have participated in these processes. They have provided valuable insights into things that went well during the fire season and provided us with an agenda of issues for improvement. Work groups have been convened to identify action items to address these issues from the operational review process. These actions will be considered by senior management.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Smith for his detailed and professional approach to the task and for the preparing the report with due diligence. The report is a key reference document for the Great Divide Fires of 2006 / 07.

The report recognises that CFA and DSE have learned to respond positively to previous reviews to ensure that good practice is built into our core business. Interagency integration and cooperation, provision of information to the community, and the enhanced integration of response and recovery functions worked well this year. These practices can be attributed to projects and initiatives that have been implemented since the major fires of 2002 / 2003. Internal agency operational reviews coupled with past experiences of working together have also informed how we do business.

CFA and DSE are learning organisations. Our post-incident and post-season business processes all contribute to our learning and future development. External and independent reviews, such as this report by Ross Smith are another valuable source of constructive feedback, observations and learning potential. The report identifies a number of areas where our organisations need to enhance our performance. Some of these issues have been identified previously, and are subject to development initiatives that are either planned, or underway. In many cases, these processes have already resulted in improvements in our practices. Importantly, the report provides additional guidance about lessons to be learned from the fire season, and will be used to assist us to better target our performance improvement programs.

DSE and CFA have jointly considered the key findings identified in this report, along with the observations from other operational review processes, and have identified five strategic themes that require priority and strategic action. These themes are:

1. Sustainability of Community Information Flows
2. Integrated Emergency Planning
3. Information Technology and Information Flow
4. Incident Management Refinement (Logistics)
5. Incident Management Refinement (Planning and Fireground)

DSE and CFA are progressing these themes within the context of their agency business planning processes, and, where appropriate, with other emergency management agencies.

We accept the report of the findings from the “Key Issues Identified from Operational Reviews of Major Fires in Victoria” for the 2006/2007. We are pleased to present it as a basis for further learning and for wider viewing.



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