



EMV
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VICTORIA

Mt Ray-Boundary Track Fire

January-March 2014

Community Report

Compiled by:

Emergency Management Commissioner

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July 2014

Working in conjunction
with Communities,
Government, Agencies
and Business.

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Please note:

This information may not be complete or be representative of all efforts made by the emergency management sector in managing the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire as it is based only on existing information available to EMV at the time of the compilation of this report.

1 Purpose

Introduction

The Fire Services Commissioner (FSC) initiated a review of the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire under the provisions of Section 10 (i) of the *Fire Services Commissioner Act 2010*. The role of the FSC was superseded by the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) on 1 July 2014.

The review is to respond to the concerns raised by the community and to promote improvements in fire and emergency management arrangements into the future.

The Terms of Reference for the Community Report were:

- to engage with and consider community concerns relating to the management of the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire,
- to engage with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Chief Officer and Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) Chief Fire Officer,
- to ensure strategic ownership and engagement within the fire services agencies about the fire management of the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire,
- to work with the community to identify their issues of concern and develop actions to improve,
- to provide observations and actions that will be implemented by the FSC (now the EMC), CFA Chief Officer and DEPI Chief Fire Officer
- for the EMC to report to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on strategic issues, actions and any systemic issues.

2 Executive Summary

This community report provides for an opportunity for the Glenaladale and district communities to reflect and to express their issues and concerns regarding the Mt Ray - Boundary Track fire that burnt for some 67 days on public and private land. The Mt Ray - Boundary Track fire destroyed 3 homes, burnt 6700 ha of private and public land, and impacted on outbuildings, livestock, and fencing. No human life was lost.

The community has formed a Community Reference Group and the state leaders of the fire services have met with the community to listen and gather the key issues that require improvement strategies to be developed and implemented.

This report is not designed to list individual issues and provide answers to all issues presented, rather provide a context to determine overarching strategic issues and actions that together will improve the management of fires.

The process of the Community Reference Group being able to communicate directly with the fire services state leaders has been engaging and very informative. There has been three strategic actions identified and they will now be implemented by the fire services (CFA and DEPI), Victoria Police, local government and the community. A joined up approach to progress and resolve these issues is the only way to achieve a new, refreshed approach.

The Strategic Actions are:

- *Initial Attack / Incident Management / Utilisation of resources*
- *Road Traffic Management*
- *Community involvement in fire preparedness, response and recovery*

The Strategic Actions are the key to bringing together multiple themes and provide a clear set of actions that will address the issues identified by the Community, the Emergency Management Commissioner and Chief Fire Officers.

Executive Overview

Mt Ray – Boundary Track Fire

Cause – Lightning on 16 January 2014.

Fire Status

- Going 16 January 2014
- Contained 13 February 2014
- Controlled 28 February 2014
- Safe 24 March 2014

Fire duration 67 Days

Size 6,727ha burnt of private land (6,138ha), public land and plantation

Losses / impacts

- No human life was lost
- 3 houses and 7 sheds and outbuildings destroyed
- 270 cattle
- 500 sheep
- 130 goats
- 73km of fencing

The Mt Ray – Boundary track fire, north of Glenaladale, was first reported on 16 January 2014, a total Fire Ban day. The fire was managed initially by the Heyfield Incident Management Team.

The fires' spread was halted on the first day at one hectare, however, because of severe fire weather conditions the next day, 17 January (another total fire ban day), it ran quickly to the south. On the same day another fast moving bushfire was reported by a local earth moving contractor several kilometres south of the Mt Ray fire. This fire became known as the Glenaladale – Limpyers 3 fire and it also spread quickly into the State Forest with massive short distance and long distance spotting.

Both the Mt Ray fire and the Limpyers 3 fire ran to the south east under the extreme fire weather conditions of 17 January. Some spotting occurred into plantations and private pasture from these fires but was successfully suppressed. Emergency Warnings were issued for Fingerboards, Glenaladale and Fernbank communities, but these were downgraded to advice warnings the next day.

By 18 January, these fires were 3 km south-west of the Glenaladale community. Crews concentrated on constructing containment lines with dozers around the fire boundary. Access for CFA tankers was difficult due to the rocky, steep tracks.

The Limpyers 3 fire was contained on 19 January at 600 hectares. The Mt Rayfire was contained on 20 January at 589 hectares. Significant machinery work was done around the fire to create mineral earth breaks. DEPI and CFA crews also conducted burning-out operations of unburnt fuel within the fire perimeter. Overnight and during the day on 21 January rain helped to contain the Mt ray fire near Glenaladale.

However, on the severe fire weather day of 9 February, in the worst conditions experienced in Victoria since Black Saturday, the fire escaped control lines. The maximum temperature for this day was 41.7 degrees celsius in the area, with a relative

humidity of 10% and Fire Danger index of 95. Winds from the north-west averaged up to 44km per hour during the day.

The fire developed extremely quickly under the strong north-westerly winds and moved rapidly south-east across private land and plantations towards the Fingerboards and Fernbank communities, on a trajectory towards the Princes Highway. The control of the fire was transferred to the Bairnsdale ICC and a Watch and Act message was issued for surrounding communities.

Ground crews and aircraft focused on asset protection. A strong south-westerly wind change increased wind speeds to an average of 48km per hour from the south to south-west with wind gusts up to 59km per hour. This pushed the fire to the north-east, across more private land, towards Glenaladale and the Mitchell River National Park. On 9 February at 4.00pm an Emergency Warning was issued for the surrounding communities with fire appliances continuing to provide asset protection.

This asset protection work continued into the evening, when conditions eased, night crews relieved local crews and moved into blacking-out. By the morning of 10 February, the fire spread had been halted with 6,727 burnt, 6,138ha of which was private land. There was significant damage to private assets, including large numbers of livestock losses. Ground crews worked to identify, track and black-out the fire edge and started assessing and treating hazardous trees so that roads could be reopened to local residents. This work continued for the following days along with the work of the Rapid impact Assessment Teams and Animal Health teams.

The fire was declared contained on 13 February, with crews continuing to patrol and black-out with the assistance of FLIR data and handheld Thermal Imaging Cameras until 28 February when the status of the fire was determined to be controlled.

3 Review process

A community meeting was held in Glenaladale on 7 June 2014 where concerns were raised in relation to the management of the Mt Ray - Boundary Track Fire by the States fire services. Written submissions were presented to CFA Chief Officer, Euan Ferguson, Acting DEPI Chief Fire Officer, Darrin McKenzie and the then Fire Services Commissioner (FSC), Craig Lapsley at this meeting.

The written submissions included a range of specific operational questions for consideration related to the management of the Mt Ray - Boundary Track fire. The material presented in the written submissions is predominantly from community members who are Country Fire Authority (CFA) members and/or local CFA brigades.

It should be noted however, that subsequent community meetings organised by the Mt Ray Fire Committee were well attended by a wide range of community members where a myriad of issues were discussed.

The Fire Services Commissioner (FSC) initiated the preparation of this community report. The role of the FSC was superseded by the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) on 1 July 2014. Therefore, this report is now being prepared by the EMC.

The EMC returned to Glenaladale on 13 July 2014 to gain further insight into the experiences and concerns expressed by community members within the area during the fires.

The information provided by the community has formed the basis for this community report. Any information used as part of the final report to illustrate particular points, concerns and actions required has been de-identified. The final report will be made available to all interested community members.

Identified themes and issues from written submissions

Analysis of the nine Mt Ray - Boundary Track Fire community submissions identified the following themes:

- Initial attack
- Incident management / incident strategy
- Information to the community / communications
- Community / private asset protection
- Road blocks / traffic management
- Local knowledge
- Planning and preparedness / shared responsibility
- Resourcing
- Community engagement
- Human, agricultural and farming impacts
- Communications between the responder agencies
- Workforce capability
- Community perception and community trust.

Analysis of the issues and questions raised within the Mt Ray - Boundary Track Fire community submissions showed that “initial attack” and “incident management / incident

strategy” were the most prevalent themes. This result may reflect the nature of the submissions, where CFA members authored eight of the nine community submissions.

Further to the community submissions the Community Reference Group submitted the following propositions:

- A modern system that provides access and egress to residents that transfers the legal liability to the individual for accessing fire impacted areas.
- Increased areas of safe / cool fuel reduction burns to be established
- Agency funding incentives to promote pro active approach to fire management with an aim to reward keeping fires small in size and short in duration.
- Change organisational approaches to ensure agencies work as one with no turf or boundary issues and remove “them and us” cultures between agencies.

4 Bushfire management

State control priorities

The *State Bushfire Plan 2012* outlines strategic control priorities to provide clear direction from the State Controller to Regional Controllers and Incident Controllers on the key strategic priorities that must be considered and actioned during the management of any significant or complex fire.

The priorities articulate the focus on the primacy of life and issuing of community warnings and information to assist people make informed decisions about their safety, and to communicate other priorities including the protection of property, economies and the environment.

The policy underpins the planning and operational decisions made by agency command and control staff when managing fire. The priorities are:

- Protection and preservation of life, which is paramount – this includes:
 - Safety of emergency services personnel, and;
 - Safety of community members including vulnerable community members and visitors/tourists located within the incident area;
- Issuing of community information and community warnings detailing incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to assist community members make informed decisions about their safety;
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that support community resilience;
- Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence;
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability; and
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.

The priorities articulate the focus on the primacy of life and issuing of community warnings and information to assist people make informed decisions about their safety.

State Command and Control Arrangements

The following is an extract from the *State Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire in Victoria 2013* (September 2013) with regard to the line-of-control in place for the 2013-14 fire season.

Line-of-Control

Control relates to situations and operates horizontally across agencies. Those appointed to the control function for bushfire are accountable for the control of the bushfires managed within their span of control. They provide direction to all other agencies responding to the emergency, at their respective tier.

The 'line-of-control' refers to the line of supervision for those appointed to perform the control function. The line-of-control for bushfire in Victoria is State Controller, Regional Controller and Incident Controller. The line-of-control for bushfire is in place at all times but is not activated until a fire has potential for or reaches a major fire status.

The purpose of the line-of-control for bushfire in Victoria is to ensure an operational, informational and evaluative connection between the controllers at each tier so that the FSC, who has legislative accountability for the control of major fire and is the State Controller for bushfire, is assured that the needs of the community are being met.

State and Regional Controllers

The FSC is the State Controller for bushfire and performs the role continuously.

For the extent of the bushfire season, the FSC approves the appointment of rostered Regional Controllers to take charge and provide strategic leadership for bushfire readiness and response in each Region.

During the bushfire season, both the FSC and Regional Controllers monitor all fires and their potential consequences but only actively manage fires with the potential to become major fires. This could be all fires on days of high fire risk.

Outside the bushfire season, the FSC appoints Regional Controllers on a needs basis.

Incident Controllers

In first response, the fire services agencies normally appoint Incident Controllers to manage bushfires according to their jurisdictional responsibilities.

In readiness for bushfire on days of high fire risk or for major bushfires, the State or Regional Controllers may appoint Incident Controllers, based their qualifications and experience and regardless of their agency.

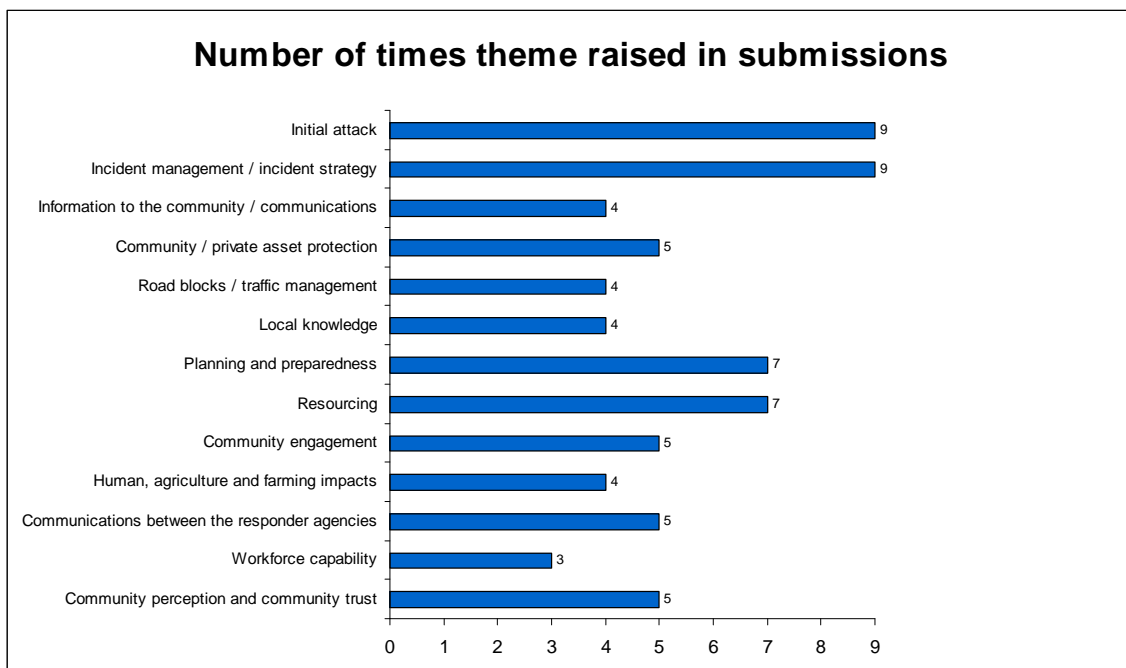
Since the control function operates horizontally across agencies, Incident Controllers must communicate with the commanders all the other agencies responding to the bushfire, including the commanders of their own agency resources.

5 Community submissions

The community submissions comprised individual and group submissions that provided anecdotal information, as well as a series of specific questions the community members wish to be answered.

It is emphasised that this anecdotal information has not been validated or tested for reliability. Furthermore, given the limited sample size, the issues raised may not be representative of the broader population. As the majority of this anecdotal information are observations from the perspective of the persons who made the submissions.

The chart below illustrates the number of submissions that provided comments and/or questions against the themes. In particular, it shows that all submissions raised issues and/or questions around the areas of “initial attack” and “incident management / incident strategy”. This may reflect the fact that the majority of submissions were from community members who were also CFA members.



6 Observations and themes

Initial attack

Community submissions raised issues and questions around the lack of an effective initial attack. The perceived change in firefighting strategy, from an immediate aggressive direct attack to an indirect attack approach, was a recurring issue within the submissions.

The submissions reflect the community belief that financial incentives, as well as the lack of personal commitment and community responsibility are the key drivers behind the lack of an effective initial attack, which is putting the community and private properties at risk.

Observations – Initial attack

- Different initial firefighting strategies and tactics (immediate aggressive direct attack versus indirect attack).
- lack of aggressive initial attack - rapid deployment of agencies resources to enable fires to be attacked in the early stages of fire development is required
- sometimes inefficient and inappropriate utilisation of aircrafts, dozers and firefighters in supporting initial attack of fires. This includes appropriate and accountable supervision of all resources on the fireground including private contractors
- taking advantage of the windows of opportunities in lulls in weather to get on top of fires

Incident management / incident strategy

Community submissions indicated that more could have been achieved in relation to the fire's incident management / incident strategy. The key community questions were around strategies implemented by the fire services and the utilisation and management of resources. Community members strongly believed that DEPI and CFA need to work together collaboratively, with one submission suggesting that Incident Control Centres (ICCs) should be run jointly by DEPI and CFA for fires that may spread to private land.

It should be noted that there was significant overlap between the issues raised under this theme and the themes "initial attack", "community / private asset protection", and "resourcing".

Observations – Incident management / incident strategy

- Improved management, supervision and coordination of resources
- Strategies implemented to protect life and property as a priority
- A single approach to inter-agency communication, cooperation and collaboration
- the lack of night and early morning shifts to achieve more effective use of resources and capitalise on lulls in weather and fire behaviour.
- remote management of fires and the role of Divisional Command requires clarification including the location of the ICC and the use of pre-formed IMT's.

Information to the community / communications

Community submissions raised issues around the availability, accuracy, consistency or timeliness of information that was provided to the community.

This included perceptions of:

- outdated or inaccurate information disseminated via ABC radio
- delayed warning to evacuate
- general lack of available information for the local community, with maps of the fire only becoming available one week after the event
- inconsistency in the definitions of terms used to describe the state of the fire used in media releases (CFA website and emergency.vic.gov.au contain different definitions) and difficulty in locating these definitions.

Observations – Information to the community / communications

- availability of timely, tailored and accurate information to support decision making
- consistency use of definitions for terms used in media releases.
- completeness, accuracy and/or timeliness of warnings disseminated by emergency broadcasters is required
- dissemination of timely, tailored and relevant information - information to the community / communications issues, specifically around community members receiving inaccurate and delayed information
- dissemination of information to locals by locals
- the need for a systemic approach in disseminating and sharing of information that is not reliant solely on mobile and internet services.

Community / private asset protection

Comments and questions related to private asset protection were raised in community submissions. The submissions indicated that community members sought a clearer understanding of the policies and procedures in relation to firefighters putting out fires on private land. Furthermore, they queried why they received limited or no support from DEPI when combating fires threatening their private properties.

These questions reflected community perceptions and expectations that responder agencies should have provided greater support and/or resources to protect private assets.

Observations – Community / private asset protection

- Policies and procedures in relation to community / private asset protection.
- that the community did well to protect their properties.

Road blocks / traffic management

Community submissions raised issues in relation to road blocks. The common community sentiment was a need for road blocks to better cater to community needs. Specifically, submissions indicated that local property owners should be allowed access through road blocks to treat and feed injured stock. In particular, two submissions asserted that landowners should have been allowed access through road blocks before the public, including the media and other “*important personages*”.

The effectiveness of the Traffic Management Point Policy, was questioned especially with regard to the fact that landowners who did not evacuate were free to travel within the burnt area, while landowners who evacuated were not permitted back into the area.

Community members also wanted to understand why the road block wristband system designed to permit entry of locals was not implemented for the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire.

Observations – Road blocks / traffic management

- Traffic Management Point Policy and its application
- length of closures and effects on livestock
- implementation of the road block wristband system.
- the length of road closures
- the use of passes and issuing of passes
- inflexibility of road blocks and its potential to increase risk to the health and safety of local community members
- police awareness of community needs including food, water, medicine, livestock and supplies.

Local knowledge

Community submissions strongly believed that not enough local knowledge was used to inform the response. It was cited that personnel with local knowledge were actively defending their own properties.

It was claimed that the decision to establish a Relief Centre without adequate consideration of local demographics, resulted in community members having to drive through the fire ground to reach the Relief Centre.

However, the submissions also indicated a belief that local CFA brigades had good local experience and knowledge.

Observations – Local knowledge

- Gathering and utilisation of local knowledge was not well executed - perceptions from community members that fire control ignored local knowledge that was provided
- new managers in DEPI and CFA needing to be aware of local areas and issues.
- CFA Group structure was not well supported by CFA District resulting in the Group structure was ineffective and local leaders were not included.

Planning and preparedness

Planning and preparedness was a common theme, which was commented on by community members in seven out of nine submissions.

Two main areas of concern in relation to planning and preparedness were reflected in the community submissions. These were:

- the lack of fuel reduction burns, as well as the reporting of inaccurate information on the state of fuel reduction burning in the Mt Ray area
- the decision to back burn the Mt Ray area in the middle of summer without appropriate community consultation.

Observations – Planning and preparedness

- Level of fuel reduction burning
- accuracy of reported information in relation to fuel reduction burning
- community consultation and input.
- community strongly believe that track maintenance program is poorly executed
- community believe that the planned burning program is not comprehensively done with a lack of burning in some key locations
- individual community preparation is overall good however is not sufficient for high intensity fire behaviour
- broader community planning is inadequate
- the lack of planning and preparedness – in particular, the inadequate fuel reduction burns in the local area.

Resourcing

A lack of resources allocated to combat the fire, especially in relation to the initial attack, was identified in community submissions.

In addition to a series of very specific resourcing related questions, these related to perceptions that:

- insufficient resources were allocated for a fire of this size. The turnout of many private vehicles/appliances were crucial in preventing the fire causing considerably more damage
- helicopter air support was effective in combating the fire at its initial stages, however it was redeployed too early
- there was a lack of coordination of resources, which compounded the existing issue of a lack of resources to combat the fire.

It is clear within the community submissions that without the extraordinary efforts of community members and their private vehicles/appliances, the fire would have caused significantly more damage.

Observations – Resourcing

- Effective deployment of resources, including aircraft
- Management and coordination of resources
- Private vehicles/appliances supporting the firefighting effort.

Community engagement

Community submissions raised issues around community engagement and identified the Glenaladale community meeting as a “*serious public relations disaster*” because it was organised by East Gippsland Shire at the request of DEPI, but not attended by DEPI or CFA representatives or ICC or Regional Control Centre (RCC) staff.

In relation to back burning operations near private land during summer, one submission made strong statements that the community must be consulted and be provided with the rationale and strategy for the planned burn. Further, the submission stated that assurances should also be given that the back burn will not become a major fire, which may threaten private property.

Observations – Community engagement

- Attendance by DEPI and CFA staff at community meetings
- community consultation in relation to planned burns near private land.
- management of community meetings – community involvement
- different model of engagement for long duration fires
- trust and respect lost for the emergency services within the community
- engagement prior to the fire to better inform planning and preparedness
- community committee structure
- potential for this event to be used as a case study.

Human, agriculture and farming impacts

A range of human, agriculture and farming impacts were outlined in community submissions. These included damage to and losses of:

- house and contents
- woolsheds
- store sheds
- two caravans
- animal shelters
- stock yards
- water infrastructure (pipe, pumps, tanks etc)
- fencing
- pasture
- livestock/animals – including pets and farm animals.

Given the wide range of human, agriculture and farming impacts, community members believe there should be timely implementation of support mechanisms. Specifically, the destruction and disposal of livestock need to be carried out as soon as the fire threat is over.

Fencing is vital to the livelihood of local community members, therefore they consider that fence clearing and reconstruction should also happen in a more timely manner.

Observations – Human, agriculture and farming impacts

- Timely implementation of support mechanisms to expedite the recovery process
- Timely destruction and disposal of livestock
- Timely fence clearing and fence reconstruction.
- restricted road access and egress provided a frustration and direct impact on the appropriate access to animal welfare support (veterinary).

Communications between responder agencies

Clear and timely communications between DEPI and CFA ground crews are vital to maintaining effective operations.

The submissions indicated that there may be several areas for improvement in relation to inter-agency communications for this fire. These included:

- ineffective CFA radio communications as a result of the poor radio channel being used (channel 124)
- one-way communication between CFA and DEPI, with DEPI not providing timely information to CFA brigades.

Observations – Communications between responder agencies

- Poor radio coverage
- The need for two-way communication between CFA and DEPI.

Workforce capability

A series of workforce capability questions were raised within the submissions. Community members expressed that there should be more multi-agency training, especially in regards to active firefighting. One other area where training may have been lacking, as identified in the submissions, was the use of maps and Global Positioning System (GPS).

Observations – Workforce capability

- Multi-agency (CFA and DEPI) training.
- Use of technology to support safe and good decision making

Community perception and community trust

The submissions reflect a loss of community confidence and support for the responder agencies given their experience with the Mt Ray-Boundary Track fire. This is mainly driven by:

- community perception that financial incentives and a lack of personal commitment to the local area is impeding, rather than promoting active firefighting
- broken promises which led to losses in stock and pets
- the inadequate level of resources that was allocated to combat a fire of this magnitude.

Observations – Community perception and community trust

- Trust and respect lost for responder agencies within the community. Community trust has been significantly impacted in a negative manner.
- There is a need for DEPI, CFA and VicPol to engage with the community to rebuild community relationships and trust. Local community-based collaboration must occur between the community and emergency services' regional, district and local managers to build new and refreshed relationships.

7 Strategic Actions

The community submissions and individual consultation sessions provided an insight into the experiences and concerns expressed by community members within the area during the Mt Ray-Boundary Track Fire.

The detailed information provided by the community has formed the basis for this community report.

Three strategic Actions have been identified that will include issues identified from the eleven themes discussed with the Community.

The three strategic Actions are:

- *Initial Attack / Incident Management / Utilisation of resources*
- *Road Traffic Management*
- *Community involvement in fire preparedness, response and recovery*

These strategic actions will now set the direction for improvement with involvement and leadership required from all involved these being DEPI, CFA, local communities and local government.

Strategic Action – Initial Attack / Incident Management / Utilisation of resources

Problem Statement

The initial attack and incident management structures was not effective and all resources were not effectively deployed.

Outcome Statement

The initial attack, incident management structures and effective deployment of all resources is maximised to achieve early fire suppression.

Owners

CFA Operations Manager Region 11 and DEPI Land and Fire Manager Gippsland supported by CFA Chief Officer and DEPI Chief Fire Officer.

Actions

- Incident and Regional Control Teams support initial attack resources to control fires at the earliest opportunity by deploying ground and air resources to all fires
- For remote area fires that are not controlled / suppressed in initial attack, Incident and Regional Control Teams to complete an operations analysis to determine the type of resources and the operational period to achieve suppression at the earliest opportunity.
- Cross land tenure fire control which maximises all the available resources to achieve initial attack will be deployed under a single control structure – this will include all resources fire services resources. Ensuring that cross land tenure issues do not impact on timely and appropriate first attack.
- Initial attack and ongoing fire control to operate 24 hours a day to maximise lulls in weather, fire behaviour to maximise fire control tactics and strategy including effective use of fire fighting resources during lulls in weather and during evening, night, and early morning periods.
- Initial attack and fire prediction be communicated to all fire service agencies and the community detailing the success, challenges and timelines to achieve fire control / suppression.
- Fire control / Incident Management Team to engage with CFA Groups to ensure local resources are actively engaged and included in the Incident Action Plan.
- Deliver timely assessment of remote areas from ground and air to ensure an appropriate and timely initial attack occurs
- Ensure that the training and deployment of CFA and DEPI personnel includes the need to extinguish fires in initial attack to keep fires small
- Ensure that major fire operations review the role and functional resourcing of Divisional Command to achieve a more effective result
- Include local knowledge, local leadership, and local community in incident management strategy and incident management teams.
- Maximise the use of private contractors that are deployed to fires to ensure an effective and efficient outcome.

Strategic Action – Road Traffic Management***Problem Statement***

Road Traffic Management was not understood nor accepted by the community during the 67 days of fire operations.

Outcome Statement

Road Traffic Management Systems are effectively communicated to the community in the preparedness phase, response phase and recovery phase. Road Traffic Management Systems must consider the consequences of a fire impacted community and consider different approaches for long fire operations.

Owners

Victoria Police EM Superintendent Gippsland in conjunction with CFA Operations Manager Region 11 and DEPI Land and Fire Manager Gippsland.

Actions

- Revisit the state traffic management protocol to address short, medium, and long term road closures to better address community needs of access and management of community needs.
- The four tier Road Traffic Management System be communicated to the community in the preparedness phase of each fire season.
- The implementation of the Road Traffic Management System as part of a fire operation is communicated to the community at community meetings during the fire operation and provide the reason, timelines and opportunity for community members to seek clarification
- The Incident Controller and Victoria Police Manager responsible for Road Traffic Management implementation are to ensure that:
 - all personnel managing Road Traffic Management points are appropriately briefed with local knowledge
 - the access of key personnel to affected areas is a critical consideration as part of management of the Road Traffic Management System, this includes experts that provide human and animal health support etc
 - the four tier implementation is proactively reviewed to ensure an appropriate level of road closure is established, especially for long duration fires.
 - fire service resources provide escorts to vehicles as appropriate.

Strategic Action – Community involvement in fire preparedness, response and recovery***Problem Statement***

Community members are not included in fire preparedness, response and recovery activities in a structured and meaningful manner.

Outcome Statement

A structured approach is established that engages the local community trusted networks and trusted leaders. This will support community involvement and understanding of preparedness, readiness, response and recovery plans. This extends to providing fire control managers access to local knowledge, local leaders and local community information to establish a more comprehensive management of fire and the community.

Owners

Shire of East Gippsland, Victoria Police EM Superintendent Gippsland, CFA Operations Manager Region 11, DEPI Land and Fire Manager Gippsland supported by the Director Risk and Resilience EMV.

Actions

- A Community Emergency Management Plan be established which will assist development of the CEMP through a local Community Emergency Management Committee that includes local community trusted networks and trusted leaders
- The Glenaladale District Community Emergency Management Committee be established with community leaders from community networks including the local sport recreation committee, local Fire Brigades, local Hall Committees and interested community members with appropriate balance of gender, age and other factors
- The Community Emergency Management Plan be based on the next generation plan being drafted by Emergency Management Victoria and local government. This planning process would also interface with local government and state government department programs such as the public land planned burning program and public land fire access tracks.
- Ensure that CFA and DEPI local management structures engage with the community prior to fire season through the community emergency management plan
- Review the process of community meetings to better cater for community needs in the immediate, short, medium, and long term after the initial run of fire.

8 Conclusion

The 2013-14 fire season was of significance and challenged Victorian emergency services and communities. There were more than 4,600 grass and bushfires of which 78 were significant.

Lightning strikes on the 15 and 16 January 2014 started a number of fires in the Mt Ray area which included the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fires. These fires impacted on the Glenaladale district communities for 67 days resulting in 6700 hectares of private and public land being burnt, destroyed homes, other buildings, livestock and fencing. No human lives were lost.

After the fires, local residents held community meetings where concerns were raised in relation to preparedness for, response to and recovery from the Mt Ray – Boundary Track fire. The significant concern expressed by the impacted community members resulted in the FSC (now EMC) commissioning a review of the management of the fire. This provided the opportunity for community members to directly provide their experiences and observations, in writing and verbally.

The process included the CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson, DEPI Acting Chief Fire Officer Darrin McKenzie and the then FSC Craig Lapsley meeting with community members at Glenaladale.

The time spent with the community, coupled with the written submissions from community members, provided an insight into the experiences and concerns expressed by community members within the area during the fires. Community members expressed concerns with the management of the fire, some community members also commended the firefighting effort and information they received during the fire.

The information provided by the community has formed the basis for this community report. While it does not provide or seek to reproduce the level of detail and the specific accounts of the individuals and groups who took the time to provide this in depth information, it provides a consolidation of issues raised by the community as a means to identify and target actions that will address the concerns of the community in a collective and cohesive way.

From this process, the EMC, CFA Chief Officer and DEPI Chief Fire Officer have agreed a series of Strategic Actions be implemented before the 2014-15 fire season. These Strategic Actions aim to respond to the collective concerns raised by the community and promote improvements in fire and emergency management arrangements into the future.

Attachment 1 – 2013-14 Fire Season Operational Context

As the 2014 Mt Ray - Boundary Track Fire took place over the same time period as the 2014 Goongerah-Deddick Trail Fire, the 2013-14 fire season operational context is consistent with that provided in the *2014 Goongerah-Deddick Trail Fire Community Report*. The following is an extract from this report.

The 2013-14 fire season

The 2013-14 fire season was long and challenging for emergency services and Victorian communities.

Victoria experienced a heatwave, long running fires in hard-to-reach, remote bushland, and fast moving grass fires threatening Melbourne's fringe. From December 2013 to March 2014, there were:

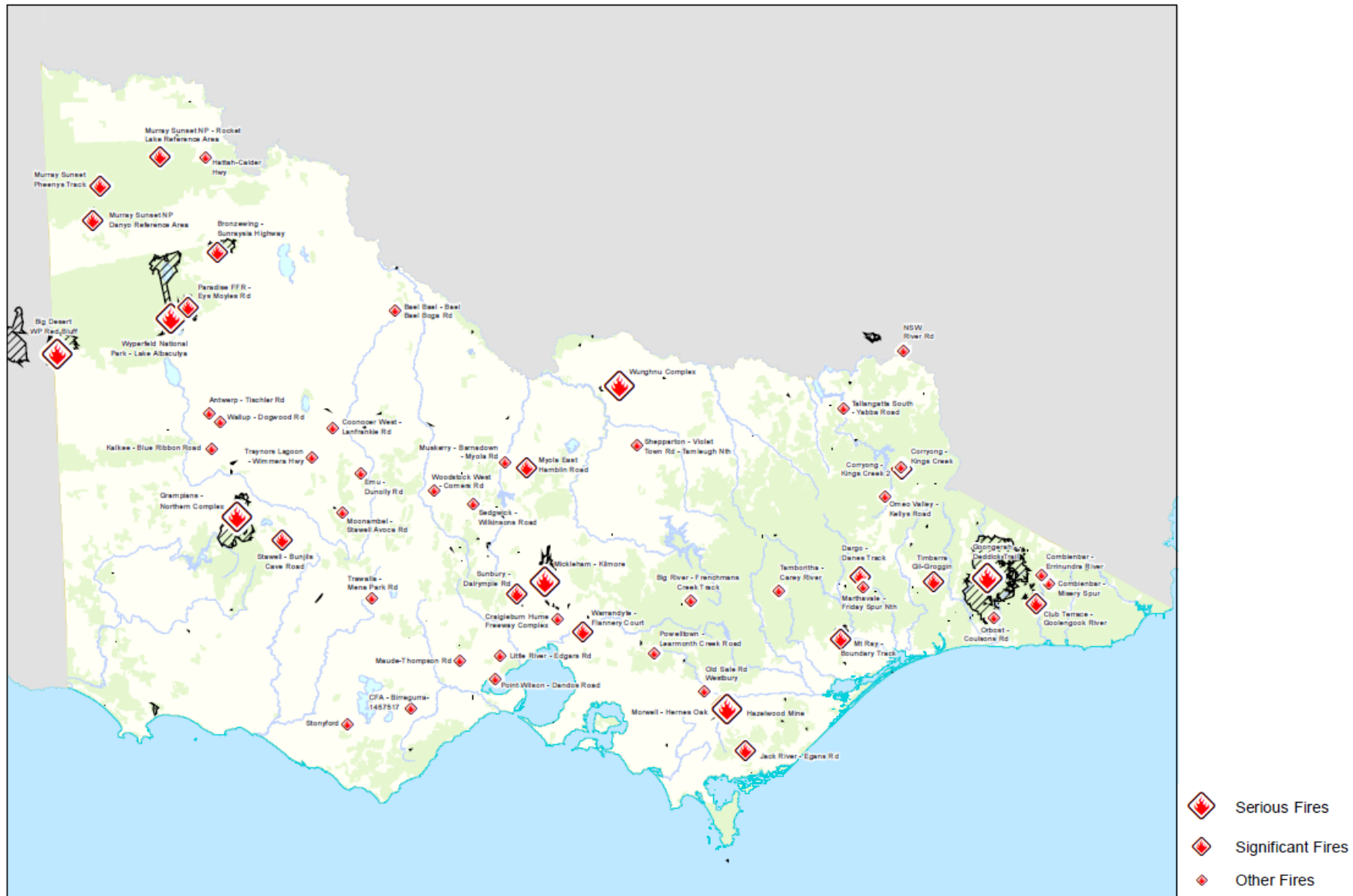
- 19 days of extreme and severe fire danger ratings
- 17 days of Total Fire Ban.

The fire services fought more than 4,600 grass and bushfires, an increase of 300 from the previous season, and attended almost 40,000 incidents during the season. Serious fires across the state included:

- Goongerah-Deddick Trail Fire
- Wyperfeld National Park
- Grampians Northern Complex
- Big Desert Wilderness Park - Red Bluff Wildlife Reserve
- Mickleham-Kilmore
- Wunghnu Complex
- Hernes Oak / Driffield / Hazelwood mine fire.

Figure 1 provides an overview of serious, significant and other fires for the 2013-14 fire season.

Figure 1: 2013-14 fire season – serious, significant and other fires

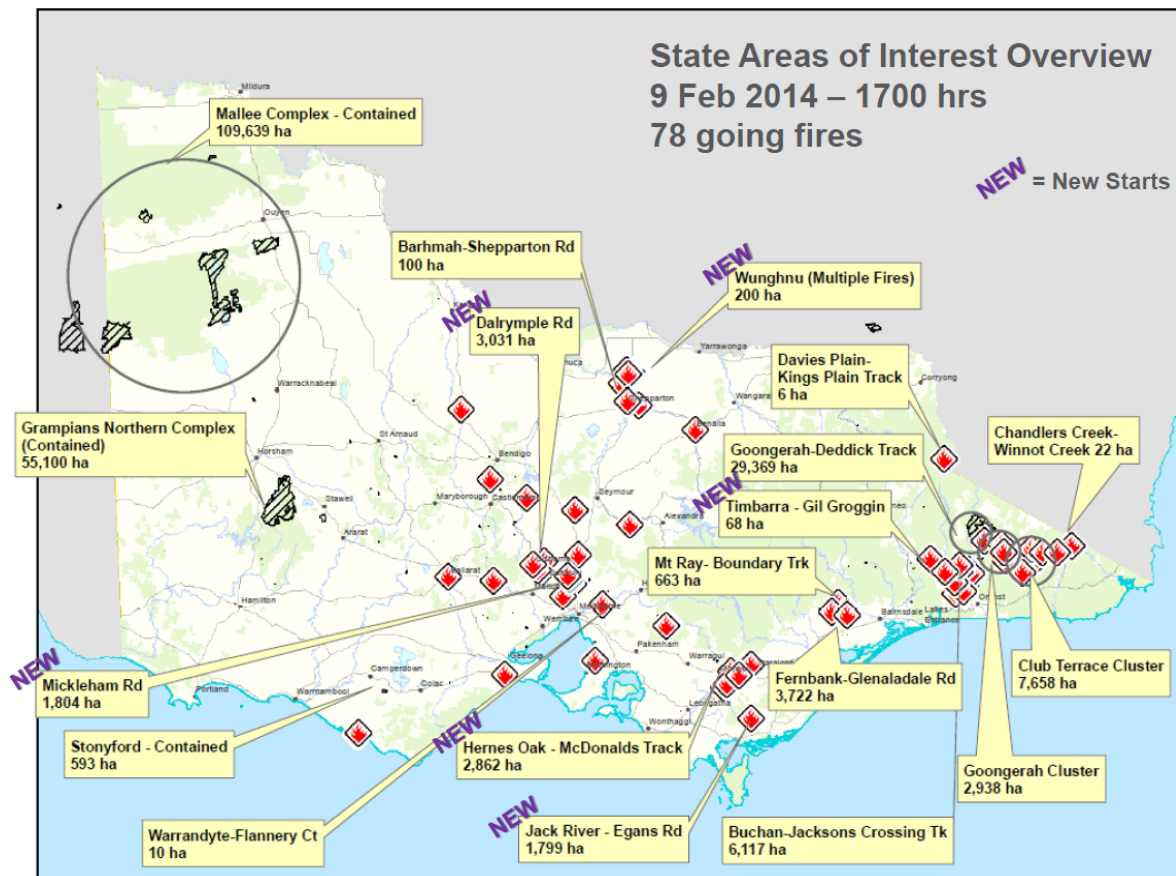


Events of significance

Following the heatwave of 13 to 17 January 2014, the weekend of 8 and 9 February 2014 was a period of high heat conditions as well as high fire danger. Maximum temperatures across the state were 38°C to 42°C with strong north to north-westerly winds.

On 9 February 2014 there were 78 going fires across the state, with a number of new starts as illustrated in Figure 2. There was now fire within the disused areas of the coal mine pit at Hazelwood power station and the Goongerah-Deddick Trail Fire had tripled in size and merged with other fires.

Figure 2: Overview of state areas of interest as at 9 February 2014



Victoria's emergency services, with the assistance of 2,850 interstate and international colleagues, worked to manage the fires. There were 1,675 dispatches of aircraft delivering almost 10,000 hours of work during the season. Further, a total of 3,644 warning and advice messages were issued to Victorian communities over the course of the season.

State losses

The 2013-14 fire season saw 76 houses and 2,900 kilometres of fences destroyed or damaged, and more than 21,500 livestock lost. More than 463,000 hectares of private and public land was burnt, more than double from the previous season. Figure 3 provides an overview of key loss and damage information.

As at 21 March 2014, 6,423 event / personal hardship payments totalling \$4.4 million were issued to members of the Victorian community affected by the 2013-14 fires.

Figure 3: Overview of 2013-14 fire season state losses as at 25 March 2014

