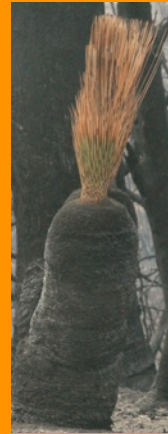


# MessageMatrix



February 2009

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## Fire Roundup

Well there is a lot to say here. it has been such an awful, horrible, terrible month in Victoria.

## Black Saturday

7th February 2009

It is very difficult to know what to write here, although there is so much to say. Perhaps I'll start with some facts and statistics (which I have to admit were mostly sourced from the ever reliable Wikipedia).

This event has had the largest loss of life of any natural disaster in Australia.

- More than 300 fires were responded to by CFA and DSE on the day
- In total 450000ha of land burnt
- At least 210 people perished (estimates of over 30 people still missing)
- The Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) reached unprecedented levels on the day, ranging from 120 - 190.
- More than 4000 firefighters have been deployed.
- In excess of 10000 personnel have been involved in the response and recovery
- More than 500 people were injured
- 100 people were admitted to hospital with burns



- At least 2029 houses destroyed, with thousands more damaged



- In total there were 3500 structures destroyed - houses plus; 59 commercial properties, 12 community buildings (including 2 police stations, 3 schools, 3 churches, 1 fire station), 399 machinery sheds, 729 other farm buildings, 363 hay sheds, 19 dairies and 26 woolsheds
- Approximately 7500 people are homeless
- 5300km of fencing was burnt
- 2,150 sheep, 1,207 cattle, and an unknown number of horses, goats, alpacas, poultry and pigs were lost

## Some of the issues

Of course, the reasons for such a disaster are varied and extraordinarily complex and as yet have not been established (see Bushfire CRC research and the Royal Commission). As a start though, here are some of the issues already the subject of public debate:

- The effect of climate change on bushfires in Australia

- The effectiveness of the prepare, stay and defend policy
- Community warnings
- Evacuations
- Community Shelters
- Bunkers
- Prescribed burning
- Land use planning in bushfire prone areas
- Building codes and standards in bushfire prone areas
- Government and emergency services planning and resourcing for bushfires
- Recovery priorities and coordination
- Insurance

There is a sense of urgency to implement strategies to prevent the repeat event. However, it is imperative future fire prevention planning is based on a sound analysis of the events and not just changes brought about by media, political and populist pressure.

## Research

In attempt to identify and address some of the issues arising from Black Saturday, the Bushfire CRC has put together the Victorian Fires 2009 Bushfire Research Task Force to provide an independent assessment of the factors surround the fires.

The Task Force is focussing on three main areas:

1. Fire behaviour
2. Human behaviour and community safety issues
3. Building (infrastructure) and planning issues
4. Arson

A feature of this research will be a series of integrated studies that combine analysis of fire behaviour, house loss and survival, and residents' experiences to give a broad understanding of what happened in selected



Duncan gets his way with the assistance of an armed policeman

neighbourhoods.

Research data and outcomes are likely to contribute to the Royal Commission .

The entire Terragang has been involved in this research, with Duncan as Operations Manager (managing all the teams involved in data collection), Jon coordinating the fire behaviour team, Kayla in the fire behaviour team and Amalie part of the social research.

## Royal Commission

A Royal Commission has been established with broad terms of reference to address the issues which have arisen.

The Royal Commission is headed by Bernard Teague as chairperson, with Ron McLeod and Sally Pascoe.

An interim report is due on 17 August 2009, in the anticipation it will inform planning and preparation for the 2009/10 fire season. The final report is due on 31 July 2010.

## Blame game

The bushfires have raised many questions, some more valid than others. One issue which is clearly being overlooked by the Royal Commission and the CRC Task Force is whether aliens were responsible for the fire. Yes, this question is raised, with compelling video evidence on Youtube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AYh68\\_X0Bw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AYh68_X0Bw)

And if aliens aren't to blame, then there are a myriad of others who have been suggested. Suspects include greenies, climate change deniers, climate change zealots, tree changers (in particular BMW drivers), horse owners, the federal, state and local governments, DSE, and CFA.

cont...pg3

## Blame game cont...

What is a natural disaster without some legal action? Thousands of residents have joined a class action with Slidders Lawyers against the Victorian Government and SPAusnet. The claim is being made

on the basis of negligent management of powerlines and infrastructure which may have lead to the Kilmore East and Beechworth fires.

## And in the office...

Actually, we haven't really been anywhere near the office.

## Where we have been

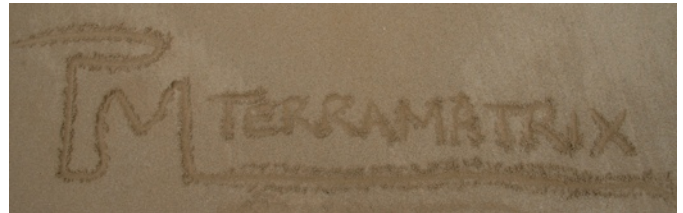
The month started in a normal, and from where I stand now, serene kind of way. And despite the distraction of fire research, we (actually, mostly Kayla and Jon) have continued with various other projects including a couple of WMOs and an EMP in the Otways; finishing up the rail audits; attempting to tie up Mornington loose ends; We also began the month doing a post incident analysis with the CFA at the Delburn fire in Gippsland.

But mostly it has been all hands on deck with the Victorian Fires 2009 Bushfire Research Task Force with the Bushfire CRC.

## Where we are going

Well, mostly we are completely committed to the fire investigation with the Bushfire CRC, however there are always other things on the boil.

Mornington 'Local Government Wildfire Management Forum' is on 17th April 2009. The community surveys have arrived at the shire offices and are awaiting collection.



Kayla headed to Mornington, Queenscliff and Geelong with Chris for the next stage of rail audits. The rail audit report will completed in the coming weeks.

There are several WMO enquiries and some queries springing specifically from the Black Saturday Fires, including around the hot topic of bunkers. Look out for this topic in next months MessageMatrix.



The Boolarra PIA team

There appears to be some interest from the Tasmanian Fire Service in Terramatrix heading to their fine island to scout opportunities. Kayla and Amalie are happy to take on the job of scouting.

## Upgrades

Not to forget important tech issues: Duncan has used the power and persuasion of a fancy tabard, which he likes to sport around the CRC offices and will no doubt bring back to Beechworth, to convince Jon he needed a new 17inch Apple (of course) laptop. Jon was allowed to have the old printer from the Beechworth office.

There is talk of Terra-person number 5 recruitment, so everyone needs to keep their ear to the ground for an appropriate candidate. It is difficult to build on perfection.

Oh, and Amalie has become a permanent fixture on the Terrmatrix payroll. Clearly Duncan and Jon were under enormous pressure when they made this decision. Thanks guys.