

# MessageMatrix



Edition Number Four 2010

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## Royal Commission

The final report from the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission (VBRC) was released on July 31. The report came with 67 recommendations relating to community safety, land-use planning and building, emergency management structures, arson, electricity causes fires, land management, and research.

Following the release of the report, the Victorian Government immediately approved in principle all but eight of the recommendations. A month of consultation with the community and key stakeholders was then undertaken, resulting in all but one of the recommendations have been either adopted or adopted in principle. The one not under consideration was the recommendation for buyback of properties in high fire risk locations.

The full reports are available online or can be mail ordered from the VBRC website [www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au)

## But...

Despite the VBRC recommendations against people living in extreme bushfire risk areas- the Black Saturday fires don't appear to have affected real estate sales in areas such as Kinglake. Since the fires, nine properties have reportedly been sold on Pine Ridge Rd Kinglake, a location where fifteen people died and used by the VBRC as an example of where buyback would be appropriate.

## Appointments

In response to one of the VBRC recommendations, the Victorian Government has appointed Craig Lapsley as the new Fire Services Commissioner.

Ian Dicker was announced as Chair of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, replacing Christine Nixon.

Graham Fountain has been appointed the CEO and Chief Officer of the MFB.

Euan Ferguson has been appointed the Chief Officer of the CFA. He previously held the position of chief executive and chief officer at the South Australian Country Fire Service. No replacement for the CFS has been announced.

## AFAC & Bushfire CRC Conference 2010

This years conference was held in Darwin on 8-10 September. For those who didn't make it, or want to access conference

papers, they are available online at [http://knowledgeweb.afac.com.au/Window\\_on\\_the\\_Conference](http://knowledgeweb.afac.com.au/Window_on_the_Conference)

## Fire Hazard Ratings

The national bushfire hazard ratings have been revised for this fire season, the major change being the renaming of the highest rating from 'catastrophic' to 'Code Red'. For more information go to [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)



**New Overall Fuel Hazard Guide**  
DSE has published a revised *Overall Fuel Hazard Assessment Guide* (4th edition, 2010). The new edition includes significant changes to the assessment process. Copies

are available from the Information Victoria Bookshop [www.bookshop.vic.gov.au](http://www.bookshop.vic.gov.au)

## Phoenix RapidFire

A Bushfire CRC project led by Kevin Tolhurst and Derek Chong from Melbourne University, Phoenix RapidFire is a computer model aimed to received \$21.5 million funding to extend its use across Victoria.

## History of Mega Fires

Scientists at the University of Tasmania have secured an ARC grant to study trees and sediment to find out whether mega fires are caused by climate alone or affected by human activity. The project is part of a global study to track bushfire activity in the southern hemisphere over the past 100 years.

## Bob Smith

We were saddened by news of the passing of Bob Smith in late July. Bob was a long standing CFA employee and volunteer. In recognition of his 45 years of service, he was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal as part of the Australia Day honours, earlier this year.

Terramatrix staff were very fond of Bob, and we extend our deepest sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues.

## Tunes, Flicks and Pics

The Hepburn Community Recovery Committee has funded a project to help young people deal with the trauma of bushfire. The Hepburn Regenerate Tunes, Flicks and Picks Bushfire Project aims to develop a music CD and film to assist bushfire recovery and preparation.

## Some fires around Australia

**NT** - a school and two town camps were evacuated near Elliot (about 640km south of Darwin).  
- houses came under threat when 13ha were burnt near Howard Springs, just south of Darwin.

**WA** had a few fires including:

- about 67ha were burnt near Nannup
- 250ha were burnt on the Edge of John Forrest National Park near Perth's east
- A 5ha burn went through King's Park in Perth, suspected to have been caused by Arson.

## Fires around the globe

Hundreds of fires began burning across Russia in late July. The fires followed drought which caused massive crop failures and in the midst of heatwave, with temperatures in some areas exceeding the average by 7C. The fires continue to burn, many as underground peat fires.

**Thousands** of people were reported to have died, due to the affects of fire, heat and smog. Another threat posed was the release of radioactive material in plants and soil in Chernobyl-affected areas.

A fire in the Golan Heights nature Reserve in Israel destroyed over 13,000 dunams\*. The fire was believed to have been started by tourists setting fire to toilet paper and throwing it in the bush when still alight.



\*A dunam is a unit of area originally used in the Ottoman Empire- defined as 40 standard paces in length and breadth.

Australian DJ Kaz James reportedly led a rescue effort to move people from a beach near where a bushfire was burning, on the Spanish party island of Ibiza.

A man inadvertently caused a 25 acre fire in Orange County, California, when a swing taken off the fairway struck a rock, causing it to spark.

## Marysville Golf Course

Greg Norman has offered his services, free of charge, to design the new 18 hold golf course in Marysville.

## Community Based Gardening Project

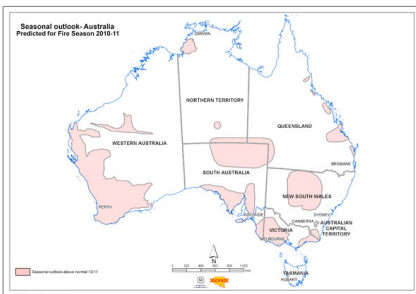
The Helen Macpherson Smith Trust has established a Bushfire Grants fund to assist communities affected by the Black Saturday bushfires in establishing sustainable gardening activities.

## Not all about fire

Heavy monsoon rains causing flooding in regions of south Pakistan is being called the biggest humanitarian disaster of our lifetime. More than 8 million people have been affected, 2 million displaced and at least 2,000 have died. Hunger and disease are currently the greatest threats, with concerns that aid is not arriving fast enough. Please consider donating to the any of the many organisations working in this area.

## 2010/2011 Bushfire Seasonal Outlook

The bushfire Co-operative Research Centre (BCRC) has released a Firenote on the forth coming fire season ([http://www.bushfirecrc.com/news/releases/bushfire\\_outlook2010.html](http://www.bushfirecrc.com/news/releases/bushfire_outlook2010.html)). The conclusions from a workshop held in August are that Victoria will have parts of the state expecting a higher than average fire potential owing to an underlying rainfall deficit and substantial grass growth. It should be noted however, that even Victoria's 'average' fire potential means that fires and losses can occur during a fire season.



Areas in pink are those where the outlook is above average for the season (Bushfire CRC, 2010)

The Bureau of Meteorology have released their climatic outlooks for the next three months (November to January) (<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead>). These outlooks indicate an average rainfall predicted across most of Victoria with a slightly higher than average chance of rainfall in the northeast. Similarly an average maximum temperature is predicted across most of Victoria with a slightly higher chance of higher average temperatures, this time in the southwest.

Of course we won't truly know the extent of the fire season until about the end of April next year. Let's hope that it is a benign one.

## Terramatrix - Two new Terras

Terramatrix welcomes two new members to the Terragang.

### Julian Black

Julian is currently undertaking a PhD in Land Information at RMIT University. Research Title: 'Towards a neighbourhood scale bushfire risk assessment approach to assess the benefit of



implementing bushfire protection measures in the urban interface'.

Julian has a background in GIS and has previously worked for Spatial Vision, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and Department of Sustainability and Environment in the position of GIS Analyst/Cartographer.

### Catherine Stephenson

After completing degrees in Horticulture and Natural Resource Management, Catherine worked for DSE in the



Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) as a Management Support Officer and worked there during the 2006/07 Great Divide Fires. She later worked in the unit that managed the ECC. Following this, Catherine moved to RMIT University to study bushfire economics, primarily estimating the costs of severe Victorian bushfires. Outside of work, Catherine loves anything outdoorsy, including long walks on the beach, hiking through ancient forests and observing post-fire vegetation recovery (especially those of Grass Trees).

# Summer beware with Kayla Selwood

## Snake Bites

With the temperature warming up ectothermic fauna species start to increase their activities. Snakes are reptiles and reptiles are ectothermic which require external heat sources to maintain body temperature. This is done by basking in the sun or lying on warm surfaces. Their levels of activity directly related to body temperature, meaning that in the winter months snakes are less active and hunt less.

In Australia there are about 3000 snake bites per year and on average 1-2 will prove fatal approx. four hours after the bite. Half of these deaths are due to bites from the Brown Snake with Tiger Snake, Tipan and Death Adder responsible for the remainder. Only 1 in 20 snake bites require administration of anti-venom.

Bites occur in the warmer months and are more common in regional and rural areas. Dry bites occur when a snake bites but fails to inject venom. All bites should be treated as serious and although no venom was injected they can still cause severe injury to the victim with muscle damage and infections.

### Signs and Symptoms

The bite site can be painless and may have the classical paired fang marks, but often the appearance of the bite is a single puncture, or multiple or linear lacerations.

Signs and symptoms can include:

- Paralysis drooping of upper eyelids and/or double vision;
- Bruising, redness and/or localized swelling;
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, vertigo and/or fainting;
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing;
- Tachycardia (fast heart beat) and/or cold clammy skin;
- Speech impediment or loss of facial expressions;
- Progressive muscle weakness and pain on movement; and
- Generalised pain and sweating.

### First Aid

The times of slicing open the bite or sucking the venom out by mouth has long passed.

There are five important steps to treating a snake bite:

1. Make sure the snake isn't around to bite you or the patient again, as you treat the patient;
2. Do not wash or clean the bite site. It is extremely important that the bite area isn't washed or clean as traces of venom may be present and can be used to identify the snake and ultimately the anti-venom;
3. Bandage firmly, similar to strapping a sprained ankle. DO NOT remove the bandage and if possible mark on the bandage where the bite is;
4. Splint or sling the limb to keep it as still as possible and keep the patient still as possible; and
5. Seek help immediately.

### Prevention

The chance of a snake bite can be greatly lowered if you wear the appropriate protective footwear and

thick socks when outdoors.



### Interesting Facts

Venomous snakes are found on every continent except Antarctica.

Snakes have no eyelids – rather they have a clear scale protecting the eye.

Snakes smell via their tongue and hear with inner ears, which picks up vibrations in the ground through the head and belly scales.

Snake bites is also cocktail of Lager and Cider.

## Hyperthermia

Hyperthermia is an elevated core body temperature due to failed thermoregulation and occurs when the body produces or absorbs more heat than it can dissipate.

Hyperthermia is defined as the body having a temperature greater than 37.5-38.3C, with core body temperatures above 40C life threatening.

Hyperthermia is a medical emergency and requires immediate treatment to prevent disability or death.

The two most common forms of hyperthermia are heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

### Causes

Heat stroke and heat exhaustion are a result of prolonged exposure to excessive heat and/or humidity. The mechanisms in the body that regulate heat become overwhelmed and are unable to effectively deal with the heat. Factors such as drinking too little water and physical exertion can exacerbate the condition.

Medical conditions that may also increase the risk of hyperthermia include:

- Poor circulation;
- Inefficient sweat glands; and
- Heart, lung and kidney diseases.

Medication such as diuretics (caffeine), sedatives, tranquilizers and heart and blood pressure drugs will also increase the risk of hyperthermia.

### Signs and Symptoms

- Hot, dry skin;
- Swollen lips;
- Nausea, vomiting;
- Diarrhoea;
- Headaches, fainting or dizziness;
- Low blood pressure;
- Increased heart and respiratory rates; and in severe cases;
- Confusion and hostility;
- Pale or bluish skin colour; and
- In extreme cases seizures may occur.

### Treatment

Patients exhibiting signs and symptoms of hyperthermia should seek medical treatment immediately and:

- Move into a cool place out of the sun preferably into an air conditioned room or vehicle;
- Be given fluids, avoiding alcohol and caffeine – water and juices are preferred;
- Bathe or sponge with cool water and fan;
- Lie down and rest (in the cool place); and
- Seek medical attention.

### Prevention

Prevention is common sense and straight forward; be in good physical condition; avoid excessive activity in situations where there is excessive heat and ensure an adequate intake of fluids before, during and after exercise.

Wearing personal protective clothing (PPC) required when undertaking particular tasks, such as fire fighting can limit the heat dissipation from the body due to the PPC creating a barrier. When wearing thick PPC on a hot day is unavoidable you should ensure you stay hydrated and take frequent breaks.

### Interesting Facts

In 2003 tens of thousands of people died from heat in Europe.