



The Place To Be

Media release

From the Minister for State and Regional Development

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\$10.8 M BUSHFIRE RECOVERY PACKAGE ANNOUNCED TODAY

A \$10.8 million recovery package announced by the Bracks Government today will help rebuild and restore Victorian communities affected by the devastating bushfires that swept across parts of the State earlier this year.

Minister for State and Regional Development and chair of the Bracks Government's Bushfire Ministerial Taskforce, John Brumby, today released the taskforce's final report and said the assistance package would help restore confidence in bushfire affected areas.

"This recovery package will offer on the ground support for communities, industries and farmers in the Grampians, Kinglake, Yea, the Brisbane Ranges, Gippsland and south-west Victoria regions to help them get back on their feet," Mr Brumby said.

"During visits to the major bushfire affected areas over the past month, taskforce members have heard first hand from emergency service personnel and residents of the devastating impact these bushfires had on their communities.

"The Taskforce has heard the needs of individuals, families and businesses and today's final recovery package will continue the Bracks Government's swift response.

"Our priorities are to help boost the tourism industry in fire affected areas, provide a range of new business recovery and community development initiatives to help rebuild vital infrastructure, and help farmers and landholders who have suffered stock and property loss."

The December and January bushfires in the Kinglake, Grampians, Anakie and Moondarra regions tragically claimed the lives of three Victorians, burnt 160,000 hectares, destroyed 57 houses, saw a substantial number of farm buildings burnt out, claimed more than 64,000 cattle and sheep with more than 2500 km of boundary and internal fencing lost.

The Taskforce report includes:

- **\$3 million** to assist farmers and rural landholders with business recovery, pest control, soil erosion and the de-silting of dams;
- **\$2.2 million** for a range of initiatives to rejuvenate the natural and built environment including:
 - rebuilding walking trails in the Grampians to reactivate tourism, the continuing engagement of summer fire crews until April to rebuild trails, with priority given to "iconic" trails to enable them to open before Easter;
 - boosting the State's fire mapping capacity to assist Parks Victoria with assessing the extent of fire damage;
 - measures to assess and protect cultural works; and
 - repairs to damaged water authority works.
- **\$1.6 million** in new tourism industry support, including a marketing and advertising campaign to help bring people back to the bushfire affected areas;

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- **\$300,000** for Ararat, Northern Grampians, Southern Grampians shires and the Rural City of Horsham for community development initiatives;
- **\$135,000** for small-scale community projects across all the fire-affected areas;
- and **seven** community infrastructure projects brought forward under the Government's *Small Towns Development Fund (STDF)*, in Ararat, Halls Gap, Rawson, Walhalla, and Yea.

Mr Brumby said the final report acknowledged the considerable effort of a huge number of personnel and volunteers across numerous local council and community organisations, government departments and agencies, in fighting the fires and supporting the recovery process.

“While not as large as other fires in Victoria’s history, the 2006 fires did result in the loss of a large number of private properties and stock losses,” he said.

“However lessons learnt from the 2003 bushfires in the North East were evident in this year’s effort with greater co-operation between agencies fighting fires on both public and private land, better systems for communication information to threatened communities as well as the establishment of the Victorian Bushfire hotline which offered affected people immediate advice on assistance available to them.

“One of the outstanding features of the response to these fires was the level of community engagement from a very early stage with 101 community meetings held, attended by around 16,000 people.”

Mr Brumby said the new measures announced today were on top of a range of other initiatives announced to date, including:

- **\$2 million** in business recovery assistance including a business support package, support for economic and social renewal, one-on-one financial counselling and advice, and three projects already announced under the STDF;
- Low-interest loans at a concessional rate of **2.6 per cent** through the Rural Finance Corporation for primary producers and small businesses who have suffered loss or damage as a result of the fires;
- **\$1 million** for the Community Safety Emergency Support Program which assists groups such as CFA Brigades, SES Units, Life Saving Victoria Clubs, Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Flotillas and other emergency service volunteer groups purchase equipment;
- **\$125,000** for farmers affected by the fires for transport costs associated with the provision of emergency fodder and agistment; and
- **\$315,000** in grants to local governments and community health agencies and emergency grants of up to \$900 per family, and personal hardship grants of up to \$21,000.

Mr Brumby said the taskforce had also recommended information from Government departments relevant to emergency situations be collated and posted on a central Government website.

“This will include information on food handling and what types of food can be donated, nature and type of financial assistance to individuals, families and councils and assistance available to rural landholders, particularly those dealing with dead or maimed stock,” he said.

Including Mr Brumby taskforce members include Agriculture Minister, Bob Cameron, Police and Emergency Services Minister, Tim Holding, Tourism Minister, John Pandazopoulos, Environment Minister, John Thwaites, Community Services Minister, Sherryl Garbutt, and Local Government Minister, Candy Broad.

For further information and to view a copy of the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery final report visit: www.dse.vic.gov.au/fires/

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