

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY 2003

Summary of Natural Resources Portfolio



Final Report from the
Ministerial Taskforce on
BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

IMPACT OF THE FIRES:

The 2003 bushfires in Gippsland and the North East of Victoria burnt 1.19 million hectares of public land. The recovery of this land is essential for healthy catchments and rivers and underpins the tourism, recreation, forest and associated industries based on the land.

Also, 90,000 hectares of private land were burnt with significant impacts on local communities and farms.

The consequences of these fires include a severe reduction in water quality and quantity, and the destruction of vegetation, including habitats for significant flora and fauna, commercial timber stands, recreation and tourism infrastructure assets, cultural sites and farms adjacent to public land. Twenty-six houses and 364 farms were affected by fire. Farming enterprises have suffered stock, pasture and fencing losses.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:

The Government has released the Final Report on Bushfire Recovery from the Ministerial Taskforce. The Report details priority actions for bushfire recovery. The natural resources recovery actions have been developed in response to public submissions, with input from affected community members and staff from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries and Parks Victoria, as well as relevant Catchment Management Authorities, Alpine Resorts and Water Authorities.

In addition to assistance provided to industry and communities, the Government's bushfire recovery package contains strategies for: protecting catchments and water supply; progressive repair or replacement of infrastructure assets in parks, forests and alpine resorts; supporting species and habitat regeneration; protecting cultural values; and providing practical assistance for affected farm enterprises.

The report proposes a total natural resources funding package of **\$70.6 million**.

Below is a summary of the major initiatives that the Government has identified as being crucial to the recovery of natural resources and the rebuilding of local communities.

Protection and Restoration of Catchments and Water (\$23.9 million)

Over the next 6 to 12 months, rains in the burnt catchments will cause the movement of soils, ash, nutrients and debris overland and into streams, rivers and water storages. Works will be required to minimise the potential for landslip, restore stream environments and provide early warning regarding changes to water quality.

Immediate works will focus on: undertaking soil conservation works; restoring almost 9,000km of fire containment lines constructed during firefighting operations on both public and private land; clearing debris that will continue to be washed into waterways; repairing and revegetating eroded riverbanks; and constructing urgent water storage areas and treatment works to ensure drinkable water is available to the alpine resorts at Falls Creek and Mt Hotham for the 2003 ski season.

Asset Repair and Replacement in Parks, Forests and Alpine Resorts (\$24.9 million)

In parks, forests and alpine resorts, many visitor and management facilities have been destroyed or damaged by the fires. Replacement of these assets will facilitate recovery of the recreation and tourism sector and ensure safe access for visitors and land managers. Assets requiring repair or replacement in parks, ski resorts and forests include: picnic areas, camping grounds, roofed accommodation, lookouts, toilets, car parks, roads, walking tracks, signs, visitor information boards and snow pole lines.

Restoration of Ecological and Cultural Heritage Assets (\$13.2 million)

Long term strategies will be put in place for recovery of the natural environment. These will ensure that endangered flora and fauna are protected and biodiversity is maintained. In turn these actions will support the economic well-being of businesses that rely on the natural values of the public land for their livelihood.

About 2 million visitors per year visit the national parks, state forests and alpine resorts affected by the fires. Tourism is a significant regional industry that relies on the natural assets for their business. The economic recovery of the fire-affected regions is dependent on the recovery of the natural environment.

Major bushfire recovery initiatives related to ecological recovery include: controlling newly emergent weeds; controlling pest animals, including foxes, to protect vulnerable native fauna; managing alpine grazing to ensure rapid recovery of alpine regions; protecting threatened fauna and vegetation communities; and revegetating key communities that cannot regenerate naturally. Both indigenous and non-indigenous cultural heritage sites will be assessed for damage, documented and restored as appropriate.

Agricultural/Private Land Impacts (\$8.6 million)

Fire-affected farming communities have key issues needing assistance and resolution. The fires caused stock and fencing losses, and the destruction of feed and damage to pastures.

On February 28 2003, the Ministerial Taskforce announced an assistance package to support farmers including: funding for the Victorian Farmer's Federation to assist in the supply of urgently needed fodder, fencing assistance, and the provision of advice and assistance to farmers. The fencing package includes initiatives focused on: clearing areas around fencelines; co-ordination of volunteers and paid workers for fencing work; subsidies for temporary stock containment; and assistance with dog fencing adjoining Crown land on the grounds of public safety and animal welfare.

An additional wild dog management program will be developed, as will additional programs to assist with rebuilding farming enterprises.

Fire containment lines across farms will erode and impact on catchment and water recovery and farm viability if not rehabilitated – these will be repaired as part of the 'Protection and Restoration of Catchments and Water' bushfire recovery strategies.

For further information on the Bushfire Recovery Program, please contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Fire Recovery Response Line on 136 186 or visit www.info.vic.gov.au/bushfires

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