Submission No 287

INQUIRY INTO THE 2026 SUMMER FIRES ACROSS VICTORIA

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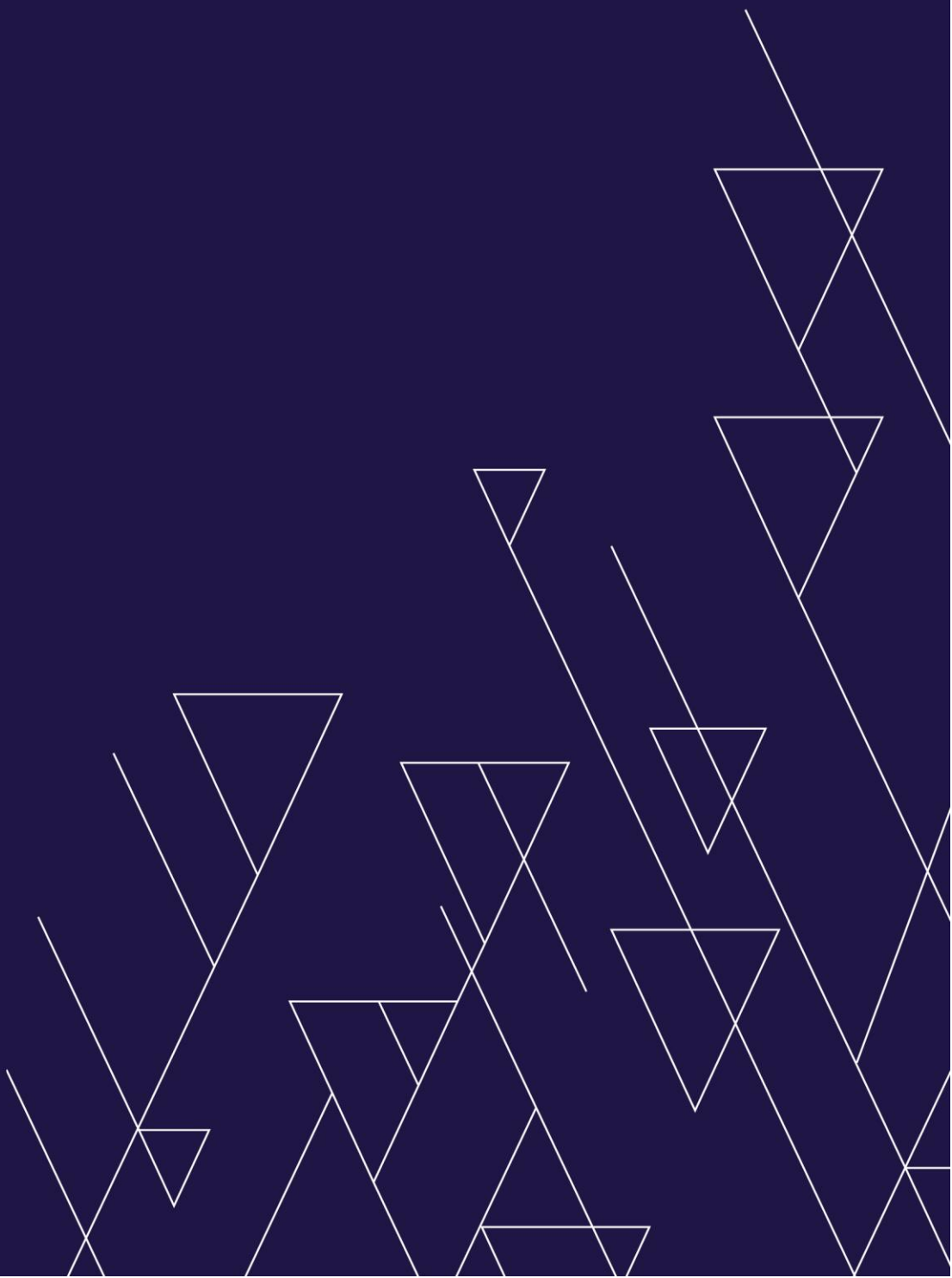
Victorian Government Submission

Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria



VICTORIA
State Government

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Glossary

AAR	After-Action Review
AV	Ambulance Victoria
BoM	Bureau of Meteorology
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CMA	Catchment Management Authorities
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DH	Department of Health
DJCS	Department of Justice and Community Safety
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
EMC	Emergency Management Commissioner
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
ERC	Emergency Relief Centres
FFMVic	Forest Fire Management Victoria
FRV	Fire Rescue Victoria
IGEM	Inspector-General for Emergency Management
IMT	Incident Management Team
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plans
MEMPC	Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee
RAP	Recognised Aboriginal Parties
REMP	Regional Emergency Management Plan
REMPC	Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan
VESEP	Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program
VICSES	Victoria State Emergency Service
VICPOL	Victoria Police
VPF	Victorian Preparedness Framework

Executive Summary

Key points

Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world. The bushfires of 2026 are among the most extreme Victoria has experienced and, in several instances, resulted in new records.

After almost two years of dry conditions, matched by above average temperatures, agencies and departments worked closely with communities to prepare for what was expected to be a severe fire season. While the first major fires began in October 2025, the most dangerous conditions arrived during the period 7-9 January 2026. Notably, high-end extreme to catastrophic fire danger was realised on 9 January 2026, where over 200 bush and grass fires started on that day.

Strategic decisions and rapid response meant some fires with the potential to threaten lives and property were quickly contained or made safe. Due to dangerous conditions, others were not. Several of the fires that started on 7 and 9 January 2026 became campaign fires, resulting in devastating losses for communities, destroying homes, sheds, infrastructure, livestock and crops across all corners of the state. Tragically, one life was lost. While the impacts have been significant, the potential for further loss of life was real.

In many cases, the key observable difference from other historical major fires was the community's preparedness and willingness to heed warnings and mark early decisions to leave.

The Victorian Government and agencies take a structured approach to prepare, respond and support communities to recover from bushfires, informed by the lessons of previous fire seasons.

This Submission provides a Victorian Government departments and agencies overview of the 2026 Summer Fires. It has been compiled in a very compressed timeframe due to the Parliament deadline to receive submissions. Response, relief and recovery operations are continuing at the time of writing this report, and agency After Action Reviews have only recently commenced in some of the impacted areas.

Context

Since the 1950s, Victoria and large parts of Australia have seen an increase in extreme fire weather and longer fire seasons. This has contributed to larger and more frequent fires, especially in southern Australia.

Victoria faced a heightened risk of bushfires heading into the 2025-26 higher risk weather season due to significant and persistent warm and dry conditions for more than 24 months, which made vegetation prone to igniting and carrying fire. Rainfall deficits in some parts of the state were the lowest on record, with severe rainfall deficiencies across the southwest, central, north, northeast and western parts of the state. Mean maximum temperatures in 2025 were very much above average for Victoria, making it the eighth warmest on record.

Preparedness

Considering this heightened fire risk, significant preparedness activities were undertaken by agencies and departments across government in advance of the higher risk weather season. This included the annual coordinated fuel management program of work, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) 'Get Fire Ready' program, the 'Are you Fire Ready' media campaign, pre-season briefings

around the state including exercises focused on evacuation and shelter in place processes, critical infrastructure resilience auditing and updates to joint standard operating procedures (JSOPs). The Victorian Government provided an additional $80 million in funding which included the recruitment of additional seasonal firefighters within Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), early commencement and bolstering of the aviation fleet along with strategic bulk water cartage and fuel distribution.

Victoria's aviation fleet plays a significant role in supporting fire ground response. Firefighting operations comprising of aviation including fire bombers, aerial intelligence gathering and aerial supervision. This capability is mostly utilised to slow the spread of a fire, which then allows ground crews to do their critical work. Ground crews consist of CFA volunteer firefighters, FFMVic firefighters, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) firefighters, CFA's Forest Industry Brigades, heavy plant and equipment such as bulldozers, graders, excavators, harvesters and tractors operated by FFMVic and contractors. This year these efforts are supported by CFA's bulk water carrier program and local farmers that have their own firefighting equipment to help protect their own and their neighbours' properties.

For the 2025-26 higher risk weather season (HRWS) aircraft commenced from early October 2025, a month ahead of most seasons as part of the additional $80 million investment in preparedness. By January 2026 the core fleet of 54 aircraft were strategically located across the state to respond daily to fire outbreaks.

In the lead up to the 2025-26 HRWS, a significant whole of sector preparedness program was delivered based on targeted, strategic statewide priorities and risks. Relevant agencies and departments delivered a range of briefings as part of this program, including regional and state face-to-face preparedness briefings, state aircraft preparedness briefings, a Critical Infrastructure Industry Preparedness Briefing and governmental and Ministerial briefings.

Attestations made by all relevant agencies and departments to the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) confirmed the extensive work done to ensure they were ready for the season ahead. Roles and responsibilities regarding heat emergencies were clarified (noting heat emergencies often overlap with bushfire emergencies), and procedures for the escalation of fires into the state line of control were formalised.

Prior to the commencement of the most dangerous conditions, the State Control Team (SCT), met on 5 January 2026, and then daily from Wednesday 7 January 2026. The SCT implements the strategic context of operational readiness for, response to, and where appropriate the integration of response, relief and transition to recovery for a major emergency. Incident Management Team (IMT) readiness was enacted on that day, with regional control in place from 8am. Incident control centres were subsequently set up in in areas of potential impact.

Friday 9 January 2026 was forecast to be the most severe fire weather day on record in Victoria. A Catastrophic fire danger rating signifies that conditions will be the most extreme possible, and that fires will be unpredictable, uncontrollable and dangerously intense. Fourt weather districts were forecast to be Catastrophic. The remaining five weather districts were forecast to be at the upper limits of Extreme fire danger rating. Since the introduction of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System in September 2022, a Catastrophic rating had only previously been declared in a single district in February 2024. Under the predecessor Code Red system, declarations were similarly limited in scale – three districts in 2010 and two districts in 2019. The SCC was activated to Tier 3 – the highest level – from 9 January to 5 February 2026. This meant that appropriate agencies were in place to prepare for, respond to, and provide early recovery from a major emergency.

Response

The geographic spread of fire activity on 9 January 2026 has not been seen in a single day in Victoria since Ash Wednesday in 1983. Over 200 bush and grass fires started on that day. Two of

the most significant fires (Walwa and Longwood), which commenced on 5 and 7 January 2026, continued to spread at scale on 9 January 2026 under the catastrophic fire conditions. Grassland fire behaviour was equivalent to, and in some cases exceeded that seen during the 2009 Black Saturday fires. The Horsham Automatic Weather Station, which was near the Grass Flat fire, recorded a Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) of 319, the third highest in recorded history in Victoria. In forested areas across central Gippsland, fire behaviour was comparable to that of 2009 and the 2019-20 Black Summer fires.

The total burnt area of the 2025-26 fires as at the end of February was approximately 440,000 hectares, surpassing the 2009 Black Saturday fires at 430,000 hectares.

The effectiveness of the CFA Get Ready program, public information and warnings, along with the rapid declaration of a state of emergency, and extensive firefighting efforts, undoubtedly helped to save lives, with only one life being tragically lost in the 2026 summer fires, in 2009 we saw the tragic loss of 173 lives and 5 lives in 2019-20.

During the first week of response from 7 January 2026, more than 15,000[1] emergency management volunteers and career personnel were involved in emergency response and relief operations. Approximately 60% of the CFA fleet were deployed on 9 January 2026 and two-thirds of all brigades responded. During the week commencing 7 February 2026, approximately 80% of Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic)'s operational fleet of around 700 vehicles were deployed across the state to support operations. These figures from CFA and FFMVic highlight the substantial scale of the seasonal response and the high level of personnel and equipment mobilisation required to manage fire activity across Victoria.

There are many amazing stories of critical firefighting efforts and of the commitment by first responders, day on day, both locally and travelling across the state to support other communities in need.

Knowing the forecast conditions in early January 2026, additional Call When Needed aircraft were added to the core aviation fleet. On 9 January 2026, 75 aircraft were strategically located across the state based on risk. Aerial intelligence supported situational awareness and informed public information and warnings. Weather can have a significant impact on the performance and effectiveness of fire aircraft, especially with a forecast of high winds and wind gusts was evident on 9 January 2026. Safety is the primary overriding consideration in any aviation allocation considerations.

During 9 January 2026 there were several periods from late morning through to the afternoon where extremely high winds extended across multiple firegrounds. This coincided with significant fire behaviour, resulting in some of the 75 aircraft unable to take off or operate safely and/or incident controllers deeming their use as not having the required effective suppression effect. As conditions eased, aviation activity resumed. Night operations on the Longwood fire continued until 2245hrs, where it was ceased due to weather conditions (cloud cover). From the early morning on 10 January 2026, 72 aircraft were available across the state to support fire suppression efforts.

At the peak of the bushfires, more people than ever used the VicEmergency app with 1.6 billion hits in the 24-hour period on 9 January 2026. Furthermore, the public were observed heeding the public information and warnings including early evacuations. The focus on proactive evacuation was a key difference in approach from 2009. In total, 1,798 bushfire and grassfire warnings were issued through VicEmergency channels between 1 December 2025 and 1 February 2026. Friday

[1] IN FULL: Authorities provide update on Victoria bushfires and relief packages | ABC NEWS - YouTube on 11 January 2026 (estimated figure given by the Emergency Management Commissioner at 27:17).

9 January 2026 was the single biggest day on record for community warnings on VicEmergency, with 291 warnings issued.

There was a strong focus on sharing clear messages with the community through community meetings conducted in a hybrid method of face to face combined with live-streaming. Press conferences and complementary messaging were shared through social media and other platforms. Footage from the field and video updates with Incident Controllers and State Response Controllers focused on explaining the current situation, strategies of crews at different times, and advice on what communities needed to do. These were consistently high performing posts on social media. Communities benefited from the introduction of the nationally standardised Australian Warning System and Australian Fire Danger Rating System, both introduced post 2009, along with seven Potential Impact Zone maps that showed the potential spread of fires.

Given the significant risk and potential for rapid escalation of the fires, it was important that emergency powers were available to be used if required, to protect life and property. Declaring the State of Disaster also signalled the seriousness of the bushfire threat and the likelihood of rapid changes in fire behaviour, prompting heightened community awareness and responsiveness. While the emergency powers were not ultimately exercised, their availability sent a clear signal to the community the importance of adhering to the advice of emergency service agencies. This contributed to strong community responsiveness and likely reducing the loss of lives.

Additionally, as the fires intensified, Victoria sought and received interstate and international support on 7 January 2026 through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Authorities Council and the Arrangements for Interstate Assistance, including additional personnel, incident management teams, and equipment to assist with emergency response on request.

Impact

The bushfires that occurred in January 2026 resulted in devastating and widespread impacts on individuals and communities across the state, with 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and one Alpine Resort impacted. This is comparable in scale to the 2019-20 bushfires and the 2009 bushfires.

As a result of this summer's fires, 451 homes were found to be destroyed as part of the initial impact assessment process. In 2009 where more than 2,000 homes were destroyed across a smaller number of hectares, and in 2019-20 where more than 350 homes were destroyed.

The Insurance Council of Australia estimated the cost of damage from the 2009 fires at $1.07billion. For the 2026 fires, to date, there have been 4,300 insurance claims totalling $422.9m in value, with claims continuing to be submitted. This comes after the Insurance Council of Australia escalated its event declaration from a 'significant' event to an 'Insurance Catastrophe' on Friday 16 January 2026.

The impacts of the bushfires on farming communities and agricultural enterprises surpassed both the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the 2019 Black Summer fires. Over 45,000 head of livestock have been lost – predominantly sheep and cattle, as well as almost 10,000 km of fencing and over 150,000 hectares of agricultural land, including established horticultural crops such as vineyards and orchards. Adding to the immediate effects of the bushfires, drought conditions, which in some regions date back to June 2023, are exacerbating negative economic impacts as well as exhausting fodder reserves.

Of the 25 major fires this summer, 12 resulted from lightning strikes, two from mechanical ignitions, two reignitions, one electrical fault, and eight are of unknown/undetermined causes. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found that some of the most devastating fires on Black Saturday were ignited by faulty powerlines. At the time of this submission, none of the

investigated fires have been deemed to have started by fallen powerlines. Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter technology has since been rolled out across the state and is highly effective at preventing fire ignition.

Fifty-six arterial roads and over 250 local roads were closed in correlation with the January 2026 fires. As of 24 February 2026, the impact assessment process quantifying damages to road assets is still ongoing.

For roads managed by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), significant efforts were also made to bring in contractors, including forestry contractors associated with DEECA arrangements, to assist road authorities with clearing hazardous trees and conduct other activities to facilitate safety.

Relief and Recovery

The Victorian government was quick to respond and provided targeted relief and recovery supports to ensure affected communities received the assistance they need in a timely manner, including personal hardship payments for relief, emergency accommodation, 1800 Recovery Hotline, recovery support program, psychological first aid, financial counselling, emergency animal fodder support and waste disposal supports.

Relief payments were made available immediately after the fires began in order to support urgent relief needs under the Personal Hardship Assistance Program, including to allow people to meet immediate food, clothing and medication needs.

Additional investment in relief and recovery programs was then made based on assessment of immediate impacts and community needs. This included funding of $19.5 million announced on 11 January 2026, followed up by additional support packages of $15 million on 13 January 2026, close to $100 million on 14 January 2026, $81 million on 15 January 2026 and $160 million on 30 January 2026.

32 Emergency Relief Centres and 15 Recovery Information Hubs were also opened by councils to provide food, water, psychosocial, financial and accommodation supports, as well as general recovery information. Significant efforts were made during the season to ensure communities that had been encouraged to leave or were impacted by fires had a relief centre available to them to seek respite and services. Following the fires, those impacted were proactively contacted to provide a variety of supports.

By 26 February 2026, all local government areas had transitioned to Recovery and by 6 March 2026 secondary impact assessments were completed for most councils. The Victorian Government has so far committed more than $370m to deliver relief and recovery programs for communities impacted by the 2026 Victorian Bushfires.

On 15 January 2026, the Premier announced that the government would refer the 25-26 Summer bushfires to the Inspector General for Emergency Management (IGEM) for a formal review.

Established in 2014, the IGEM's primary role is to provide assurance to both government and the community on Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

Under the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, a review of a major emergency event by the IGEM can only be undertaken at the request of the Minister for Emergency Services under section 64 (1)(c). The IGEM has received a formal request from the Minister to undertake a review following the conclusion of the current Parliamentary Inquiry.

The IGEM's review will now commence following the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into 2026 fire season, to allow agencies to focus on their after-action reviews, with their lessons to be implemented prior to the next higher risk weather season.

Chapters in this Submission address the respective sections under the Inquiry's Terms of Reference[2] (ToR), as below:

- Chapter 1 provides an overview of Victoria's emergency management and bushfire management arrangements. This includes how government works together, and with, communities to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies, as well as the governance frameworks that ensure effective decision making and accountability. It also provides an overview of the continuous improvement mechanisms which are embedded within the arrangements and the significant reforms which have been implemented over the past 15 years in response to lessons learned from significant natural disasters and other emergency events (sections 5, 8, and 11 of the ToR).
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of 2026 fire season, including the impacts of climate change, the conditions leading up to and during the fire season, the preparedness activities which were undertaken ahead of the season and the response activities undertaken. It also details the impacts of the fires and the relief and recovery activities which have undertaken to date (sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9,10 of the ToR).
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of Victoria's three fire agencies, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). It explains the roles and responsibilities of these agencies and how they work together effectively. It also provides an overview of the funding arrangements, workforce capacity and sustainability (section 3 of the ToR).

[2] https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/inquiry-into-the-2026-summer-fires-across-victoria/#terms

Victoria's Emergency Management arrangements

Key points

The increasing frequency, severity and complexity of emergency events – driven by climate change – will continue to challenge the emergency management sector and the resilience of communities, businesses and the environment.

Victoria's emergency management arrangements are strengthened and refined in response to lessons learned from significant natural disasters and other emergency events and through continuous improvement processes, independent reviews and inquiries.

Victoria's arrangements support and ensure effective cooperation and coordination across government and with communities when delivering emergency management functions.

All levels of government and the community work together to achieve a shared vision of *safer and more resilient communities*.

1.1 Overview of Victoria's emergency management arrangements

The foundations of Victoria's current emergency management arrangements date back to a review of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. At the time of its enactment, the *Emergency Management Act 1986*[3] (EM Act 1986) gave greater responsibility to individual municipalities, as well as fire and emergency services.

The *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission*[4] and the *Review of the 2010 – 11 Flood Warnings and Response*[5], led by Mr Neil Comrie AO APM, also highlighted the opportunity to improve Victoria's emergency management arrangements. These reviews recommended:

- greater clarity in command-and-control structures and interoperability across agencies
- strengthening of communication tools and warnings
- building community resilience and shared responsibility in emergency management.

In response, the *Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper*[6] (the White Paper), released in December 2012, set an ambitious ten-year roadmap for reform built on the following principles:

- emergency management based on community participation, resilience and shared responsibility
- efficient governance arrangements that clarify roles and responsibilities, embed cooperation across agencies, and ensure emergency management reform is coordinated across the sector
- an 'all hazards, all agencies, all communities' approach with networked arrangements, greater interoperability and a stronger emphasis on risk mitigation.

[3] https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-1986/051

[4] http://royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Commission-Reports/Final-Report.html

[5] *Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response – Final Report*. Victorian Government (archive.vic.gov.au).

[6] *Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper Dec 2012*. Emergency Management Victoria (emv.vic.gov.au).

1.2 Emergency management legislative arrangements

A key element of the White Paper reform was the enactment of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (EM Act 2013)[7], which provides a statutory basis for Victoria's emergency management arrangements, including the establishment of:

- Emergency Management Victoria (EMV)
- the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC)
- the primary control centre for Victoria, known as the State Control Centre (SCC)
- the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM)
- the State Crisis and Resilience Council (SCRC).

Emergency service agencies have their own legislative basis. Further details are provided in Chapter 3.

1.2.1 Emergency Management Victoria

The EM Act 2013 establishes EMV as a statutory entity jointly led by the EMC and a chief executive. It is Victoria's overarching emergency management body and plays a key role in implementing the Victorian Government's emergency management reform agenda. EMV's functions include:

- coordinating the development of whole-of-government policy for emergency management
- advising the Minister for Emergency Services on emergency management policy
- implementing emergency management reforms assigned by the Minister
- liaising with the Australian Government on emergency management
- supporting the EMC to perform their functions.

The EMV must have regard to the fundamental importance of the role volunteers play, and to decisions made by SCRC.

1.2.2 Emergency Management Commissioner

The EMC is an independent statutory officer appointed by the Governor in Council. They have specific statutory responsibilities under the EM Act 1986 and EM Act 2013 in relation to the management of major emergencies. Their key functions, outlined in section 32 of the EM Act 2013, include:

- managing the State Control Centre (SCC) on behalf of, and in collaboration with, all agencies that may use the primary control centre for emergencies.
- coordination of the activities of agencies having roles or responsibilities in relation to the response to Class 1 emergencies or Class 2 emergencies, and the coordination of agencies in relation to consequence management.
- ensuring the Minister for Emergency Services is provided with timely and up to date information on actual or imminent major emergencies and the response to major emergencies, and providing advice to the Minister on other matters relating to the EMC's functions.

[7] https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-2013/020

- coordinating data collection and impact assessment processes.
- developing and maintaining incident management operating procedures and operational standards for the performance of emergency management functions by responder agencies.
- leading and promoting the implementation of the *Victorian Emergency Strategic Action Plan* (SAP)[8] to the extent that it relates to the improvement of the operational capability of responder agencies.

The EMC also has specific functions in relation to emergency management planning, including responsibility for the preparation and review of the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP)[9] and approval of regional emergency management plans (REMPs).

1.2.3 State Control Centre

As noted above, the EMC manages Victoria's primary control centre, the State Control Centre (SCC) on behalf of and in collaboration with all agencies. The SCC provides a facility and processes to support the EMC and emergency management agencies to discharge their accountabilities and collaborate to meet the state's emergency management priorities and objectives.

EMV provides a 24/7, 365 days-a-year service, working with all agencies in preparing for, responding to and assisting recovery from emergency events that affect the Victorian community. EMV comes together with agency and department personnel to collectively meet the SCC's functions and objectives. At Tier 3 it expands to being a centre operating with around 200 personnel, both days and nights.

1.2.4 Inspector-General for Emergency Management

IGEM is an independent statutory officer appointed by the Governor in Council. Their primary role is to provide assurance to the government and community regarding Victoria's emergency management arrangements and foster continuous improvement. They undertake objective and system-wide reviews, evaluations and assessments of Victoria's emergency management arrangements and sector-wide performance, to:

- identify emerging issues for the emergency management sector
- provide reliable, evidence-based information on what works well and suggest improvements
- identify ways for Victoria's emergency management sector to learn and get better
- provide the government and community with confidence that emergency management arrangements are fit for purpose.

1.2.5 State Crisis and Resilience Council

The SCRC is Victoria's peak crisis and emergency management advisory body. SCRC is responsible for providing advice on whole of government policy and strategy for emergency management in Victoria as well as the implementation of that policy and strategy. Secretaries of all Victorian Government departments, the Chief Commissioner of Police, the EMC, the Chief

[8] Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2025-28 | Emergency Management Victoria

[9] State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) | Emergency Management Victoria

Executive of EMV and the CEO of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) are represented on SCRC. The IGEM also attends as an observer.

In the event of a complex or large-scale disaster, the SCRC's role is to:

- ensure that broad social, economic, built and natural environment consequences are addressed at a whole-of-Victorian-Government level
- identify and access government resources as required
- oversee communications strategies.

Victoria's Sector Outcomes Framework, Strategic Roadmap

In 2023, the Victorian Government released Victoria's *Sector Outcomes Framework* (Framework) and *Strategic Roadmap* (the Roadmap).[10] Collectively, these documents set out a clear direction for the emergency management sector, guiding future reform work and investment decisions.

The Framework and Roadmap set out the emergency management sector's shared vision for *safer and more resilient communities*, as well as outcomes that describe what success will look like and priorities the sector is focussing on over the next six years.

The Framework and the Roadmap guide the development of the annual Strategic Action Plan. Each strategic action in the SAP aligns with a priority from the Roadmap, and works towards achieving relevant outcomes outlined in the Framework.

Strategic Action Plan

Under the EM Act 2013, the SCRC is responsible for developing a three-year rolling emergency management Strategic Action Plan (SAP). The SAP is updated annually and approved by the Minister for Emergency Services.

The SAP steers the government's vision to support Victoria in achieving safer, more resilient communities and outlines the state-wide strategic priorities, investment and principles of government and the emergency management sector. It sets out specific actions for government departments and responder agencies, which they must implement.

1.2.6 State control arrangements

When an emergency becomes a 'major emergency' (a large or complex emergency that has the potential to cause loss of life and extensive damage, adverse consequences to the Victorian community, or requires a multi-agency response), State Control arrangements are activated under the EM Act 2013.

State Control arrangements provide clarity and certainty regarding how government works together, along with business and the community in an integrated, coordinated and cohesive way to respond the major emergency. In particular, the arrangements designate key responsibilities, including for the control of response activities across government.

The EM Act 2013 specifies different arrangements depending on the Class of emergency:

- Class 1 emergencies – major fires or any other major emergency for which FRV, CFA, DEECA or VICSES is the control agency under the SEMP (for example storms and floods).

[10] Strategic priorities | Emergency Management Victoria (emv.vic.gov.au)

- Class 2 emergencies – any Major Emergency other than a Class 1 emergency or a Class 3 emergency (for example a public health emergency or an animal disease emergency)
- Class 3 emergencies – warlike or terrorist acts, hijacks, sieges or riots (noting that this class of emergencies are explicitly excluded from the Emergency Management Framework and are managed by Victoria Police under police arrangements).

Further information regarding the operation of state control arrangements is set out below under section 1.3.10 of this submission.

1.2.7 Emergency management planning framework

Victoria's emergency management arrangements establish a framework for integrated and effective emergency management. Under the EM Act 2013, state, regional and municipal plans must be prepared providing detailed information about how government will work together and with communities to mitigate, respond to and recover from emergencies.

State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP)

At state level, the SEMP, prepared by the EMC, sets out a coordinated and comprehensive approach to emergency management, including:

- information on Victoria's state control arrangements (see further information below)
- state emergency management priorities to underpin and guide all decisions made during emergencies in Victoria
- agency role and responsibilities for the mitigation, response and recovery phases of emergency management.

SEMP Bushfire Sub-Plan

SEMP sub-plans[11] are also developed to provide specific information on managing particular emergencies. The *SEMP Bushfire Sub-Plan*[12] outlines the current arrangements for the management of bushfires in Victoria. This supports a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach and reflects a shared responsibility for bushfire management. In alignment with the SEMP, this plan contextualises the current arrangements, roles and responsibilities for bushfire mitigation, planning, preparedness, response (including relief) and recovery.

Regional and Municipal Emergency Management Plans

Eight designated regions[13] have a Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee (REMPC). Each produces a regional emergency management plan (REMP), approved by the EMC. All Victorian municipalities[14] have a municipal emergency management plan (MEMP) approved by their REMPC in accordance with the Emergency Management Planning Guidelines. REMPs and MEMPs ensure that planning reflects area-specific risks. The ability for regional/municipal committees to have dedicated fire committees and sub-plans is optional.

[11] State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) Sub-Plans (2022). Emergency Management Victoria (emv.vic.gov.au).

[12] SEMP Bushfire Sub-Plan | Emergency Management Victoria

[13] *Government Gazette*, No G39, 1 October 2020, 2064-2067.

[14] Within the meaning of section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

1.2.8 Victoria's critical infrastructure resilience arrangements

Some infrastructure is critical to the social and economic wellbeing of the Victorian community. 'Critical infrastructure' is specifically defined for the purposes of Part 7A of the EM Act 2013, and more broadly described in Victoria's Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy[15].

Part 7A of the EM Act 2013, and the Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy, outline measures that owners and operators of critical infrastructure should take to manage emergency risks that will affect service delivery.

Responsible entities for 'vital' critical infrastructure, as it is defined within the EM Act 2013, are tasked with developing and implementing site-specific strategies to mitigate and manage the effects of risks (including risks from natural hazards such as flooding) to ensure continuity of essential services.

Government departments also have responsibilities in assisting and monitoring the performance of vital critical infrastructure.

The Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy provides a framework for industry-government partnership and an ongoing focus on sector resilience across energy, water, transport, communications, health, food supply, government, and banking and finance sectors.

1.3 Managing all phases of emergencies

Victoria's emergency management arrangements support activities across the three phases of an emergency: mitigation and preparedness, response and recovery. These are outlined below, providing a specific focus on bushfire risk management.

1.3.1 Mitigation arrangements

Mitigation involves the delivery of actions across government, business and the community to eliminate or reduce the incidence or severity of emergencies and minimise their effects. It is a critical component of emergency management given the growing social, economic and environmental costs of major emergencies and the increasing impacts of climate change.

The roles and responsibilities for mitigation are detailed in the SEMP and in hazard-specific SEMP sub-plans.

Agencies and departments contribute to the mitigation of emergencies as part of their business-as-usual functions by:

- formulating and implementing policies, programs and regulations (such as land-use planning, building regulations, bushfire management and climate change policies)
- building, operating and maintaining infrastructure
- promoting individual and household financial resilience to the consequences of emergencies (for example, through home and contents insurance)
- exercising emergency management arrangements
- engaging the community in building resilience, raising awareness of risk and promoting protective actions.

[15] https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/current-projects/critical-infrastructure-resilience/critical-infrastructure-resilience-strategy

1.3.2 Bushfire risk management

As with other emergency management mitigation activities, bushfire risk management requires cooperation and coordination across government and with communities. Various government departments and agencies have roles and responsibilities in relation to bushfire risk management, including fire agencies (FFMVic, the CFA and FRV), Councils, and the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). Bushfire risk management also involves close collaboration with Victorian communities, including private landowners who also have responsibilities to manage bushfire risk on their own properties.

Key bushfire risk management activities include:

- Fuel management
- Land use planning and building controls
- Fire restrictions and total fire ban days
- Neighbourhood Safer Places–Bushfire Place of Last Resort (NSP-BPLR) and community fire refuges
- Arson enforcement
- Community education
- Powerline safety

The Office of Bushfire Risk Management

The Victorian Government established the Office of Bushfire Risk Management (OBRM) on 1 July 2021 in response to IGEM's Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season (Phase 1).

The OBRM sits within DEECA and is supported by an advisory panel. The OBRM is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of an end-to-end framework for bushfire risk management, with a primary focus on fuel management. OBRM's role does not extend to seasonal preparedness, readiness and response activities, or the on-ground delivery of bushfire risk reduction activities. Statutory authorities remain accountable for their statutory functions. Land managers and landholders retain primary responsibility for delivering bushfire risk reduction activities on their land.

Bushfire management strategic direction

The *Bushfire Management Strategy (2024)*[16] sets out the shared vision and long-term outcomes for how bushfire risk is managed across the state. These outcomes include using the best available science, innovation and knowledge to support evidence-based decision-making, and ensuring that the sector, land managers, communities and industry collaborate effectively and share responsibility for managing bushfire risk across both public and private land.

Safer Together is a program, jointly administered by DEECA and the CFA in collaboration with EMV, FRV, Parks Victoria, DTP and other land managers, local government and communities. Safer Together is supporting Victoria's bushfire management sector to work together to implement Victoria's Bushfire Management Strategy by bringing together existing work with new initiatives to progress towards a shared vision and long-term outcomes.

[16] https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-bushfire-management-strategy

1.3.3 Bushfire risk management – Fuel management

Fuel management is central to Victoria's approach to managing bushfire risk. It involves the intentional modification of the presence, structure or volume of vegetation. Fuel management activities reduce the likelihood of fire starting, the severity of fire, the likelihood of fire spreading and the impacts on communities, infrastructure and the environment. Fuel management is undertaken by fire agencies, such as FFMVic, the CFA, and FRV, as well as by Councils, land managers, Road Authorities and private landowners.

A joint approach to fuel management

The Joint Fuel Management Program[17] (JFMP) is a State-wide program that manages fuel on public and private land over a rolling three-year period. The JFMP is updated annually with the latest information and built on the current long term regional Bushfire Management Strategies[18].

The JFMP prescribes a range of delivery activities to reduce the amount of fuel and fuel-driven bushfire risk in a landscape. Methods used include planned burning (lighting and managing planned fires at times of lower bushfire risk to reduce leaf litter, twigs, bark and undergrowth), non-burn fuel treatments, such as mechanical treatments (mowing, slashing and mulching) and chemical treatments (herbicides) and the maintenance of fuel breaks.

Fuels are managed differently across different areas in Victoria. In areas close to towns, fuel treatments are more frequent to protect people and the things they value.

In other areas, burns can be managed to reduce the spread of bushfires across the landscape or promote ecological outcomes. Some areas are excluded from planned burns to protect areas that are less tolerant of fire.

In high-risk areas, mechanical treatment is carried out as either an alternative treatment option to planned burns in whole or part, particularly where treatment provides immediate bushfire risk reduction or assists delivery of a burn at a future time.

The CFA, FFMVic and FRV partner with Traditional Owner Corporations and groups to support implementation of their cultural fire priorities as set out in, but not limited to, Whole of Country plans and the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy.

The CFA, FFMVic and FRV firefighters routinely work together on planned burns. Fuel management arrangements for roadsides, and on public and private land is outlined in **Appendix A**.

Risk-based approach to fuel management

Victoria uses a wide range of interventions to prevent, prepare for and respond to bushfires to reduce impacts to Victorians, their homes, critical infrastructure and industries, and environmental and cultural values. A safe and effective fuel management program across public land, private land and roadsides is one of the tools Victoria uses to manage bushfire risk.

A fuel-driven bushfire risk reduction target for fuel management on public land was adopted in 2016 on the recommendation of the IGEM. This was a move away from the previous hectare-based target, which was assessed as not achievable, affordable, or sustainable. It was noted that area-based hectare targets alone will not necessarily reduce the bushfire risk to life and property in Victoria and may have adverse environmental outcomes.

[17] https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/bushfire-fuel-and-risk-management/joint-fuel-management-program

[18] https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au/strategic-bushfire-management-planning

DEECA's fuel management program is guided by a risk reduction target to keep fuel-driven bushfire risk at or below 70% of its maximum. DEECA delivers against this target by delivering fuel management in State forests, national parks and protected public land. There are no targets set for private land, or for public land managed by other State government entities or local councils.

Fuel-driven bushfire risk is assessed by modelling predicted bushfire behaviour across Victoria under worst-case fire weather conditions and estimating their potential impact to homes. The percentage metric represents how much risk remains after fuel management and past bushfires have reduced fuel levels.

FFMVic carries out fuel management in line with the *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025.*[19] More specific landscape objectives are set in each of six regional *Bushfire Management Strategies.*[20] As an example, the objectives guiding Hume region's fuel management program are extracted below; similar suites of objectives are specified in each regional strategy.

Table 1: Objectives guiding Hume Region's fuel management program

Human life, health and relationships		Critical infrastructure		Environmental values	
Minimise loss of human life from bushfires	Minimise smoke impact from bushfires	Minimise disruption by bushfires on critical infrastructure	Minimise impacts of bushfires on water catchments	Minimise impacts of bushfires on threatened species and fire-sensitive flora, fauna and vegetation communities	Minimise declines in the persistence of ecosystems

The effectiveness of this program is assessed in line with DEECA's *Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2015*[21]*.* Effectiveness in reducing risk to human life and property is the subject of an overarching performance metric to maintain fuel-driven bushfire risk at or below 70% of its maximum.

1.3.4 Bushfire risk management – Land use planning and building controls

Land use planning and building systems[22] are key risk mitigation measures in Victoria by regulating land use and development to ensure bushfire hazard and risk are considered and managed. They influence where growth and development occur and ensure that development can better withstand impacts. The systems also help communities recover following an emergency by streamlining processes relating to temporary buildings for housing and business, and rebuilding.

[19] Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025

[20] Bushfire Management Strategies

[21] Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2015

[22] https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/bushfire/

Land use planning that considers natural hazard risks is a critical mitigation measure in preventing future disaster losses in areas of new development.

Working with councils and the fire services agencies, DTP administers the land use planning and building systems relevant to bushfires. Land use planning and building systems are important for creating more bushfire resilient communities. Particularly, strategic planning, through local planning schemes is critical in setting out how settlements and rural areas will grow and change in response to the threat of bushfire. Building regulations ensure new buildings are constructed with regard to likely forms of bushfire attack.

Bushfire mapping is a key element of the land use planning and building regulatory framework. Mapping criteria identifies whether an area should be designated a Bushfire Prone Area, and if a Bushfire Management Overlay should apply.

Bushfire prone areas (BPAs)

Victoria's BPAs[23] are designated areas under the *Building Act 1993* where the bushfire hazard has been identified and mapped.

These areas are subject to or likely to be subject to bushfires. These areas are subject to building permit requirements, where new buildings are required to build to a national bushfire construction standard. This is known as a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL).

Bushfire may also need to be considered in planning proposals which are outside a BMO but within a BPA.

Bushfire management overlay (BMO)

The BMO[24] is a planning control that applies to bushfire prone areas with very high and extreme bushfire hazards. These areas are subject to planning permit requirements including mandatory bushfire protection measures such as defendable space, water supply, access and ongoing vegetation management requirements. Areas where a BMO applies are also by default BPAs.

1.3.5 Bushfire risk management - Fire restrictions

CFA and DEECA use fire restrictions to reduce the likelihood of bushfire ignition through regulating activities known to start fires on days of elevated fire danger or throughout the high-risk weather season. The fire services actively work with Victoria Police to enforce any breaches. During periods in which fire restrictions apply, permits may be issued by CFA, DEECA, and FRV in certain circumstances to individuals that provide for otherwise restricted activities to be undertaken within a defined set of prescriptions.

Leading into periods of increased fire risk:

- CFA declares the Fire Danger Periods by municipalities (or part thereof) in the country area of Victoria across Fire Districts.
- DEECA declares the seasonal Prohibited Period across private property located within 1.5 kilometres of a State forest, national park, and protected public land situated within 14 municipalities and 6 Alpine Resorts in the east of Victoria. Because the 1.5km margin overlays the Country Area of Victoria, there are pockets of land where both DEECA's Prohibited Period or CFA's seasonal restrictions (the Fire Danger Period) may apply.

[23] https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/all-guides/building-in-bushfire-prone-areas

[24] https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/all-guides/building-in-the-bushfire-management-overlay

As the fire risk decreases (generally at the end of the season), CFA and DEECA terminate restrictions accordingly. These declarations are published in the Victorian Government Gazette. The status of the declarations can be found on the CFA and FFMVic websites. Agencies also work with media to inform the public.

The Prohibited Period in State forests, national parks, and on protected public land remains in force all year round. The Forests (Fire Protection) Regulations 2014 outline activities that can be undertaken without a permit, however, certain conditions must be followed.

Councils also have local laws restricting activity involving fire. Information on these can be obtained from the relevant council.

Total fire ban days

Section 40 of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (CFA Act) provides for the CFA to declare a Total Fire Ban (TFB) on days when the danger of fires occurring is elevated where any fire that occurs will be extremely difficult to control. The declaration of a TFB imposes strict rules and regulations regarding the circumstances in which fires may be lit and activities which pose a risk of causing a fire must be conducted. TFBs are declared for the whole of Victoria or parts thereof defined by the Bureau of Meteorology's weather districts.

CFA, DEECA and FRV may issue permits for their respective jurisdictions under section 40 of the CFA Act on days of TFB to allow for activities such as essential catering, welding, grinding, gas flare off, hot air ballooning and heating and spreading of bitumen.

The penalties for lighting fires illegally on TFBs, during the Fire Danger Period and during the Seasonal/Prohibited Period include large fines and possible imprisonment.

1.3.6 Bushfire risk management - Neighbourhood Safer Places, Bushfire Place of Last Resort and community fire refuges

CFA works with councils in fire prone areas to identify Neighbourhood Safer Places[25]; they are known as a 'Bushfire Place of Last Resort' (NSP-BPLR). These are places of last resort for people to move to and seek safety from a bushfire when all other bushfire plans have failed. NSP-BPLR's are locations that may provide some protection from direct flame and heat from a fire.

These places of last resort are at an existing location and do not generally have a purpose-built, fire-proof structure. In the main, NSP-BPLRs consist of a clearing that provides separation distance from the bushfire hazard (e.g. forest). They are often simply an open space at a local sports field, foreshore or park, or they may be located within a community building such as a hall or sports pavilion.

Councils play a key role is establishing NSP-BPLRs which are included in fire management planning activities and are assessed by the CFA against strict guidelines to ensure designated sites meet a range of criteria NSP-BPLRs do not guarantee the safety of community members during a bushfire.

A Community Fire Refuge[26] is a last resort shelter option. It is a designated building that can be opened during a bushfire to provide the public with short-term shelter from the immediate life-threatening effects of a bushfire. They are purpose-built or modified buildings that have been formally endorsed by the EMC and can provide protection from radiant heat and embers.

[25] Neighbourhood Safer Places | CFA (Country Fire Authority)

[26] Community Fire Refuges | CFA (Country Fire Authority)

Victoria currently has five Community Fire Refuges at Millgrove, East Warburton, Ferny Creek, Blackwood and Lavers Hill. Each is a dual-purpose building, co-located with either schools or emergency services facilities and placed in communities with no other real last resort options in the event of fire.

Community Fire Refuges are one of a number of contingency shelter options contained in Victoria's Bushfire Safety Policy Framework and should be considered in the context of all of the survival options available to a community in a high bushfire risk area. The Bushfire Safety Policy Framework acknowledges that there will be circumstances in which people may need to seek a last resort shelter option because their plans, such as leaving early or defending a well-prepared home, have failed.

1.3.7 Preparedness arrangements

Preparedness is a critical aspect of the emergency management sector and a key focus for all agencies and departments. This is led by the whole of sector *Victorian Preparedness Framework*[27] - which sets 21 core capabilities and critical tasks as a foundation of how the emergency management sector can mitigate, plan, prepare, respond to and recover from emergencies. It focuses on five core elements - people, resources, governance, systems and processes.

EMV supports the EMC in leading and coordinating emergency preparedness, response and recovery for all hazards across Victoria in conjunction with communities, government, agencies and industry. Assessment of risk and consequence form part of a year-round preparedness program across all agencies and government departments.

Agencies must report bi-annually to the EMC on how they are carrying out their roles and responsibilities under the SEMP. This includes providing annual seasonal assurance reporting on their preparedness.

Other preparedness initiatives include:

- Key committees, departments and agencies with emergency management responsibilities carry out regular exercises, to test the decision-making capability and capacity of their committees, in a safe learning environment.
- The Victorian Annual Preparedness Program (VAPP) - delivered biannually sector wide to ensure the sector’s ongoing readiness for year-round risks and increase whole of sector preparedness.
- Extensive work is done with industry and community to consider Victoria’s critical infrastructure resilience arrangements, including legislation, strategy, regulations and Ministerial guidelines. Industry sectors come together to consider different emergency scenarios; providing a framework for collaboration, information sharing, and building sector or organisational resilience across all hazards – water, food and grocery supply, health, energy, transport, communications, banking and finance, and government.
- Common doctrine provides a platform for working together through a unified understanding of roles and responsibilities, an integrated knowledge base for making decisions. The common doctrine includes joint standard operating procedures (JSOPs).
- Regular activities happen year-round to support individual community preparedness and resilience. In the lead up to high-risk periods, broad-based and targeted community awareness campaigns operate.

[27] Victorian Preparedness Framework | Emergency Management Victoria

- Engagement in national forums, including the National Preparedness Summit that Emergency Management Heads of Agencies and Departments attended. At the 2025 Summit, the elevated risk for bushfires for the upcoming season was discussed, along with the increased likelihood that interstate and/or international support will be required and that these requests for support may come in earlier than usual.

1.3.8 Community preparedness

Helping communities prepare for emergencies is a shared responsibility between emergency services, local government, businesses and the community. In Victoria, preparedness is supported through a range of programs that help individuals and communities understand their risks and take action to mitigate and prepare for them. These programs may focus on specific hazards, local preparedness or broader community resilience.

The Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management[28] places communities at the centre of emergency management, recognising that stronger, more connected communities recover faster and are better prepared for future events. Similarly, the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*[29] emphasises that disaster preparedness is a whole-of-society responsibility.

In a bushfire context, this means:

- Individuals actively planning and preparing for their own safety
- Councils and communities delivering local prevention and preparedness initiatives
- Businesses and critical infrastructure providers planning for continuity
- Community and non-government organisations preparing to support those affected
- Government agencies applying risk-based land use planning, delivering education, building partnerships, coordinating response efforts, providing public information, and supporting recovery.

Financial preparedness, including adequate insurance, is also critical to enabling early recovery following bushfire.

The National Emergency Management Agency support communities in responding to large-scale natural disasters and strengthening resilience to future events.

In Victoria, the CFA delivers a range of programs to help communities understand bushfire risk, strengthen preparedness and improve survival outcomes. Further detail on CFA's approach and programs is provided at **Appendix B**.

Bushfire Safety Policy Framework

Community preparedness for bushfire is guided by the Bushfire Safety Policy Framework which provides government, agencies and other stakeholders with direction on the development and implementation of bushfire-related public safety policies and programs. It reflects the findings and recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and is informed by the latest bushfire research.

The Bushfire Safety Policy Framework establishes the following context for bushfire-related public safety policies and programs:

- The protection of human life is paramount.

[28] *Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management* (2017). Emergency Management Victoria (emv.vic.gov.au)

[29] National Strategy for Disaster Resilience

- Risk management is fundamental to bushfire safety.
- Bushfire safety is a shared responsibility between the government and a range of stakeholders. However, individuals are ultimately responsible for making their own decisions about how to respond to the bushfire risk.
- The State has a duty in equal measure to prepare for, prevent, mitigate, respond to and support recovery from bushfire. The State cannot absolutely guarantee the safety of all its citizens from bushfire.
- All bushfires are different. Bushfires are complex and dynamic events. Safe responses will always depend on specific circumstances, so agencies and the community need to plan for a variety of situations.
- Bushfire safety depends on people having access to a range of safety options.
- All options other than being out of the fire area involve varying degrees of danger.

The State will provide timely advice to the community of forecast dangerous fire conditions and will warn communities wherever possible if a fire is likely to affect their location so that people are able to make informed decisions about how to respond.

Bushfire safety information, warnings and other safety interventions must recognise the diversity in the community and be accessible, address different needs and be relevant to local situations. The State will endeavour where possible to inform visitors to Victoria of the local bushfire risk and how best to ensure their safety.

The objectives of the framework are to:

- increasing the level of public understanding and preparedness for bushfire
- enhancing the ability of those at risk from bushfires to make informed decisions about how to respond
- enabling safe response during bushfires by establishing a range of bushfire safety options.

1.3.9 Response arrangements

The response phase of emergency management involves the action taken during and in the first period after an emergency to reduce the effects and consequence of an emergency on people (their livelihoods, wellbeing and property); on the environment; and to meet basic human needs.

The EM Act 2013 and the SEMP establish command, control, coordination and consequence management arrangements for the response phase of an emergency. These arrangements ensure that resources are deployed in a coordinated way and that consequences are managed. Agency roles and responsibilities for response (including relief) are set out in the SEMP.

Bushfire emergency response activities may include:

- fire forecasting, detection and prediction
- declaration of total fire bans
- implementing readiness and bushfire emergency plans
- fire suppression activities
- issuing community advice and warnings
- establishing Traffic Management Points (TMPs) and evacuation plans around the bushfire areas (preventing loss of life)

- community meetings to share local information to the fire affected community
- provision of relief services (including establishing relief centres)

The approach to the management of bushfire or any Class 1 emergency, consistent with the philosophy adopted Australia wide, is to ensure that:

- the protection and preservation of life and the relief of suffering is paramount
- timely, relevant and tailored warnings and information are communicated to the community
- agencies, which have personnel trained and equipped to provide a particular emergency response service, respond to the emergency
- all agencies are coordinated in their activities
- the provision of relief and recovery is integrated with response management at an early stage in the emergency
- there is ongoing assessment and management of the impact and consequences of the emergency
- the immediate needs of affected people and the impacts upon the community as a whole are managed
- State, regional and municipal plans are developed and executed, defining the operational needs for a multi-agency approach
- control measures are in place at appropriate tiers, and an effective incident control structure is in place for all incidents to achieve protection of life and property
- Emergency Management Teams at State, region and incident tiers are effectively led, managed and engaged.

These concepts apply to the response to an emergency, regardless of the size of the emergency, and regardless of how many agencies are involved in the response.

For emergencies that can be anticipated and pose a heightened risk of impact, readiness arrangements may be implemented. Readiness involves deliberate, incident specific actions based on intelligence available at that time, such as activating control and coordination arrangements, pre-positioning resources in higher-risk areas, and issuing public information to communicate the level of risk and protective actions.

1.3.10 State control arrangements

State control arrangements involve the direction of response activities across agencies, including the coordination and tasking of other agencies.

When an emergency becomes a ‘major emergency’ (a large or complex emergency that has the potential to cause loss of life and extensive damage, adverse consequences to the Victorian community, or requires a multi-agency response) State Control arrangements are activated under the EM Act 2013.

State Control arrangements differ depending on the emergency:

- Class 1 – major fire (structure or bushfire), storm or flood
- Class 2 – any major emergency other than a class 1 or 3

- Class 3 – warlike or terrorist acts, hijacks, sieges or riots.[30]

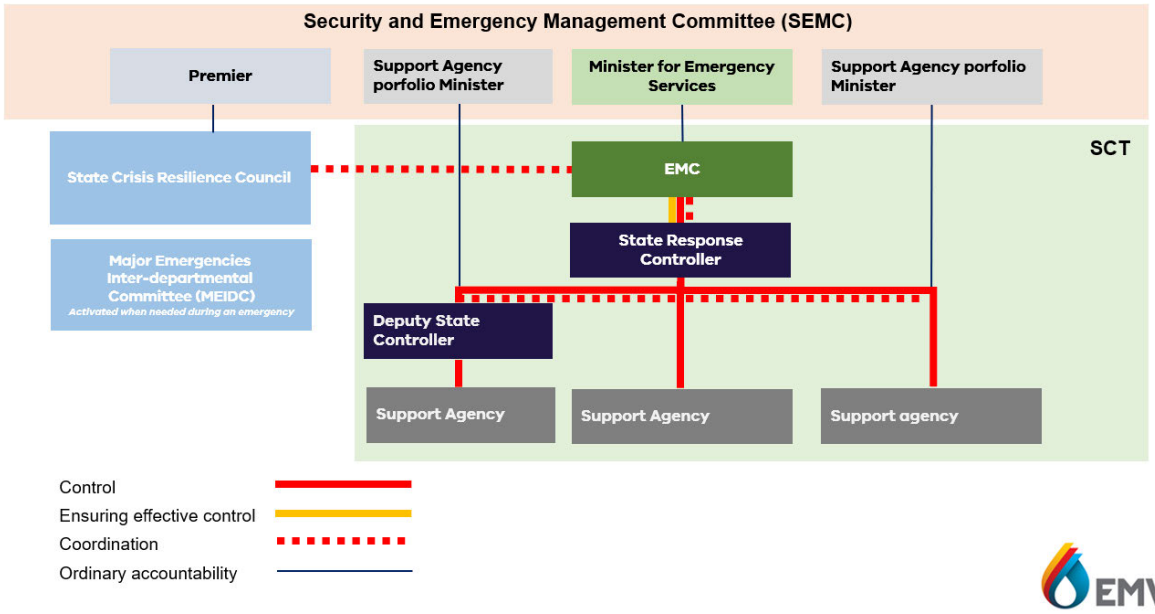
In a Class 1 emergency, the EMC is responsible for appointing a State Response Controller to control response activities.

The role of the State Response Controller (SRC) is to lead the state-level response (line of control) to a class 1 emergency (major emergency), in relation to the control of readiness, response and initial relief. The SRC assumes the responsibility for resource prioritisation, strategic decision-making and assuring effective control for major emergencies.

The SRC is supported by a State Control Team (SCT) and State Emergency Management Team (SEMT) being senior representatives of all functions under the SEMP. The SRC may also be supported by Deputy State Response Controllers to assist with the management of specific elements of the emergency. For example, a Deputy State Controller Energy may be appointed to respond to significant energy disruptions or impacts resulting from the major emergency.

The EMC has ultimate responsibility to ensure effective control is being exercised and can direct or override the SRC and/or replace the SRC if they are not performing effectively.

Figure 1: Example of a possible Line of Control arrangements for a Class 1 Major Emergency

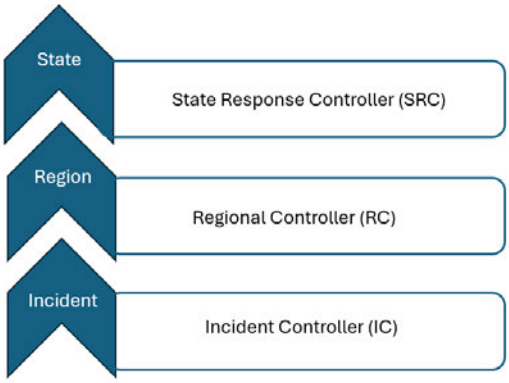


State Control arrangements also include regional and incident controllers who are supported by regional and incident control teams and Regional and Incident Emergency Management Teams (REMT – IEMT) and report to the SRC regarding major emergency readiness and response.

State, Regional and Incident control roles are performed by personnel from across the emergency management sector, including from Victoria's fire agencies, VICSES and sector departments.

[30] The term 'Class 3 emergency' is not used in the EM Act 2013, although it provides that warlike acts, acts of terrorism etc. are not class 2 emergencies. Rather, it is an operational term used to improve the readability and useability of the SEMP.

Figure 2: State, Regional and Incident Control arrangements



The SEMP[31] offers detail on the roles and responsibilities of Control Agencies and Lead Response Support Agencies. The Control Agency is the agency with primary responsibility for managing the response to a specified form of emergency, and responsible for establishing the management arrangements for an integrated response to the emergency. When a fire becomes a 'major emergency', including major fires, the responsibility for the control of response activities transfers from the Control Agency to the State Response Controller (appointed by the EMC) when the fire becomes a 'Major Emergency'.

Tiers of emergency management

In line with the SEMP, Victoria has three operational tiers (incident, region and State) with the option of an 'area of operation' being declared to manage a complex emergency that may be geographically located over several municipalities or several regions.

Some bushfires have implications beyond the incident tier that require specific actions: they need more resources, have greater consequences and recovery needs or need messages sent to broader groups of people. In these cases, regional, State or area of operation arrangements may be enacted to support the incident.

Victoria's emergency management regions are pre-set and declared by the Governor in Council under section 77A of the EM Act 2013. During a major emergency, the EMC works with control agency heads to determine line of control during a major emergency to respond to the needs of the affected regions.

Victoria has 32 established Incident Control Centres around the state. The arrangements for activation of Incident Control Centres are set out in a number of publicly available documents, including the State Emergency Management Plan. These documents consider, amongst other things, the availability and sustainability of personnel, and accessibility to the facility during the response operations.

Regional and State tier arrangements are constantly activated and scale up with resources and functional activities when a major emergency has occurred or is anticipated to occur through intelligence and commensurate with the desired levels of readiness.

The readiness and response structure for some emergencies may be enhanced by other arrangements or enhanced to cater for multiple emergencies of different types that may occur concurrently. The SEMP details how an Area of Operations may be established to meet the

[31] Role statements | Emergency Management Victoria (emv.vic.gov.au)

needs of a complex emergency; such an arrangement would operate in addition to the three tiers listed above.

Incident management

Bushfire emergencies are controlled at the incident tier through the application of the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System[32] (AIIMS). AIIMS uses the following principles to manage incidents:

- Safety first
- Flexibility
- Management by objectives
- Functional management
- Unity of command, and
- Span of control

AIIMS also applies the principles of risk management described in AS/NZS ISO 31000: 2009 Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines.

The IC is appointed for every incident and is responsible and accountable for all the functions of incident management. AIIMS identifies eight functional areas, as depicted in Figure 3 AIIMS Incident Management Functions and described in Table 2 Function Descriptions.

Figure 3: AIIMS Incident Management Functions

Table 2: Function descriptions

AIIMS Function	Description
Control	The management of all the activities necessary for the resolution of an incident.
Planning	The development of objectives, strategies and plans for the resolution of an incident and management of immediate consequences for the community.
Intelligence	The task of collecting and analysing information or data, which is recorded and disseminated as intelligence to support decision making and planning.

[32] Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System

AIIMS Function	Description
Public Information	Provision of warnings, information and advice to the public, and liaison with the media and affected communities.
Operations	The tasking and application of resources to achieve resolution of the incident.
Investigation	The task of conducting investigations to determine the cause of an incident and/or to determine factors that contributed to the impact of the incident or specific events.
Logistics	The acquisition and provision of human and physical resources, facilities, services and materials to support achievement of incident objectives.
Finance	The task of managing: • accounts for purchases of supplies and hire of equipment, • insurance and compensation for personnel, property and vehicles, and • the collection of cost data and provision of cost-effective analyses and providing cost estimates for the incident.

Country advisor roles in Incident Control Centres

The Victorian government is committed to working with Traditional Owners during emergencies to support self-determination and improve outcomes for Country as impacts to Country and Traditional Owners are expected to increase.

This includes a pilot program, introduced during 2025-26 Higher Weather Risk Season, led by DEECA to enable Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) to deploy a Country Advisor to IMTs to provide advice regarding Country and biocultural values during in-scope emergencies.

As of 19 February 2026, 32 Country Advisors across seven RAPs have been nominated to participate in the pilot program, with a further two RAPs expressed interest in joining. The required agreements with RAPs to deploy the Country Advisor role were not in place when the major fires ignited in January, so no Country Advisors were activated for these fires. However, RAPs were often involved in Incident Control Centres through local arrangement. Formal agreements have subsequently been established with some RAPs.

1.3.11 Coordination arrangements

Coordination arrangements involve bringing together people, resources, governance, systems and processes, to ensure an effective emergency response.

In a Class 1 or Class 2 emergencies, the EMC is responsible for coordinating agency response to an emergency, including when there are multiple, concurrent emergencies. The EMC chairs, and is supported by, the State Coordination Team which includes senior representatives from emergency management sector agencies.

1.3.12 Consequence management arrangements

Consequence management focuses on the wider ramifications of an emergency, rather than immediate impacts. For example, a bushfire or fire may impact supply chains and lead to a fuel shortage. In both emergencies, the consequence – a community fuel shortage – requires a coordinated response across agencies to re-establish fuel supplies and end disruption.

Consequence management supports strategic decision-making before, during and after a major emergency and aims to minimise the adverse consequences. It is particularly important in longer-term decision-making and in helping support community recovery. It involves many different agencies and engaging the skills and services of non-government organisations responsible for managing or regulating affected services or infrastructure.

The EMC is responsible for consequence management coordination for a major emergency, which is defined in the EM Act 2013 as the coordination of agencies that are responsible for managing or regulating services or infrastructure which are or may be affected by a major emergency. The EMC chairs and is supported by the State Emergency Management Team (SEMT) which includes senior representatives from agencies with portfolio responsibilities relevant to a particular emergency and representatives of business, industry or community groups best placed to assist.

1.3.13 Warnings and information

When fires are likely to impact a community or area, warnings are issued by CFA, FRV or FFMVic as well as through Incident, Regional and State Response Controllers, in line with established bushfire and grassfire business rules. The warnings tell communities what is happening and offer the best advice on what they should do.

The Victorian Warning System provides information and warnings to communities through a range of channels including:

- VicEmergency – VicEmergency website and app provides a centralised location for Victorians to access timely emergency information and warnings.
- VicEmergency Social Media channels – The centralised source of information on social media platform of Facebook and X (formally Twitter). VicEmergency Facebook pages has both a state main page supported by regional pages to provided further localised information which are aligned to the established Victorian emergency management regions.
- Emergency broadcasters – The Victorian Government has formal arrangements for the broadcast of community warnings and information to the community.
- Emergency Alert – Emergency Alert is used to send a voice message to landline telephones and a text message to mobile phones.
- Local automated warning systems – Such as community sirens.
- Face-to-face – This includes door knocking, community meetings, and community information points

Victoria has implemented the Australian Warning System (AWS) for all hazards currently part of the national arrangements. The system uses a nationally consistent set of icons, colours and warning levels for information and warnings during emergencies.

There are three warning levels in the AWS: Advice (yellow), Watch & Act (orange) and Emergency Warning (red). For each level, there are a series of clear action statements to guide positive action by the community. These include ‘stay informed’, ‘prepare to evacuate’, ‘shelter in

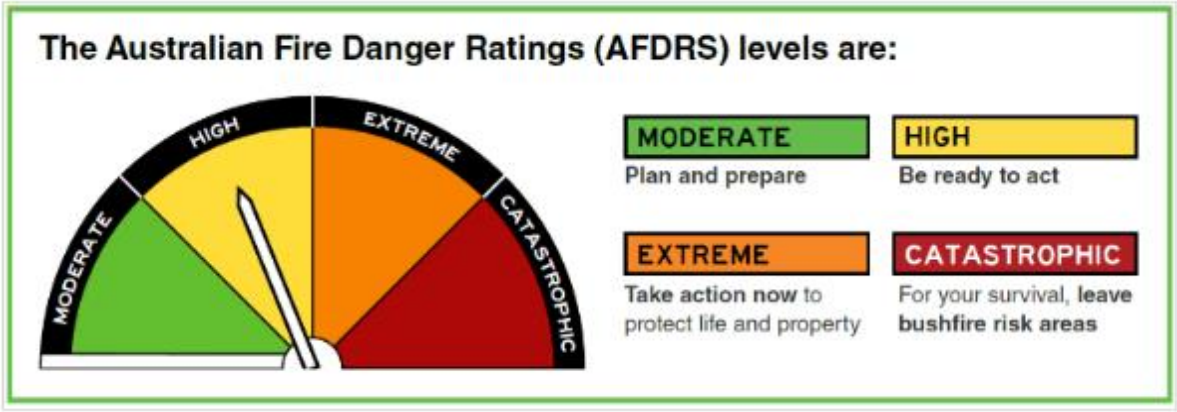
place' and 'leave now'. Further information on Information and Warnings is included in **Appendix C**.

Fire Danger Ratings

The purpose of Fire Danger Ratings is to provide an efficient and easy way to communicate fire danger broadly to the community.

An overview of the four Fire Danger Rating System levels is provided below.

Figure 4: Australian Fire Danger Rating (AFDRS) levels



Daily forecast maximum fire danger ratings will be shown for the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) Fire Weather District on roadside signs (where installed), the CFA's website, the BoM webpage and are broadcast where required through media such as television, radio, newspapers and the internet.

The Fire Danger Ratings feature:

- Broad categories representing levels of fire danger risk.
- Four fire danger rating levels.
- Simple fire danger rating names and intuitive colours.
- Distinct action orientated messages for each fire danger rating level.

An AFDRS Communications Kit for the community is published on the CFA website, available at: Australian Fire Danger Rating System Communications Kit | CFA (Country Fire Authority).

Fire Behaviour Index

The Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) is a simple numerical scale that can be used consistently across Australia, allowing users to make decisions that require finer detail than the four Fire Danger Rating categories allow. The FBI runs from 0 to 100 and beyond, with increasingly high values indicating increasing dangerous fire behaviour and therefore fire danger risk.

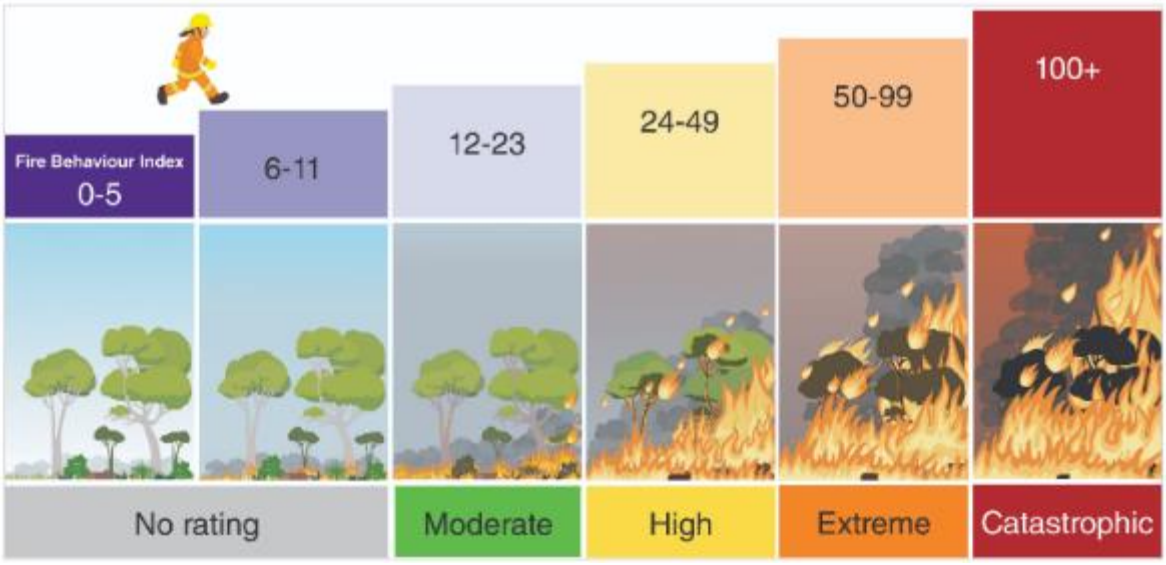
The FBI is designed to support fire management professionals and decision makers.

FBI forecasts are available on government agency intranet portals, through the registered users' section of the BoM website and publicly available during the high-risk weather season on the BoM Victorian Fire Danger Ratings webpage[33].

[33] Victorian Fire Danger Ratings

An overview of the FBI scale is provided below.

Figure 5: Australian Fire Danger Rating (AFDRS) levels



The Fire Behaviour Index features:

- A fine-grained scale of fire danger that runs from 0 to 100 and beyond.
- A stepped design to aid in operational decision making.
- Transition between steps based on changes in fire behaviour that have operational consequences.
- Management guidelines for each stepped category.

The BoM produces products as part of the AFDRS suite of services that provide nation-wide standard information about fire danger for a variety of uses.

Bushfire Intelligence and Predictive Services

Bureau of Meteorology – The BoM under agreement with the State's fire agencies produce a number of intelligence products that attempt to forecast fire weather and fire risk. These products are informed by several data sources and published by BoM at regular intervals. Supplementary intelligence products that depict fire danger and bushfire risk are produced by the SCC and disseminated across the EM sector to inform decisions. BoM embeds a meteorologist in the SCC.

Intelligence products and Fire Behaviour Analysts (FBAns) – Fire agencies use fire behaviour analysts (FBAns) to combine meteorological and fire science inputs to develop fire behaviour predictions. The predictions help firefighters identify the potential impact and consequences of bushfires and help inform the development of bushfire control and risk mitigation strategies.

When a fire starts predictions of the potential impact of the fire are assessed at multiple levels including in the field by responding crews. To assist in more detailed analysis of fire spread potential, Fire Behaviour Analysts (FBAns) can be used to predict the areas of potential impact for up to several days in advance. The FBAn role relies on experience, predictive bushfire mathematical models and bushfire simulators across a range of fuel types to predict the likely fire behaviour. The positioning of the FBAn role as part of the incident, regional or State management teams operating at the incident or State tiers is relevant. The role is important for procuring

reliable fire intelligence as well as providing early warnings (several days in advance) of largescale fire behaviour.

Bushfire Analytics and Trends Dashboard (BAT) – The CFA in partnership with other agencies has developed and deployed a Bushfire Analytics and Trends Dashboard (BAT) ahead of the 2025/26 fire season to assist key decision makers in maintaining situational awareness as it pertains to the bushfire risk environment. The BAT consists of the following analytics in three main sections:

State and regional overview. Provides the state level and fire weather district (FWD) overview.

- Fire activity
- Dryness (cumulative rainfall anomaly, Keech Byram Drought Index (KBDI)
- Grass fuel state and condition (operational fuel load and grassland curing, fuel load estimate, spatial anomaly for curing)
- Fire restrictions
- Harvest detection

Local footprint overview. Provides the CFA districts overview.

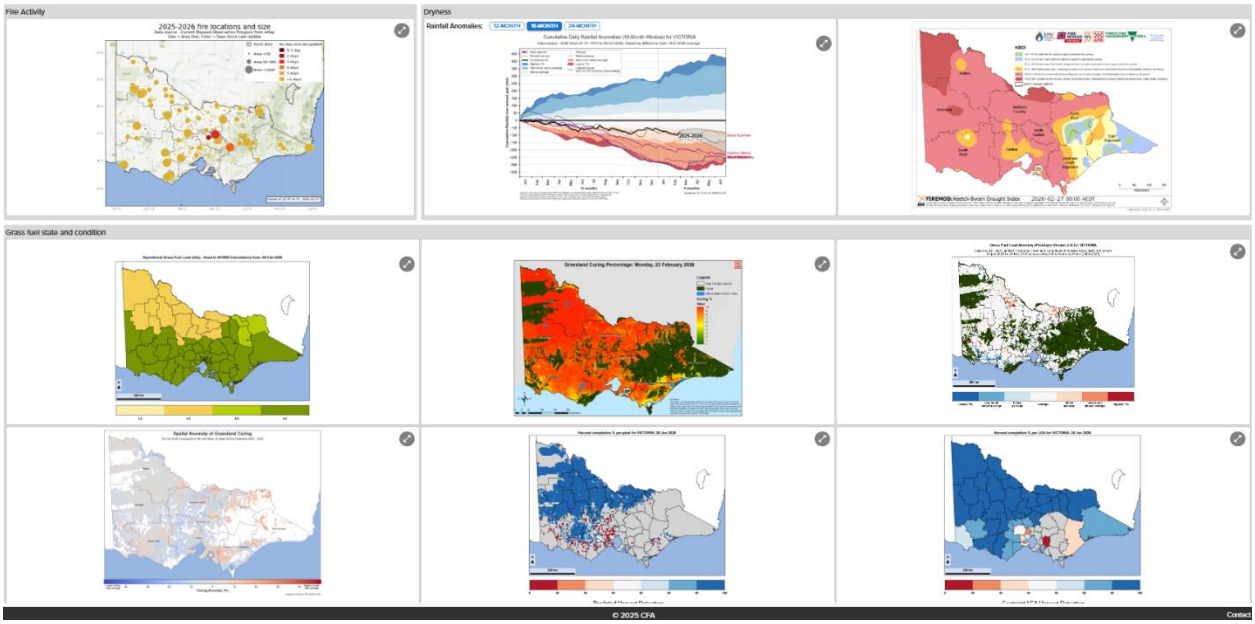
- Fire activity
- AWS 10-minute observations
- Grass state and condition (current curing tracking, harvest detection)
- Fire Danger Period (FDP) start and end date box plots.

The outlooks section contains two different fire outlook products:

- 1 week (short term)
- 2-4 week (medium term)

All of these products are updated weekly and provide an indication of fire activity over the coming weeks.

Figure 6: Example of BAT dashboard during the 2025 -26 higher risk weather season



Remote sensing and other technology - The fire services agencies collaborate where possible on the development and use of technology to support firefighting. They primarily use technology to develop an operating picture of a bushfire that can be shared at the incident, region, State and community levels.

Technology such as remote sensing can also provide bushfire managers with a strategic overview of major bushfire.

Misinformation in emergencies

Misinformation may be true or have truthful elements but is used with harmful or manipulative intentions. Disinformation is false information created with the intention of harming a person, group, organisation. Because intentions are often unclear, it is simpler to use the term misinformation to encompass most cases of false information.

A range of factors influence whether people believe misinformation. Low levels of trust in government and state agencies can leverage misinformation. People who believe misinformation may generally have an approach to judging the credibility of information which makes them suspectable to believing weak claims. Social media users can quickly share misinformation across a range of social media platforms, and sometimes this is amplified by bots and algorithms that push specific types of content to users.

For emergency service agencies, this can have a range of negative effects. People do not believe or receive warnings or guidance messages related to a hazard or risk. People distrust authorities and do not access help available. People receive a large amount of conflicting information and revert to mental shortcuts for what information to believe. People involved in the emergency response are harassed or hindered from doing their work. People believe false warnings about hazards and take unnecessary actions and risks. Emergency Management personnel spend time and energy responding to misinformation, rather than dedicated to the emergency response.

There are a range of potential interventions for responding to misinformation, but these take time and resources for emergency agencies.

Pre-bunking and inoculation strategies focus on pre-emptively familiarising people with misinformation or misinformation strategies so they have cognitive ‘immunity’ when they encounter misinformation during an emergency. Explaining the manipulative and influential techniques used in misinformation is the most effective pre-bunking approach.

In clarifying, misinformation is the inadvertent spread of false information without intent to harm, while disinformation is false information deliberately spread with the intent to confuse.

While social media and digital news can exacerbate both dis and mis-information, they are also ways to combat it. Over the past 3 years EMV have been building a critical project to produce more proactive content and hence have a greater influence on the media narrative.

This project is called ‘the newsroom’ and has a focus to effectively manage dis and mis-information via three interconnected strategies:

- production of content straight from the source - video, audio and imagery that tells the story of what is happening e.g. incident controller videos, consistent spokespeople giving media updates, strong media engagement.
- strong monitoring and quick community engagement on social media. This enables myth busting and being the voice of authority.
- building, engaging and leveraging the community’s trust in VicEmergency and response agencies. This ensures that when negating incorrect information in all these forms, we are considered the trusted source.

As emergencies are fast moving events, there were some instances of misinformation in the lead up to, and during the 2025-26 summer.

Misinformation during this fire season, at times, caused significant distraction and undermined the trust of communities in a number of settings, and/or resulted in a counter narrative that was in fact, factually incorrect.

1.3.14 Readiness arrangements

Victoria has a standing capacity and capability for responding to bushfires through standard agency arrangements. Agencies jointly develop local arrangements that document agreed arrangements for jointly preparing for and responding to bushfires.

Importantly, readiness for emergency events is a critical priority for emergency management agencies and departments, taking precedence over normal business as usual activities.

Readiness arrangements are scalable and adaptable to ensure an efficient and effective response to bushfires of any size and complexity; they are often documented in a matrix style commensurate with the fire danger ratings system. Examples of adjusting agency readiness activities can include elevating arrangements when a significant emergency can be reasonably expected, such as a bushfire occurring on a day of elevated fire danger. Enhanced readiness arrangements can include activities such as pre-positioning incident management personnel, identifying surge resources, moving key assets such as aircraft to locations that better address the risk environment or increasing fire detection activities such as patrols, tower observers and fire detection flights.

Daily readiness arrangements

During the fire season, the fire agencies, together with other emergency management sector agencies and departments, jointly ensure response resources (personnel, equipment, facilities etc.) are set at an appropriate level of readiness, commensurate with the risk and operational requirements. This can include pre-positioning fire-fighting resources and incident management teams (IMTs) on days of high fire risk.

At State and regional tiers, a matrix for bushfire readiness summarises arrangements and guides decision making processes to ensure the appropriate capabilities are set to respond to outbreaks of fire quickly and effectively.

Fire agency readiness levels in respect to IMTs, aviation and other specialist resources are recorded in operational systems that provide an overview or dashboard of readiness arrangements for bushfire.

The introduction of the AFDRS provides a consistent basis for agencies and jurisdictions across Australia to plan and implement readiness arrangements for bushfire. This decision making is supported by other inputs including forecast fire danger indices (forest and grass), resource availability, existing fire activity and forecast lightning activity.

Resource readiness

In respect to some specialist resources, the fire agencies and other sector departments and agencies have an agreed set of arrangements for ensuring a minimum level of resources are ready to respond to bushfire emergencies in Victoria. JSOPs document these arrangements in respect to both IMTs and aviation.

During the fire season, aircraft are positioned at various locations around Victoria to support response activities. JSOP02.06 – Aviation Resource Readiness (Bushfire)[34] relates to the pre-positioning and readiness of aviation personnel and equipment to support bushfire response activities. These arrangements specify a minimum specification that can be adjusted and enhanced to suit the environment and other factors and the approvals required for this.

IMT and Incident Control Centre (ICC) arrangements in the fire season are specified in JSOP02.03 – Incident Management Team – Readiness Arrangements[35]. This approach to IMT readiness in the JSOP is supplementary, therefore does not include the arrangements that control agencies may put in place to manage initial response and day to day activities, such as non-major fires, or normal fire response.

Operational planning

Operational planning and readiness arrangements are informed by an environmental scan, resource availability and risk assessments which are detailed and summarised in key operational planning documents.

The State Operations Plan is produced at the State tier and amongst other information provides a risk overview across Victoria for a defined period that are used by agencies to inform strategies and actions. The State Operations Plan also provides an operational overview, key State objectives and risks, and key strategic communication messages and activities.

1.3.15 Initial response

Following the ignition of a bushfire, the fuel, topography and weather in the area where the bushfire is burning will determine its size, direction and intensity. The fire agencies are responsible for the first response to bushfire according to their respective legislative and jurisdictional responsibilities, often supported by privately owned and managed resources in rural areas.

In light fuels such as grass, firefighters generally extinguish bushfires using water. Where water is scarce or where fuels are heavier, such as in a forest, firefighters generally contain bushfires within mineral earth firebreaks, created using either hand tools or heavy machinery.

Aircraft can assist in halting the intensity and spread of a fire for a temporary period, allowing ground firefighters to approach with increased safety. Predetermined dispatch of aircraft is a key measure to achieve this initial reduction in bushfire development.

Initial attack

Early detection of and response to bushfires is vital to restricting the spread and development of bushfires. The fire agencies detect bushfires using a range of methods including reports from the public, Fire Lookout Observers located in fire towers or detection aircraft. Enhanced fire detection arrangements are activated in line with the forecast fire danger.

Triple Zero Victoria (TZV) provides the link between the Victorian community and the State's emergency services agencies; they provide Victoria's 24-hour emergency call taking and dispatch services and receive Triple Zero (000) calls from the public to report fires and dispatch CFA or FRV resources. Where a fire is detected on public land, TZV dispatches the assigned CFA or FRV resources and contacts the FFMVic State Agency Commander who may dispatch additional FFMVic resources.

[34] JSOP02.06 – Resource Readiness (Bushfire))

[35] JSOP02.03 – Incident Management Team – Readiness Arrangements

Where response is undertaken quickly to a bushfire, fires can generally be contained before they reach their maximum potential. An efficient first response will keep the area of impact of the bushfire as small as possible and will minimise the potential for bushfire to have broader consequences. On days of elevated fire danger, fire agencies adjust their readiness and response arrangements by planning for the initial response or first attack to fail and the fire to grow rapidly. On days when fire danger is rated Extreme or Catastrophic, bushfires are less likely to be contained. Where this occurs, the strategy shifts from suppression to ensuring communities are not in the path of encroaching bushfires.

Where a bushfire is contained, firefighters are required to ensure they consider and manage the risk of bushfire escaping containment. This will normally involve careful monitoring of the weather and on-going patrol of the area for several days to ensure there is no re-ignition of fuels previously thought extinguished.

Pre-determined dispatch of aircraft

At specific fire danger trigger levels, the State Aerial Firefighting fleet has a number of firebombing aircraft that provide pre-determined dispatch (PDD). PDD is a system which authorises the dispatch of aircraft by pager, concurrently with ground resources, with the intent to have aircraft working over fires in the shortest possible time – supporting rapid initial attack.

1.3.16 Operational safety

In line with the State Emergency Management Priorities[36] the safety and the protection of human life, including emergency services personnel and community members, takes priority above all other considerations in bushfire management.

All emergency services personnel are to avoid putting themselves at risk when working at an incident. By adopting the Safe Person Approach and using the Dynamic Risk Assessment, emergency personnel may minimise the risk of injury to themselves and others. Further information on Operational Safety arrangements is included in **Appendix D**.

1.3.17 Impact assessments

Impact assessment is the collection and reporting of emergency impacts, providing decision makers with timely, relevant information regarding the nature and extent of hazards and consequences during and after an emergency. Principles and doctrine supporting Impact Assessment are the:

- State Emergency Management Priorities.[37]
- State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP)[38] roles and responsibilities.
- Victorian Preparedness Framework (VPF)[39] core capabilities and critical tasks.
- Impact Assessment Guidelines.

[36] State Emergency Management Priorities

[37] State Emergency Management Plan, State Emergency Management Priorities

[38] State Emergency Management Plan, Roles and Responsibilities

[39] Victorian Preparedness Framework pp31

Initial Impact Assessment (IIA)[40]

IIAs are a response agency responsibility, activated by the incident controller and documented in the Incident Action Plan[41]. It can include intelligence and field observations or formal assessments during response. IIAs provide information to determine the criticality and significance of an emergency, as well as identifying damage, risks and relief needs to human-centred factors. Data and information collated during an IIA often requires interpretation or validation prior to use, and where there is low confidence data gathered, reported with caveats or as ranges. Other mechanisms are used to determine the impact on environment factors, non-residential infrastructure, economy and industry.

Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA)[42]

SIA expands on initial impact information and data collated during the response phase, providing a consolidated account of actual and compounding impacts. Councils are responsible for coordination and delivery of SIA within their Local Government Area. State and regional lead and support agencies focus on regional implications across the recovery environments: social, built, economic and natural.

EM-Impact

EM-Impact is the Victorian data repository portal for data entry, visualisation and storage, with 150 pre-determined data metrics related to SEMP lead agency activities. It is available across the emergency management sector to support relief and recovery coordination.

1.3.18 Recovery

The recovery phase of an emergency involves providing assistance to affected people and communities so they can resume a proper and effective level of functioning. The EMC is responsible for coordinating recovery activities at state and regional tiers, while local councils manage these activities at the municipal tier.

Under Victoria's emergency management arrangements, recovery is community-led and community-centred, responsive and flexible. Recovery activities are designed and implemented through engagement with communities and managed locally. Recovery activities can also be scaled up to deal with more widespread, complex issues and support needs.

Bushfire recovery activities can include:

- emergency recovery activities for individuals, households, communities and industries or businesses
- public health surveillance programs
- emergency responses like removing residual water or environmental asset restoration
- natural and built environment make safe work and restoration
- cultural heritage protection and assessment
- community engagement and support.

[40] Impact Assessment Guidelines V4.0 pp13

[41] Joint Standard Operating Procedure 03.03 Incident Action Planning

[42] Impact Assessment Guidelines V4.0 pp20

At a state level, relief activities are coordinated by the State Emergency Relief Coordinator positioned in the State Control Centre. Key relief coordination activities during this event included the management of Disaster Relief Australia activation, reporting on displaced persons, and supporting the transition from response to recovery. At a regional level, relief activities are coordinated by Regional Relief and Recovery Coordinators, in place at Regional Control Centres.

Outside of an emergency, Regional Relief and Recovery Coordinators work closely with sector partners to plan and prepare for relief and recovery coordination. This is primarily achieved through their participation in Regional Emergency Planning Committees (REMPCs) and as chairs of the REMPC Regional Relief and Recovery Sub Committee, as well as through engagement with Municipal Emergency Planning Committees (MEMPCs) established and run by Victoria's 79 councils. Through these forums potential risks, issues, gaps and opportunities in the delivery of relief and recovery activities are identified and managed accordingly. Regional Emergency Management Plans (REMPs) are prepared and reviewed regularly to ensure clear governance, roles and responsibilities particular to that region.

1.3.19 Evaluation and improvement

The Victorian emergency management sector supports a culture of continuous improvement by:

- validating existing emergency arrangements for different hypothetical scenarios – 'exercising'
- encouraging the sector to share lessons on positive actions to sustain and areas to improve
- encouraging learning from assurance activities and national and international good practice
- improving how things are done, based on research and national and international good practice
- collaborating through pilot projects
- focusing on systems of work rather than the performance of individuals
- recognising that identifying and implementing sustainable solutions takes time, resources and opportunities.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities during and after a major emergency can include:

- debriefing officers, teams and agencies
- reviewing the effectiveness of coordination, control, consequence management and communications functions
- an operational or system level review by EMV
- independent assurance activities by the IGEM – guided by the IGEM's *Assurance Framework for Emergency Management*[43] for a coordinated sector-wide collaborative approach
- other independent assurance activities by the Victorian Government and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, or another independent monitor.

[43] Assurance Framework for Emergency Management

Lesson management framework

The Victorian emergency management sector *Lessons Management Framework*[44] ('the EM-LEARN Framework) informs continuous improvement before, during and after emergencies. The Framework aligns with the A*ustralian Institute for Disaster Resilience: Lessons Management Handbook*[45] and is consistent with the *IGEM's Assurance Framework for Emergency Management*.[46]

The purpose of the lessons management framework is to promote learning mechanisms that exist throughout the emergency management system before (Before Action Reports), during (RTM&E, Operational Learnings Reports) and after (debriefs and multi-agency reviews) emergency events.

In capturing of observations, EM-Share is Victoria's online lessons management repository that supports the sector's lessons management lifecycle. It enables all emergency services personnel to submit observations arising from operational and non-operational activities, including monitoring, debriefs and reviews; to analyse emerging insights; and to track how observations contribute to broader sector improvement.

[44] https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/reviews-and-lessons-management/lessons-management-framework-em-learn

[45] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/lessons-management-handbook/

[46] https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/our-work/assurance-framework-for-emergency-management

The 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season (HRWS)

Key points

The bushfires of 2026 are among the most extreme Victoria has experienced and, in several instances, resulted in new records.

Following nearly two years of prolonged dry conditions, accompanied by above-average temperatures, agencies and departments worked in close collaboration with communities to prepare for what was expected to be a severe fire season.

The first major fires began in October 2025, but the most dangerous conditions occurred between 7 and 9 January 2026, with notably high-end extreme to catastrophic fire danger which was realised on 9 January 2026. The elevated fire risk continued through February and into early March 2026 with additional major fires occurring during this period.

While some fires with the potential to threaten lives and property were quickly contained through strategic decisions and rapid response, others were not. Several of the fires that started on 7 and 9 January 2026 became campaign fires, resulting in devastating losses for communities, destroying homes, sheds, infrastructure, livestock and crops across all corners of the state. Tragically, one life was lost. While the impacts to homes, community infrastructure, agriculture and the environment have been significant, the potential for further loss of life was real. In many cases, the key observable difference from other historical major fires was the community heeding warnings and making early decisions to leave.

During and immediately after the fires, there was a strong focus on relief and recovery, ensuring affected communities could access financial assistance, relief centres and support services quickly.

2.1 Increasing fire risk and the impacts of climate change

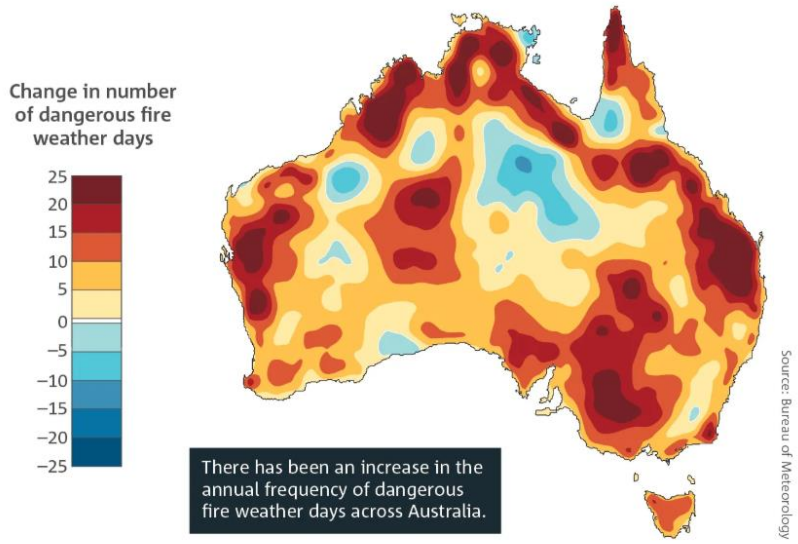
Victoria has experienced an increase in extreme fire weather, and in the length of the fire season, across Victorian and large parts of Australia since the 1950s. This has led to larger and more frequent fires, especially in southern Australia.

Victoria's Climate Science Report 2024 outlines the changes to Victoria's climate which have already occurred, predominantly caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere due to human activities such as fossil fuel combustion and land-use change. These changes include increases to annual temperatures, more frequent heatwaves, reduced rainfall, as well as more frequent bushfires and increased burned areas and severity of bushfires.

In particular, the Report identifies that fires in Victoria have occurred more frequently in recent decades, with 3 of the 4 '1 million hectare' fire seasons since 1930 occurring since 2000.

The number of days with dangerous weather conditions for bushfires has also increased. The map below shows the change in the number of days per year (July to June) that the Forest Fire Danger Indices have exceeded its 90th percentile of conditions in Australia between July 1950 to June 1987 and July 1987 to June 2024. Red colours represent an increase in dangerous fire weather days and blue colours represent a decrease.

Figure 7: Change in the number of dangerous fire weather days per year



The Report also outlines the projected changes Victoria is expected to experience (under low and high emissions scenarios, including further increases to annual temperatures, heatwaves and reduced rainfall. Critically, the Report identifies that 'fire weather severity, area burnt and fire intensity are projected to continue increasing in many regions of south-east Australia, with consequences for Victoria's forests, vegetation types, fuel moisture and overall fire risk'.

Research funded by the Safer Together program has also considered the effects of climate change on future fire seasons, forecasting that:

- Across Victoria, fire seasons are expected to increase in the future. Under high carbon emission climate projections, the duration of a fire season is expected to increase on average by 33 days by the end of the century, compared to a baseline between 2000-2020. This varied widely across different regions. In Gippsland, fire seasons are expected to become longer with a similar number of days above FFDI 25. In contrast, in north-western Victoria, fire seasons are expected to become more intense within a similar seasonal envelope.
- The number of days per year when all nine fire weather districts are in "Very High" (FFDI > 25) fire danger is expected to double by 2100, from ~2 days over the baseline period (2000-2020) compared to 4-days by the end of the century. Synchronous fire weather stretches limited resources and has the potential to reduce suppression effectiveness.

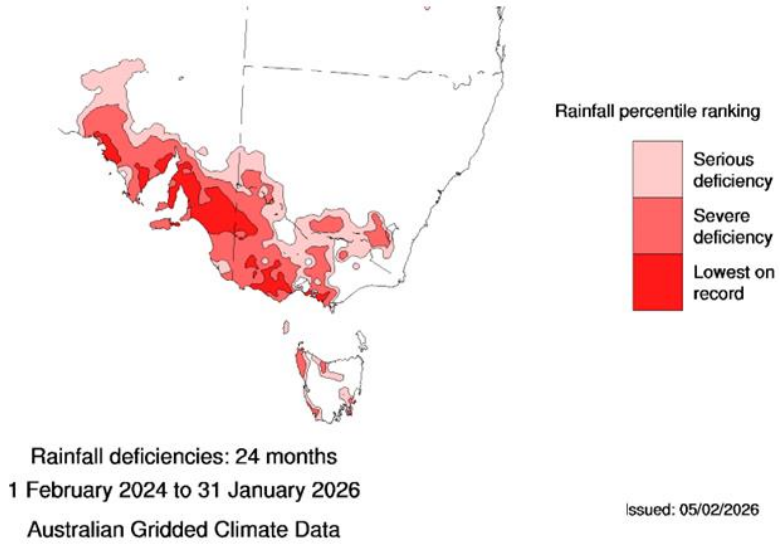
More information on long-term changes in fire patterns/conditions is provided in **Appendix E**.

2.2 Seasonal conditions in the lead up to and during the 2025/26 higher risk weather season

From a seasonal perspective, Victoria faced a heightened risk of bushfires heading into the 2025-26 HRWS due to significant and persistent warm and dry conditions for over 24 months, which made vegetation prone to igniting and carrying fire. Rainfall deficits in some parts of the state were the lowest on record (see below diagram), with severe rainfall deficiencies across the southwest, central, north, northeast and western parts of the state.

In December 2025 and January 2026 rainfall was 24% and 73% below the 1961-1990 average, respectively. While isolated areas in the Otways and far eastern Gippsland recorded above-average rainfall associated with mid-month storm activity, including record January daily rainfall at Lorne (Mount Cowley) and Benwerrin on 16 January 2026, and the highest January total in at least 20 years at Gabo Island Lighthouse, these events were localised and did not offset broader dryness across inland districts. This resulted in a reduction in root zone soil moisture from November 2025 to January 2026, and an increase in fuel availability.

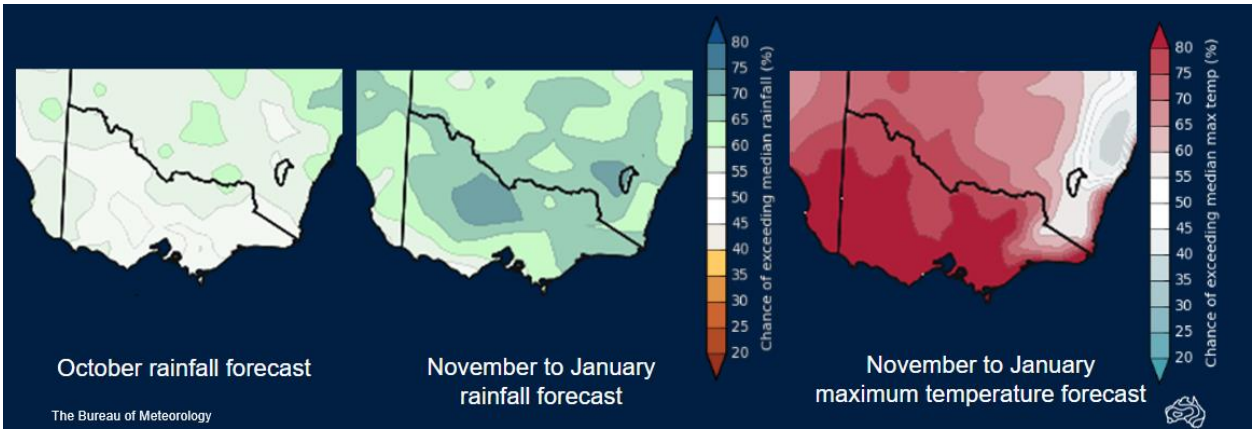
Figure 8: Rainfall deficits ahead of the 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season



Temperatures preceding the season were also heightened. Mean maximum temperatures in 2025 were very much above average for Victoria, and the area-averaged mean temperature was 15.0°C, 0.94°C above average, making it the eighth warmest on record[47].

Figure 9: Rainfall and maximum temperature forecast for the 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season

The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook, specifically forecast an increased fire risk for south-west, western, central and north-central Victoria, as well as south-west Gippsland during January and



[47] Bureau of Meteorology (2025), Climate Outlook for December 2025 to March 2026

February 2026. While spring rainfall had temporarily increased surface soil moisture and grass growth in some districts, underlying long-term dryness was expected to transition fuels rapidly to highly flammable conditions under sustained heat.

2.3 Preparedness activities for the 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season

Considering this heightened fire risk, significant preparedness activities were undertaken by agencies and departments across government, including the annual coordinated fuel management program of work, the CFA 'Get Fire Ready' program, the 'Are You Fire Ready' media campaign, pre-season briefings around the state including exercises focused on evacuation and shelter in place processes, critical infrastructure resilience auditing and updates to joint standard operating procedures (JSOPs). Additional funding was successfully allocated from government for the recruitment of additional seasonal firefighters within FFMVic, early commencement and bolstering of the aviation fleet along with strategic bulk water cartage and fuel distribution.

Prior to the season, attestations made by all relevant agencies and departments to the EMC confirm the extensive work that had been done to ensure they were ready for the season ahead. Roles and responsibilities regarding heat emergencies were clarified (noting heat emergencies often overlap with bushfire emergencies), and procedures for the escalation of fires into the state line of control were formalised.

In the lead up to the 2025-26 HRWS, a significant whole of sector preparedness program was delivered based on targeted, strategic statewide priorities and risks.

These priorities were set by the EMC, in collaboration with emergency services Chiefs and Commissioners. The priorities included:

- timely, tailored and relevant warnings and information
- evacuation and shelter in place arrangements
- flexibility in readiness arrangements
- effective use of resources to maximise resource pool
- community consequence and relief.

Given the heightened risk predicted and potential early start to the season, the EMC requested all preparedness activities be completed by 1 October 2025. State and regional partners worked collaboratively to deliver to this earlier timeframe.

Whole of sector preparedness activities delivered included:

- delivery of the VAPP – whole of sector preparedness initiatives focused on all staff with an incident management role
- regional and state face-to-face preparedness briefings – 20 briefings attended by over 2,000 people
- state, regional and district level exercises – with a strong focus on evacuation and shelter in place arrangements
- Regional and State Controller Development Forum – to uplift capability of all Regional Controllers and State Response Controllers (over 80 people in attendance)
- state aircraft preparedness briefing – viewed by over 200 staff with an aviation role

- Spring/Summer Attestations received – providing assurance that agencies were prepared to meet their roles and responsibilities under the SEMP
- Incident Control Centre (ICC) and Regional Control Centre (RCC) audits – to ensure all facilities were ready for operational response
- Community Fire Refuge (CFR) audits and pre-season briefings to ensure operational readiness
- state aircraft readiness – fleet commenced earlier in high-risk areas and progressively pre-positioned based on fire risk (1 October 2025 onwards)
- governmental and Ministerial briefings
- Critical Infrastructure Industry Preparedness Briefing
- cross border preparedness – all four cross border fire committees meet in person, re-established relationships, reviewed arrangements and communications
- pre-season Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC) focused on communications coordination during an event
- community preparedness briefings for the not-for-profit and multicultural sectors
- statewide community preparedness education/communication campaigns – VicEmergency campaigns, agency led campaigns, along with significant grassroots community engagement activity at local level. See **Appendix B** for community engagement provided by CFA
- Level 3 IMT personnel accreditation panels
- recruitment of additional staff to ensure more resources for higher-risk season
- review and update of all relevant doctrine to ensure fit for purpose for upcoming season
- Part 7A of the EM Act 2013 requires owners/operators of Vital Critical Infrastructure to conduct regular, documented, and audited emergency risk management exercises. These exercises test preparedness for disruptions in energy, water, or transport, aiming to ensure essential service continuity.

Further advice on specific preparedness activities undertaken by individual Departments and Agencies as well as Critical Infrastructure sectors is set out in **Appendix F**.

2.3.1 Additional funding provided

Due to the heightened bushfire risk, the Victorian Government provided an additional $80 million investment in fire season preparedness in September 2025. Funding allowed a total of 15 regional aircraft to start their service period early in key locations including Ballarat, Stawell and Ovens Valley. Funding has also supported the CFA to increase water storage across the state and improved community refuges and fire danger signs across Victoria.

2.3.2 Fuel management activities ahead of the 2025/26 higher risk weather season

Planned burning is part of a long-term strategy to reduce bushfire risk. It is not just about a single burn, or single year, but an ongoing process aimed at creating a strategic network of fuel-reduced areas on public land. This network helps to slow the spread of fire and helps firefighters to reduce threats to communities, critical infrastructure and the environment.

FFMVic delivered fuel management treatments across 109,938 hectares of public land in Victoria in 2024-25. This included 270 planned burns covering 92,473 hectares and 951 non-burn fuel treatments covering 17,465 hectares. The delivery of fuel management treatments is highly dependent on favourable weather conditions.

This risk-based model and risk target were adopted in 2016 on the recommendation of IGEM's Review of Performance Targets for Bushfire Fuel Management on Public Land. This was a move away from the previous hectare-based target, which was assessed as not achievable, affordable, or sustainable. It was noted that area-based hectare targets alone will not necessarily reduce the bushfire risk to life and property in Victoria and may have adverse environmental outcomes.

Fuel management on roads

In preparation for the 2025-26 fire season DTP undertook a full width cut (at a minimum width of 3 metres) on all arterial roads between October and December 2025. DTP manages approximately 23,000 km of arterial road network, meaning around 50,000 km of roadside grass was cut during this period across roadsides and medians. A full width cut meets, and in some cases exceeds, the CFA's recommended standard within the Roadside Fire Management Guidelines of 3 metres 'behind the line.'

The timing of grass cutting differs each year, based on rainfall, temperature, spring growth and the advice of emergency services. To maximise risk reduction, the cut needs to balance the timing between spring growth and grass curing (noting cured and dried grass becomes a fire risk). To support the timing of cuts, grass curing rates are provided on a weekly basis by the CFA. High-fire risk roadsides and key evacuation routes, which are strategically important fuel breaks, are prioritised for works under the cutting program. The identification of these sites is determined in consultation with FRV, CFA and DEECA.

Performance against bushfire risk management targets

DEECA's fuel management program is guided by a risk reduction target to keep fuel-driven bushfire risk at or below 70% of its maximum.

As at 30 June 2025, fuel driven bushfire risk was below target at 66%. In the absence of fuel management, bushfire risk would have grown to 69%.

Fuel-driven bushfire risk is assessed by modelling predicted bushfire behaviour across Victoria under worst-case fire weather conditions and estimating their potential impact to homes. The percentage metric represents how much risk remains after fuel management and past bushfires have reduced fuel levels.

In 2024-25, the contribution of planned burning by land tenures was:

- DEECA and Parks Victoria land – 95% of total area burnt
- Private land burns supported by fire agencies – 4% of total area burnt
- Other public land – 1% of total area burnt.

Not included in the risk reduction metric, but providing additional benefits over and above the risk reduction provided by planned burning, are the following activities:

- Private land burns carried out without the involvement of fire agencies.
- Vegetation management and preparation by house- and landholders.
- Hazardous tree management and preparation of fuel breaks.
- Works to ensure safe access and egress for firefighters and communities threatened by bushfire.

Longer term risk reduction benefits of planned burns

Planned burning delivers far broader bushfire management benefits than simply stopping bushfires. Treated areas support faster, safer and more effective backburning operations because crews can anchor burns off known, low fuel edges where hazardous trees have already been removed and access roads prepared. Lower fuel levels created by planned burning moderate fire behaviour by reducing flame height, intensity and convection, which in turn decreases spotting distances and slows the fire's rate of spread. This moderation buys valuable time for suppression strategies to work, for aircraft to operate safely and effectively, and for communities to evacuate or prepare which strengthens the responsiveness of emergency operations during major bushfire events.

These benefits were clearly demonstrated during the 2026 summer bushfires. This has been evident in the fires in Walwa, Longwood, Carlisle River, Kennedys Creek, Ravenswood, Wonnangatta and Mallacoota.

In the Otway District, particularly the Carlisle River and Kennedys Creek fires, previous planned burns played a significant role in the suppression effort. At Kennedys Creek, the fire ran into a planned-burn area to the north, where reduced fuels moderated fire behaviour to the point that crews were able to contain the fire. Further north at the Carlisle River fire, earlier planned burns also moderated fire activity, and assisted suppression efforts by supporting rapid backburning operations to be conducted given previous preparation works. In contrast, further south where an additional control line had to be constructed without relying on a pre-existing planned-burn block, it was estimated that this added two extra days of preparation before backburning could occur. Delivering the burning operation was also more difficult due to recently treated trees and debris in the vicinity of the control line, increasing complexity and slowing progress.

During the Walwa-River Road fire, planned burns undertaken during 2021 and 2025, and strategic fuel breaks were critical in supporting containment efforts. Approximately 40 kilometres of successful backburning operations were undertaken using the existing fuel break along the Gibb Range Road adjoining the Wabba Wilderness area, which had been maintained prior to the fire season to ensure safer access and operational efficiency.

Within the fire footprint, areas where planned burns were conducted in 2025 show that the fire severity has been categorised as unburnt or low canopy scorch in the initial fire severity mapping.

The backburning operation also tied into a planned burn that had been completed in the previous year, creating a broader area of reduced fuel. The combination of planned burning, strategic fuel breaks and tactical backburning contributed to lower fire intensity and assisted in limiting the fire's spread.

These examples illustrate that there is no single solution; strategic fuel breaks, planned burning and timely backburning work together to provide safer, more efficient containment opportunities when conditions allow that helped limit the impact of several recent fires on communities and the environment.

2.4 Overview of the 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season

Consistent with forecasted seasonal conditions, including the increased risk of fire, Victoria subsequently experienced significant bushfires, as well as storms, flash flooding and heat wave conditions, over the 2025-26 summer.

2.4.1 Fire danger ratings during the 2025-26 higher risk weather seasons

Victoria experienced heightened fire danger ratings throughout January and February 2026. Total Fire Bans (TFBs) were declared across multiple districts from 5 January 2026, expanding to statewide declarations on 9, 10 and 11 January 2026. A further statewide TFB was declared on 24 January 2026, and again on 27 January 2026 during the peak of the late-month heatwave.

Table 3: Total Fire Ban declarations in Victoria from 1 January to 17 February 2026

Date	Declared District(s)
5 January 2026	Northern Country
7 January 2026	Wimmera, South West and Central
8 January 2026	Mallee, Northern Country, North Central and North East
9 January 2026	Statewide
10 January 2026	Statewide
11 January 2026	Statewide
12 January 2026	North Central and North East
24 January 2026	Statewide
25 January 2026	Northern Country, North Central, North East and East Gippsland
27 January 2026	Statewide
28 January 2026	Wimmera and North East
1 February 2026	North East
4 February 2026	Wimmera, North Central and Central
5 February 2026	North East
6 February 2026	North East
7 February 2026	North East
10 February 2026	North East
11 February 2026	Mallee, Wimmera, Northern Country, North Central, Central, North East, West and South Gippsland
17 February 2026	Wimmera, South West, North Central, Central, West & South Gippsland

On Friday 9 January 2026, record fire danger ratings were forecast and then recorded for Victoria. Four fire weather districts were forecast to reach the highest level of Fire Danger Rating (FDR), being Catastrophic – a forecast that eventuated. The remaining five weather districts were forecast at the high end of Extreme FDR, with the Central District forecast at 99 on the Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) scale, being one point below Catastrophic (100+ FBI). The Horsham Automatic Weather Station, which was near the Grass Flat fire, recorded a Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) of 319, which was the highest readings on the day and the third highest on recorded history in Victoria. Only the Lara Fire in 1969 which had a GFDI of 324 and Bemm River in 1988 at GFDI of 368 exceeded this GFDI.

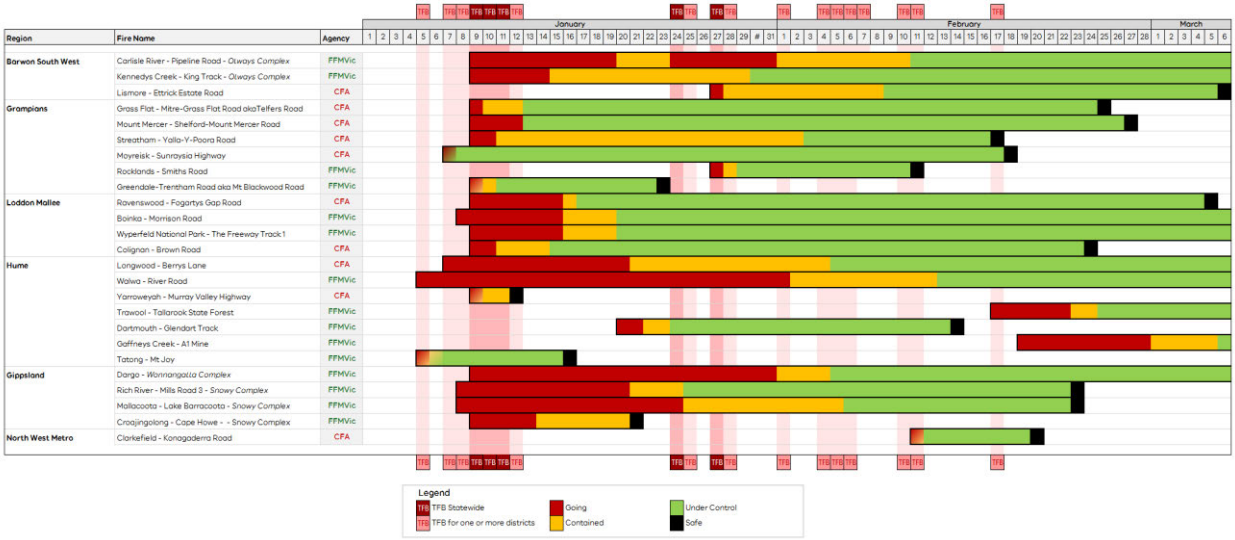
A Catastrophic fire danger rating signifies that conditions will be the most extreme possible, and that fires will be unpredictable, uncontrollable and dangerously intense. This was communicated to the public through multiple media channels and emergency broadcasters in the lead up to 9 January 2026. The 9 January 2026 Catastrophic fire danger declarations across four districts represented the most geographically widespread event of its kind in Victoria's recorded history. Since the introduction of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System in September 2022, a Catastrophic rating had only previously been declared in a single district in February 2024. Under the predecessor Code Red system, declarations were similarly limited in scale – three districts in 2010 and two in 2019.

2.4.2 Major fires during the 2025 – 26 higher-risk weather seasons

Victoria experienced significant bushfires during the 2025 – 26 higher risk weather season, with the first fires of note commencing in October 2025, a month ahead of the standard fire season for Victoria.

The below diagram provides an overview of the 25 fires that were in the state line of control. Fire activity is shown by status and is overlaid with the days on which Total Fire Bans were declared. See **Appendix G** for further details on these fires.

Figure 10: Number of concurrent significant fires recorded across January and February 2026



As expected, 9 January 2026 was a very challenging day for firefighters and communities. Over 200 bush and grass fires started on that day. Grassland fire behaviour was equivalent to, and in some cases exceed that seen during the 2009 Black Saturday fires. In forested areas across central Gippsland, fire behaviour was comparable to that of 2009 and the 2019-20 Black Summer

fires. The geographic spread of fire activity that day has not been seen in a single day in Victoria since Ash Wednesday in 1983.

The first major ignition of the season was the Walwa River Road fire in the Hume region on 5 January 2026. This was followed by the Longwood fire on 7 January 2026 and the Boinka - Morrison Road, Rich River - Mills Road 3 and Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota on the 8 January 2026.

The most critical fire weather period occurred on 9 January 2026, when extreme to catastrophic fire danger was forecast. Strong north-westerly winds, very high temperatures, low humidity and an unstable atmosphere combined to create highly volatile fire behaviour conditions.

The day saw rapid escalation of existing fires and multiple significant new ignitions including:

- Otway's Complex fires in Barwon South West:
    - Carlilse River – Pipeline Road
    - Kennedys Creek – King Track
- Grampians:
    - Mount Mercer – Shelford-Mount Mercer Road
    - Streatham - Yalla-Y-Poora Road
    - Greendale-Trentham Road
    - Grass Flat - Mitre-Grass Flat Road
- Loddon Mallee
    - Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap Road
    - Colignan - Brown Road
    - Wyperfeld National Park - The Freeway Track 1
- Hume
    - Yarroweyah - Murray Valley Highway
- Gippsland
    - Dargo-Wonnangatta Complex
    - Croajingolong – Cape Howe (Snowy Complex)

Two of the most significant fires, Longwood and Walwa, which commenced on 5 and 7 January 2026, continued to spread at scale on 9 January under the catastrophic fire conditions.

The total burnt area of the 2025 – 2026 higher risk weather season fires was approximately 440,000 hectares – surpassing the 2009 Black Saturday fires of 430,000 hectares. By contrast, the 2019-20 fires burnt just over 1.5 million hectares, with most of the fire scar being on public land. The significance of the 2026 fires was the impact on private land as the area impacted was almost evenly spread between private and public land tenures.

These fires prompted community warnings and evacuations across multiple communities, road closures on major transport corridors including the Murray Valley Highway, Hume Freeway and other regional arterials, and activation of Emergency Relief Centres (ERCs) across several regions. Public Telecommunications infrastructure and operational communications infrastructure was threatened or disrupted, power outages were reported, and water supply systems in affected townships operated under increased demand and contingency arrangements. Agricultural

impacts included loss of livestock, fencing, pasture, broadacre crops, horticultural crops, plantation timber, fodder, farm machinery and agricultural infrastructure.

Of the 25 fires in State Line of Control, 12 have been determined as resulting from lightning strikes, 2 from mechanical ignitions, 2 reignitions, 1 electrical fault and 8 unknown/undetermined or under investigation. At the time of this submission, none of the investigated fires have been deemed to have started by fallen powerlines. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) found that some of the most devastating fires on Black Saturday were ignited by faulty powerlines. Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) technology has since been rolled out across the state and are highly effective at preventing fire ignition.

2.4.3 Other significant January and February 2026 fires

Other significant January fires included:

- Dartmouth – Glendart Track (9 ha) on 20 January 2026;
- Lismore – Ettrick Estate Road (2322 ha) on 27 January 2026; and
- Rocklands – Smith Road (69 ha) on 27 January 2026.

Many of the fires were caused by lightning and expanded rapidly under extreme fire weather conditions.

The season later saw significant ignitions during February, including:

- Clarkefield grass fire (485 ha) on 11 February 2026;
- Trawool bushfire in the Tallarook State Forest (390 ha) on 17 February 2026; and
- Gaffneys Creek– A1 Mine (1232ha) on 19 February 2026

Each of these fires developed under renewed periods of elevated fire danger.

2.4.4 Mid-January storms

Consistent with forecasted seasonal conditions, including the increased risk of fire, Victoria subsequently experienced convergence of significant bushfires, as well as storms, flash flooding and heat wave conditions throughout the 2025–26 higher-risk weather season.

In mid-January 2026, intense storms from 15–17 January unleashed severe thunderstorms and flash flooding across south-western Victoria, inundating roads, campsites and coastal communities along the Surf Coast including Lorne, Cumberland River, Wye River and Separation Creek. Although these rains temporarily eased fire behaviour in parts of Gippsland and coastal districts, they did little to relieve the deep-seated inland dryness, and lightning from the storm bands triggered new ignitions within or near existing fire perimeters.

Agencies and communities were therefore required to respond simultaneously to fast-moving bushfires, disruptive flooding, damaging storms and sustained heatwave conditions, an operationally complex and demanding environment that emphasised the significant achievement of managing concurrent emergencies at scale.

2.4.5 Heatwave conditions

A renewed severe to extreme heatwave developed from 23 January 2026, with northern inland districts experiencing six to eight consecutive days above 40°C. The duration of this heatwave had not been experienced since January 2014, with some places not having previously recorded heatwaves of more than five days. The peak on 27-28 January 2026 coincided with further statewide Total Fire Bans and increased fire danger across northern and central Victoria. The

towns of Walpeup and Hopetoun recorded a new statewide maximum temperature of 48.9°C, breaking the previous record of 48.8°C (Hopetoun) set in 2009.

Fires such as Walwa - River Road (approaching 122,000–150,000 hectares), the Otways Complex and Dargo-Wonnangatta remained active into late January and early February 2026, requiring sustained aerial and ground suppression, asset protection, patrol and blackout operations.

2.4.6 February conditions

Fire danger remained dynamic through February 2026, with alternating cool southerly flows and warming trends, periods of gusty winds, and multiple days of thunderstorm activity, including severe thunderstorm potential and localised heavy rainfall of up to 30-50 mm in some districts. Elevated fire danger spiked again on 11 February 2026 ahead of a cooler south-westerly change and increased once more ahead of 17 February 2026 as warm to hot conditions and freshening north-westerly winds preceded a cold front. Despite rainfall of 4-15 mm across parts of western and central Victoria with the mid-month front, northern and eastern districts received minimal totals (0-2 mm), sustaining elevated fuel dryness into the third week of February. By 19 February 2026, conditions were described as settled through to Saturday before a front and trough were forecast to bring rain and thunderstorms on Sunday, with elevated fire danger in the east ahead of precipitation.

2.4.7 Response activities

There was a coordinated, on ground response to the fires over the 2025-26 higher risk weather season from Victoria's three fire agencies – the CFA, FFMVic and FRV – under Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

Significant broader, whole of sector supports were provided from other relevant agencies and Departments including Victoria Police, VICSES and DTP for response activities like road closures and evacuations in threatened communities and public land estates.

Victoria's aviation fleet plays a significant role in supporting fire ground response. Firefighting operations comprising of aviation including fire bombers, aerial intelligence gathering and aerial supervision. This capability is mostly utilised to slow the spread of a fire, which then allows ground crews to do their critical work.

Ground crews consist of CFA volunteer firefighters, FFMVic firefighters, FRV firefighters, CFA's Forest Industry Brigades, heavy plant and equipment such as bulldozers, graders, excavators, harvesters and tractors operated by FFMVic and contractors.

This year these efforts were supported by CFA's bulk water carrier program and local farmers that have their own firefighting equipment to help protect their own and their neighbours' properties.

Multi-agency IMTs were established with significant resources including ground crews, aircraft and operational plant working to build containment lines and community protection of towns and property.

As the scale of the fires intensified, interstate and international personnel were requested and provided to support the response to the fires.

Impact assessments were undertaken and Emergency Relief Centres were established to support impacted community members along with relevant early relief supports.

Recovery operations commenced early, with numerous State and Federal government announcements to provide financial support to affected community members including primary producers and farmers.

See **Appendix H** for on the ground response from respective agencies.

Aviation assistance

Victoria's aviation fleet plays a significant role in support on fire ground response through fire intelligence gathering, fire-bombing operations and emergency service personnel movement. For the 2025-26 HRWS aircraft commenced from early October 2025, a month ahead of most seasons. By January 2026 the core fleet of 54 aircraft were strategically located across the state to respond daily to fire outbreaks (including two Large Air Tankers, two High Volume Air Cranes and the Night Fire Aviation Program). Pre-Determined Dispatch (PDD) arrangements mean aviation is deployed at the same time as ground fire fighters and appliances.

Knowing the forecast conditions in early January and leading up to and including 9 January 2026, additional Call When Needed (CWN) aircraft were added to the core fleet. On 9 January 2026, 75 aircraft were strategically located across the state based on risk. Aerial intelligence also supported situational awareness and informed public information and warnings.

The Pre-Determined Dispatch program supports the rapid deployment of aircraft to fires reported at or above Fire Danger Index 12. At the peak, there are 27 Firebombing aircraft across the State attached to this program. This ensures aggressive first attack principles are applied to new fires reported.

Since commencement on 1 October 2025, through to 18 February 2026, aircraft have conducted almost 7,500 flights, with over 7,300 flying hours. During these flights, the firebombing aircraft have made over 20,600 drops delivering over 37,850,000 litres of product (water/retardant/foam) to support ground based firefighting operations.

The aerial fleet provided support to ground crews and decision makers including firebombing, air observation, airborne information gathering, air attack, rappel, reconnaissance flights and passenger transport.

Weather can have a significant impact on the performance and effectiveness of fire aircraft, especially with a forecast of high winds and wind gusts as was evident on 9 January 2026. Agency personnel were reminded about the potential limitations on fire aircraft in high wind conditions including the ability to take off and land and the effectiveness of drops due to dispersal in high winds. Safety is the primary overriding consideration in any aviation allocation considerations.

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During 9 January 2026, there were several periods from late morning through to the afternoon where high winds extended across multiple firegrounds, that coincided with significant fire behaviour, resulting in some of the 75 aircraft being unable to take off or operate safely and/or incident controllers deeming their use as not having the required effective suppression effect. As conditions eased, aviation activity resumed. Night operations on the Longwood fire continued until 2245hrs, where it was ceased due to weather conditions (cloud cover). From the early morning on 10 January 2026, 72 aircraft were available across the state to support fire suppression efforts.

International and interstate assistance

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Authorities Council (AFAC) National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) coordinates and facilitates international and interstate deployments through its established partnerships, agreements and national arrangements as authorised by the

Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee (CCOSC). The 'Arrangements for Interstate Assistance' (AIA) 2019 is the formal agreement to facilitate the sharing of personnel and equipment between Australian states and New Zealand emergency management agencies during large scale events.

Australian and Canadian authorities are signatories to the 'Exchange of Wildland Fire Management Resources' enacted through the Operating Plan with the purpose of setting the basis for provision of mutual assistance for Wildland Fire Management and implementing actions in other areas of cooperation for Wildland Fire Management between Canada and Australia.

Victoria sought assistance through the AFAC NRSC to enact both agreements to supply additional bushfire liaison staff, IMTs, on-ground firefighters, aviation personnel and equipment on 7 January 2026.

As of 19 February 2026, Victoria has been supported by 1458 staff and volunteers from New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, New Zealand and Canada.

Victoria has also supported other Australian and Canadian jurisdictions this and in previous years through supplying personnel to assist with emergency response on request.

Table 4: Overview of international and interstate assistance

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	WA	NZ	CANADA	TOTAL
Crew Members	128	679	44		120	55	34	42	40	1142
Incident Management Team Members	4	59	11	56	45	21	32		30	258
Liaison Officer (and admin)	3	6	2	3	6	4	2	2	4	32
NRSC Deployment Managers (and Admin)		4		2	7					13
Aviation Support		4		2						6
Specialist / Other		3			4					7
	135	**755**	**57**	**63**	**182**	**80**	**68**	**44**	**74**	**1458**

Table 5: Number of personnel deployed in and out of Victoria over the past five years (from NRSC)

Year	VIC response (outgoing)	VIC request (incoming)	Year	VIC response (outgoing)	VIC request (incoming)
	Domestic			International	
2020/2021	155 (NSW, WA)	No Data	2020	Nil	408 (Canada, US)
2021/2022	782 (NSW, QLD, SA)	Nil	2021	Nil	Nil
2022/2023	265 (NSW, SA, WA)	129	2022	Nil	Nil
2023/2024	892 (NSW, NT, QLD)	119	2023	163 (Canada)	Nil
2024/2025	108 (NSW, TAS, QLD)	478	2024	71 (Canada, US)	Nil
2025/2026	Up to Feb - 82 (SA, WA)	1416	2025	24 (Canada)	Nil
2026/2027	Future Data		2026	Future Data	74 (Canada)

The Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN) was also activated on Tuesday 8 January 2026 in response to nationally significant natural hazards. The Australian Government Crisis Coordination Team (CCT) was activated by NEMA in anticipation of formal requests for Australian Government non-financial assistance. NEMA deployed Liaison Officers into Victoria's State Control Centre from 9 January to 6 February 2026 to provide situational awareness, information, and intelligence to NEMA's National Situation Room and CCT.

Four requests for assistance were received from the Victorian Government for this event including:

- Two requests for assistance for temporary accommodation along with meals for emergency service personnel at Latchford Barracks and the Puckapunyal Military Area, which were accepted by Defence and is now completed.
- One request for assistance for ration packs to support emergency services personnel, which was accepted by Defence and is now completed.
- One request for assistance for coordination capability of spontaneous volunteers and offers of assistance, which was accepted by Disaster Relief Australia and is still active.

Under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) a range of services have been made available to 26 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and one Alpine Resort. These services include emergency relief assistance, personal and financial counselling, concessional loans for primary producers, clean-up activities, counter disaster operations, and restoration of essential public assets. The Commonwealth Government has also activated the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP) in specific localities across 16 LGAs and has activated the Disaster Recovery Allowance (DRA) in 23 LGAs and one Alpine Resort.

Health Assistance

From a health perspective, consideration was given to the potential need for interjurisdictional support into or out of Victoria during the fire season, including the implications for health system capacity, workforce wellbeing, public health risks and continuity of service delivery. These considerations included the management of workforce fatigue and occupational health and safety, maintenance of clinical governance and credentialing arrangements for any inbound personnel, public health surveillance for firer elated impacts (including smoke and heat), and the ability to share timely health intelligence across jurisdictions.

Previous fire seasons have demonstrated that prolonged and concurrent emergencies can place significant strain on health system capacity, reinforcing the importance of careful governance of deployment decisions and alignment with Commonwealth support and relief arrangements where required.

For this emergency, interjurisdictional health support into or out of Victoria was not required. Health impacts were managed within existing Victorian health system capacity and established state and regional coordination arrangements, and no interstate, international or Commonwealth health deployments were requested or deployed.

2.4.8 State control arrangements for the 2025-26 summer fires

Throughout the 2025-26 summer fire season, 14 endorsed senior agency representatives, collectively from CFA, FRV, FFMVic and VICSES were rostered to perform the role of State Response Controller. These staff are endorsed senior operational leaders of the responder agencies (i.e., CFA, FRV, FFMVic or VICSES), who fulfil the role agency agnostic, assuming the operational accountabilities of the relevant control agency chief whilst performing the role.

The SEMT met on Wednesday 7 January 2026 to support the EMC. The purpose of the meeting was to advise of the forecast Catastrophic conditions forecast for three weather Districts (at this time only three met triggers), consistent situational awareness and to identify and manage strategic risks and consequences.

The SCT met on Monday 5 January 2026, and then daily from Wednesday 7 January 2026. SCT implements the strategic context of operational readiness for, response to, and where appropriate the integration of response, relief and transition to recovery for a major emergency. IMT readiness was enacted on that day, with regional control in place from 8am.

Incident control centres were set up in in areas of potential impact, in accordance with JSOP 2.03 Incident Management Team Readiness Arrangements[48]. The CFA, FFMVic, FRV and VICSES had IMT personnel at state, regional and local operational tiers.

The SCC was activated to Tier 3 – the highest level – between 9 January to 5 February 2026. This meant that appropriate agencies were in place to prepare for, respond to, and provide early recovery from a major emergency.

2.4.9 State of disaster declaration

On 9 January 2026, the Minister for Emergency Services, Vicki Ward MP, and the EMC, advised the Premier of Victoria that the fire emergency constituted a widespread danger to life and property in Victoria and recommended that the Premier declare a State of Disaster pursuant to section 23 of the EM Act 1986.

In view of the dry conditions across the state of Victoria at that time, the Minister for Emergency Services and the EMC advised that the fires were likely to be long running campaign fires

[48] Incident Management Team Readiness Arrangements

extending well into February 2026 and that a State of Disaster declaration might be necessary to better enable the Government's response to the fires and to support communities severely impacted by them. The advice also noted that the EMC consulted with the Chief Commissioner of Police, Mike Bush CNZM.

On this advice, the Premier of Victoria declared a State of Disaster pursuant to section 23 of the EM Act 1986 from Saturday 10 January 2026 until 8 February 2026. The declaration covered the local government areas of: Alpine Shire; Ararat Rural City; Colac Otway Shire; Corangamite Shire; East Gippsland Shire; Golden Plains Shire; Greater Bendigo City; Horsham Rural City; Lake Mountain Alpine Resort (unincorporated); Mansfield Shire; Mildura Rural City; Mitchell Shire; Moira Shire; Mount Alexander Shire; Murrindindi Shire; Pyrenees Shire; Strathbogie Shire; Towong Shire; and Wellington Shire.

The Premier subsequently revoked the declaration on 5 February 2026.

While the emergency powers under section 24 of EM Act 1986 were available to be used, no emergency powers were exercised by the Minister. Given the significant risk and potential for rapid escalation of the fire situation, it was important that emergency powers were available to be used if required, to protect life and property. Declaring the state of disaster also signalled the seriousness of the bushfire threat and the likelihood of rapid changes in fire behaviour, prompting heightened community awareness and responsiveness. Although no emergency powers were exercised, highlighting their availability reinforced to the community the importance of following the advice of emergency service agencies. This contributed to strong community responsiveness, which likely resulted in fewer lives being lost.

2.4.10 Public information and warnings

All channels in Victoria's integrated warning system were employed to inform communities at risk and advise them of appropriate action to protect lives and minimise impacts.

In-language messaging and communication assets on the catastrophic and extreme fire danger ratings were developed and shared on 8 January 2026 to multicultural community organisations. The assets included a stakeholder pack, social media content and fact sheets for 5 primary languages, with key messages and advice available for community representatives to translate to their community members.

At the peak of the January 2026 Victorian bushfires, more people than ever used the VicEmergency app with 1.6 billion hits in the 24-hour period on 9 January 2026. Furthermore, the public were observed heeding the public information and warnings including early evacuations. The focus on proactive evacuation was a key difference in approach from 2009. In total, 1,798 bushfire and grassfire warnings were issued through VicEmergency channels between 1 December 2025 and 1 February 2026. Friday 9 January 2026 was the single biggest day on record for community warnings on VicEmergency, with 291 warnings issued. This surpassed the record of 285 warnings set on Friday 14 October 2022 during the 2022 Victorian floods.

In total, 2,112 bushfire and grassfire warnings were issued through VicEmergency channels between 1 December 2025 and 6 March 2026.

In addition, 75 Emergency Alert campaigns were issued between 1 December 2025 and 6 March 2026, with an SMS and/or call to a landline providing critical information about the emergency and how to stay safe.

Friday 9 January 2026 was the single biggest day on record for community warnings on VicEmergency, with 291 warnings issued. This surpassed the record of 285 warnings set on Friday 14 October 2022 during the 2022 Victorian floods.

VicEmergency app downloads grew significantly by 1.06 million, from 5.45 million active users on 1 January to over 6.51 million by 6 March 2026. This shows the community actively sought information and trusted VicEmergency as the place to get up to date information.

In addition to VicEmergency channels, localised and state-wide direct engagement with media outlets (print/digital, radio, TV) was undertaken. Emergency broadcasters were also leveraged to further distribute warnings and key community messaging to local and state-wide audiences.

Community Liaison Officers (CLO) were also deployed to ensure effective two-way communication between affected communities and the IMT. CLOs responded to the needs of communities by undertaking door knocks, setting up community information points at local services/community points of connection and facilitated formal community meetings both in person and online.

There was a strong focus on producing proactive and contextual images and video at both incident and state tiers. Footage from the field and video updates with Incident Controllers and State Response Controllers focused on explaining the current situation, strategies of crews at different times, and advice on what communities needed to do. These were consistently high performing posts on social media.

A total of seven potential impact zone maps were distributed to the media and published to VicEmergency channels over 8 and 9 January 2026, due to the expected catastrophic and extreme fire conditions on 9 January 2026.

Maps of the potential impact area of the Longwood and Walwa fires were issued on 8 January 2026, ahead of the heightened fire danger the following day. On 9 January 2026, both of these maps were updated to reflect the most up to date predictions of potential impact areas.

Maps of the potential impact area of the Natimuk, Streatham and Harcourt fires were also issued on 9 January 2026 due to the risk of fire spread to surrounding areas.

From 1 December 2025 to 1 March 2026, the total VicEmergency social media audience grew by 115,068 followers to a total of 672,788. Across Facebook, Instagram and X, over 10,025 posts were shared, leading to 185,370,134 impressions and over 5.8 million engagements. VicEmergency social media channels also provided a direct line for communities to ask questions and receive a tailored response, with over 10,000 direct messages responded to throughout this period.

Posts with the highest engagement included a map of the Greater Otways evacuation area, which was shared to the VicEmergency Facebook page on 26 January 2026. This post received over 1.7 million views and 171,000 engagements. The potential impact area map for the Longwood bushfire, shared to the VicEmergency Facebook page on 9 January 2026, received over 1 million views and more than 132,000 engagements.

The VicEmergency regional Facebook pages were also used to provide local information to communities impacted by the fires. In particular, the Barwon South-West, Hume and Gippsland pages were used to provide regular updates on the fire situation, as well as relief and recovery information. Throughout this period, each regional page audience grew - 3,162 (Barwon South-West), 9,379 (Hume) and 4,646 (Gippsland). As the Hume region experienced the most fire activity, the regional Facebook page saw the biggest growth, with over 7.5 million impressions, over 384,000 engagements and an engagement rate of 5.1 per cent.

From 1 December 2025 to 6 March 2026, the VicEmergency website had a total of 39 million views and 256 million clicks. 9 January 2026 saw a significant spike in users to the website, with 6.7 million in total and a peak of 1.2 million users on the website at the same time. 10 and 11 January 2026 also experienced a significant number of views, with 4.1 million and 2.2 million views respectively.

There was a continued focus to monitor and mitigate disinformation in the lead up and during the season through promotion of official information through official channels.

The State Communications Cell was activated to assist in the coordination of communications through:

- managing Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC) meetings
- supporting the management of SCC media conferences
- issues-based communications management
- managing relief communications on the VicEmergency website
- coordination of DRFA funding announcements.

The EMJPIC met on 6 occasions to coordinate communications in preparedness and response to the fires. Meetings were chaired by the State Communications Manager. The first meeting was held on 7 January 2026 in preparedness for heat and fire conditions. Subsequent meetings were held to focus on issues-based communications coordination, including:

- Relief services
- Planning for heatwave and fire danger conditions over the Australia Day long weekend
- Managing donations for impacted communities
- Recovery funding announcements.

A Regional Joint Public Information Committee (RJPIC) was established for the Hume region to support communications coordination associated with the Longwood and Walwa fires. The meetings were chaired by the State Communications Manager in conjunction with the Hume Regional Public Information Officer. RJPICs are attended by communications representatives from Victorian State Government departments, local councils and ICC Public Information Officers.

The first Hume RJPIC meeting was held on 12 January 2026, and focused on relief communications and regional communications priorities. Subsequent meetings focused on issues-based communications, including:

- Relief services, including accommodation
- Roads access for community members
- Concerns around visitation over the Australia Day long weekend.

The State Communications Cell developed communications plans to address issues including:

- a combined heat and fire risk communications for the Australia Day long weekend
- the Carlisle River evacuation
- regional media for relief and recovery
- social media information for donations.

2.5 Impacts

The 2026 summer fires across Victoria had significant and widespread impacts on individuals and communities across the state, impacting 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and tragically resulted in the death of one person.

Many municipalities impacted by this event were also impacted by previous events, including the February 2024 Western Victorian bushfires, February 2024 Victorian storms, December 2023 – January 2024 Victorian storms and floods, October 2022 Victorian floods, June 2021 floods and storms and the 2019-20 Eastern Victorian bushfires.

The Insurance Council of Australia estimated the cost of damage from the 2009 fires at $1.07 billion. For the 2026 fires, to date, there have been 4,300 insurance claims totalling $422.9m in value, with claims continuing to be submitted. This comes after the Insurance Council of Australia escalated its event declaration from a ‘significant’ event to an ‘Insurance Catastrophe’ on Friday 16 January 2026.

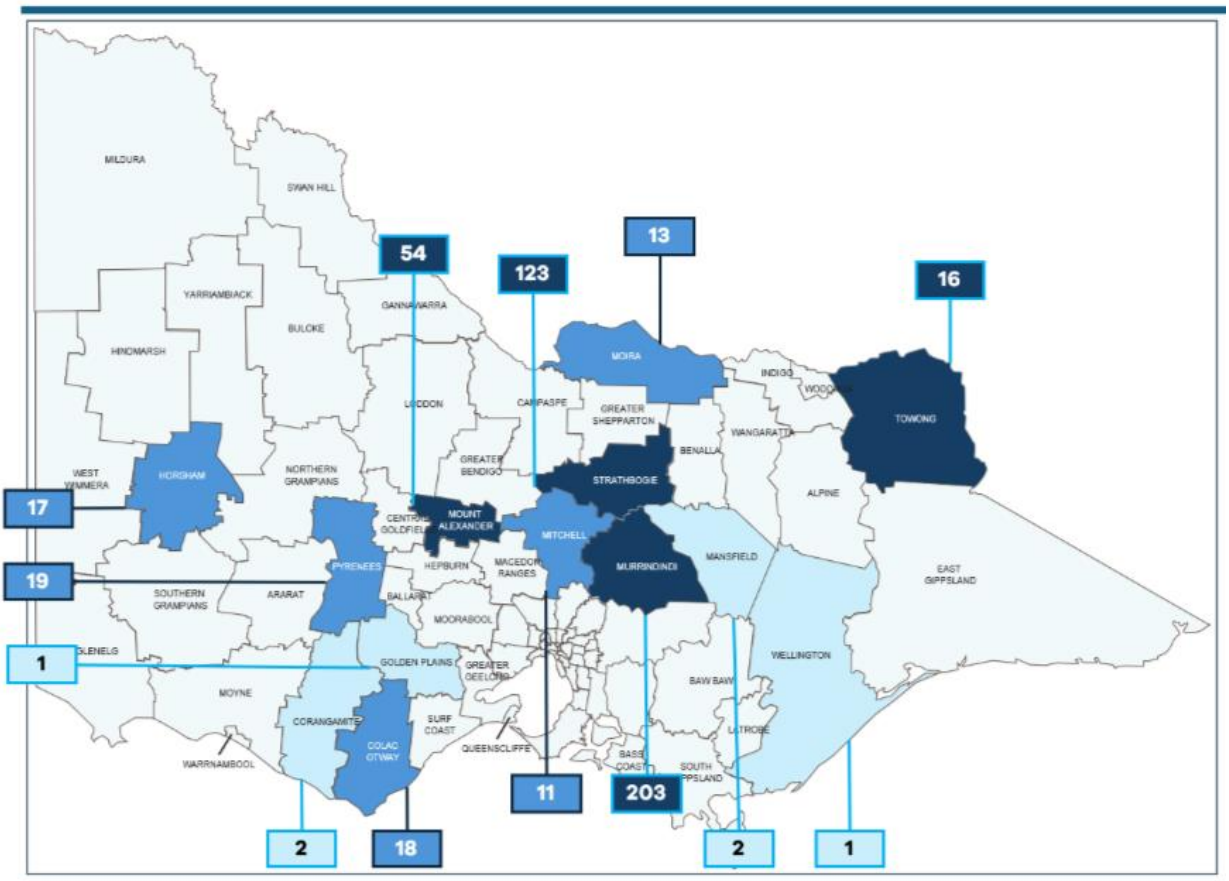
The dedication and sacrifices made by Victoria’s emergency services volunteers and personnel should also be recognised. Volunteer firefighters, along with other emergency services volunteers, made immense contributions to protect and support their communities throughout the 2025 – 26 fire season.

2.5.1 Houses destroyed or damaged

Bushfires over the 2025 – 26 HRWS resulted in the destruction of approximately 1,590 structures across the state, with assessments indicating 451 homes destroyed and 29 homes damaged (including principal places of residence and secondary homes) – displacing many Victorian residents for anywhere between a few days and potentially several years – and a further 1,110 outbuildings damaged or destroyed.

This exceeded the number of homes that were destroyed in the 2019-20 bushfires, where over 350 homes were destroyed across fewer private land tenure, given most of the fire scar was in public land. However, it is less than the 2009 bushfires, where over 2,000 homes were destroyed across smaller number of hectares.

Figure 11: Houses destroyed or damaged by LGA (n=480)



2.5.2 Displaced people

On 10 January 2026, the Victorian Government declared a State of Disaster for 18 of the 23 LGAs and one Alpine Resort (Lake Mountain).

Overall, the event saw the displacement of thousands of people within the impacted areas.

At the peak of the bushfires, people within ten LGAs had received evacuation orders requiring the activation of 32 Emergency Relief Centres and 15 recovery hubs across the state.

2.5.3 Land

While impact assessments continue, data to date shows that the bushfires have burnt through approximately 440,000 hectares of land, devastating communities and public land.

There were 63 parks closed across Victoria due to the bushfire, with some popular destinations closed including parts of the Alpine National Park, some areas within the Lake Eildon National Park and areas on the Murray River east of Walwa.

Further tourist and recreational sites have been heavily impacted including damage to 15 historic trestle bridges and two rail trails (High Country Rail trail and the Great Victorian Rail trail), resulting in widespread closures and restricted access to key natural areas. Damage to key community gathering places on public land managed by Committees of Management have also been recorded.

Within the fire landscape, there have also been considerable impacts to catchments and biodiversity including heavy vegetation loss, loss of livestock exclusion fencing and stock containment structures, and significant loss of native vegetation contributing to habitat degradation and increased erosion and predator risks.

DEECA administers the Victorian Rapid Risk Assessment Teams (RRATs). RRATs provide valuable early information on potential impacts, risks, and actions to inform recovery on public land. Their assessment helps to minimise further threat to life, property, critical infrastructure, and the environment (natural and cultural).

In response to the January 2026 Victorian bushfires, RRATs were deployed to complete risk assessments of the fire impacts in the towns of Dargo and Walwa, as well as Wyperfeld and Hattah National Parks.

Recovery of the natural and built environment on public land will take years with the scale of impacts. Note also that environmental recovery needs (particularly biodiversity) can take time to fully emerge, and interventions may be required to align with seasonal changes.

2.5.4 Cultural heritage values

The fires posed significant threats, including damage or loss, to many registered and unregistered Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and values across the state. Impacted Traditional Owners include Barengi Gadjin Land Council, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, DJAARA, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Taungurung Land and Waters Council, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, as well as several Traditional Owner groups without formal recognition across the state.

Through a desktop assessment, government has identified approximately 210 registered artefacts or cultural heritage assets within the fire-impacted areas. It is anticipated the number of impacted cultural heritage sites and values will significantly increase as recovery and rehabilitation works are delivered on Country across the state.

2.5.5 Business impacts

It is estimated that there are 73,558 GST registered businesses (excluding primary producers) within the twenty-three local government areas (LGAs) and one Alpine Resort.

Early impact data suggests more than 300 businesses are likely to have experienced impacts, including loss of livestock and assets, disruption to supply chains and a downturn in visitation and trade during economically significant trading periods.

Impacts also extends to businesses registered outside of the impacted LGAs which had stock or property in impacted areas, as is the case with many of the 93 businesses in the Harcourt Cool Store.

Harcourt Cool Stores

The Harcourt Cool Stores facility was destroyed in the fires. The destruction of the Harcourt Cool Stores has impacted more than 90 businesses within the Harcourt community and the broader region, with its food producers describing the facility as a critical linchpin to its economy.

Loss of timber supply may have downstream impacts on local economies in Myrtleford, Wangaratta and Benalla, and the Walwa fire has had a significant impact on softwood plantation resources.

Tourism

Initial reports indicate significant revenue losses, event cancellations and declines in forward bookings across impacted areas, with visitor movements in impacted regions dropping as much as 20-30% over a three-week period. This is due to the bushfires occurring during a peak holiday period, along with road and park closures, evacuations and media coverage, which is likely to cause significant, long term negative impacts on tourism across all affected regions.

Agriculture

There were also significant impacts on farming communities, with the loss of over 45,000 head of livestock – predominantly sheep and cattle, 9,625km of fencing damaged or destroyed; over 40,400 tonnes of hay or silage lost; over 500 farm sheds lost, and over 150,000 hectares of agricultural land known to have been affected, including 650 hectares of horticulture crops, 3,500 hectares of broadacre crops, as well as 11,000 hectares of plantation timber.

Adding to the immediate effects of the bushfires, Victoria is dealing with the ongoing impacts of drought, which in some regions dates back to June 2023. Drought conditions placed additional pressure on farmers with cashflow, farm water supplies and fodder reserves diminished. Widespread financial and mental health stress was already evident in the Victorian agriculture sector prior to the January 2026 fires.

As impacted areas began transitioning into recovery, Agriculture Victoria has maintained a strong presence in local communities to support impacted landholders and stakeholders. This support has included providing farm management advice and support, as well as attending recovery hubs and popup community events to connect primary producers and landholders with supports including the Rural Financial Counselling Service for financial and business advice, and the National Centre for Farmer Health for mental health and wellbeing services.

2.5.6 Roads

DTP's priority in capturing road closure data is to provide real-time information to road users, supporting them to travel safely across the network. Road closure data is dynamic and intended to capture point-in-time impacts, with roads potentially partially closed (e.g. one direction of traffic only) or opened and closed multiple times in response to on-the-ground conditions. The data below should be treated as indicative only.

As of 24 February 2026, DTP data shows that 56 arterial roads were closed during January in correlation with the fire emergency. This included key sections of Hume Highway, Murray Valley Highway and Goulburn Valley Highway.

250 road closures on local council roads, and a further 38 closures on jointly managed DTP and local council roads have been reported into DTP, as of 24 February 2026. The majority of closures were in Murrindindi, Towong and Strathbogie shires.

Over 1,300km of roads across DEECA and Parks Victoria land lies within the fire affected zone, with access and egress roads outside the fire footprint also impacted. Corresponding impacted roading assets are likely to include 515 culverts, 12 minor bridges and other road infrastructure including signage.

As of 24 February 2026, the impact assessment process quantifying damages to road assets is still ongoing.

2.5.7 Impacts to critical infrastructure

Public Transport and Rail

Due to the 2026 summer bushfires, the rail and bus networks sustained the following impacts:

- Metro Trains (MTM) had minor short-term impacts, including the suspension of the Belgrave Line on 9 January 2026.
- V-Line shut multiple lines across multiple days, commencing 9 January 2026 and concluding on 14 January 2026.
- Numerous bus services were altered or cancelled, commencing 9 January 2026 and resuming regular scheduling 22 January 2026.
- All freight rail traffic across the state (ARTC Freight Network) was suspended from 9 January 2026 to 11 January 2026.

Public Transport Services resumed their regular timetables by 22 January 2026.

Energy impacts

Throughout the January event, DEECA coordinated with electricity distribution businesses, telecommunications, health and water portfolios to identify and prioritise critical infrastructure without power, providing this information to distribution businesses to support restoration sequencing and daily reporting. Bushfires and extreme weather on 7-9 January 2026 caused widespread electricity outages across Victoria, peaking at 98,000 customers, including more than 2,000 life support customers.

The most severe and prolonged impacts occurred in Walwa and Longwood, where extensive network damage, hazardous trees and restricted fireground access extended repair timelines. In Longwood, 308 poles required replacement.

Statewide, restoration progressed rapidly: 81% of customers were reconnected within 24 hours, 96% within 72 hours, and 98% within seven days. However, rural and farming communities in fire affected regions experienced extended outages due to the scale of infrastructure damage and safety constraints. Customers impacted by the Walwa fire were restored by 23 January, while Longwood restoration continued until 6 February. Some customers may still be without power because of fire damage to their homes, but in all cases the power is available to be reconnected once customer repairs are completed.

Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiters (REFCLs) are advanced safety devices installed in Victorian substations to prevent powerline-related bushfires. Acting like a rapid, high-voltage safety switch, they detect faults (e.g. lines hitting trees) and instantly reduce voltage, limiting spark energy to prevent fires. During high fire danger days, the sensitivity of REFCLs is increased. When a REFCL is activated on these days, like 7-9 January 2026, the restoration of supply to the feeders

affected takes longer as the length of the line needs to be inspected to ensure no vegetation or other fault is impacting the line prior to resetting it.

- The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) found that some of the most devastating fires on Black Saturday were ignited by faulted powerlines.
- In response to the recommendations of the VBRC the Victorian Government established the Powerline Bushfire Safety Taskforce (PBST). The 2011 PBST Final Report identified Rapid Earth Fault Current Limiter (REFCL) technology as a potentially cost-effective way of reducing the risk of 22 kilovolt powerlines from starting bushfires (representing approx. 80-90% of risk), along with other initiatives to address the risk from powerlines more generally.
- REFCLs have been rolled out across the state and are highly effective at preventing fire ignition.
- In late January, a further period of severe heatwave conditions placed renewed stress on electricity distribution networks statewide. On 27 January 2026, heat related outages affected all five electricity distribution businesses, resulting in a second statewide peak of 103,188 customers without supply, including 2,583 life support customers. These outages were restored progressively, with all heatwave related outages resolved by 29 January 2026.

During this period, the Carlisle River fire, which commenced on 27 January 2026, disrupted electricity supply to approximately 2,800 customers at peak, with all remaining outages restored by 31 January 2026. While these late January impacts were significant in scale, they were generally shorter in duration than the prolonged outages associated with earlier fire damage.

Throughout the event, DEECA coordinated with electricity distribution businesses, emergency services and human services agencies to manage life support customers. Life support customers are those identified in the distribution businesses data as requiring electricity to maintain operation of electrical equipment to maintain their health, these customers are identified and contacted to ensure they have appropriate support when they are without electricity.

Water impacts

DEECA activated its state water emergency management arrangements on 9 January 2026 to monitor fire danger, protect water corporation assets, and begin recovery planning with the sector. A Class 2 State Controller (Water) was deployed on high-risk days during the Carlisle River fire. All emergency roles were stood down on 30 January 2026, after which normal operations resumed. Across the 22-day activation, 21 staff filled 83 shifts in key roles including State Controllers, executive liaison officers, senior advisors, water services specialists, communications staff, recovery liaison officers, and the 24/7 State Duty Officer – Water.

Water Corporations impacted by the summer 2026 fires included: Barwon; Central Highlands; Coliban; East Gippsland; Goulburn Valley; Goulburn Murray; Grampians Wimmera Mallee; North East and Wannon Water. All activated IMTs.

Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) impacted by the summer included: Corangamite, East Gippsland, Glenelg Hopkins, Goulburn Broken, Mallee, North Central, Northeast and Wimmera CMAs. The CMAs assess fire impacts when safe and support communities through meetings, information, and delivery of funded waterway and fencing recovery works.

Drinking water advisories – Four drinking water service disruptions occurred during the 2026 summer bushfires, prompting Water Corporations to issue **Boil Water** or **Do Not Drink** advisories to protect public health. In every case, **relief drinking water** was supplied to affected households.

- Longwood & Longwood East (Goulburn Valley Water): A Boil Water Advisory was issued after fire damage to the treatment plant; lifted once water quality testing confirmed safety.
- Harcourt (Coliban Water): A Do Not Drink Advisory was issued due to damaged infrastructure and contamination risk; lifted after repairs, flushing, and verification testing.
- Gellibrand (Barwon Water): A Do Not Drink Advisory followed fire damage to the treatment plant; lifted after repairs and laboratory confirmation of safe water.

Water infrastructure impacts – The January 2026 bushfires significantly disrupted both reticulated and non-reticulated water supplies, particularly affecting Harcourt, Longwood/Longwood East and Gellibrand, while damage and contamination to rainwater tanks impacted households in non-reticulated areas. Water Corporations played a vital role in maintaining essential water access by supplying drinking water at relief centres, refilling domestic tanks, and providing extensive relief and recovery support well beyond standard responsibilities.

Catchment and waterway impacts – Early impact information provided by CMAs indicate that the recent bushfires have caused substantial damage to waterways across Victoria's catchments, creating significant water quality risks. Ash, sediment and nutrient runoff from fire-affected areas pose threats to aquatic ecosystems, including potential fish deaths and long-term ecological impacts, and present risks to community and industry water supplies.

Telecommunications impacts

The 2025-26 higher risk weather season bushfires significantly impacted public telecommunications due to widespread power outages and damage to public telecommunications infrastructure. At its peak on 11 January 2026, as many as 25 communities were identified as being at risk of losing all mobile and broadband services. By 16 January 2026, all communities had their access to telecommunications restored.

Through the State Control Centre and Incident Control Centres, the Department of Government Services (DGS) supported telecommunications carriers' efforts to access their infrastructure and restore network services. DGS worked closely with DEECA on prioritisation of energy restoration to public telecommunication sites where this was possible.

A common system that provides a picture of real-time public telecommunication networks does not currently exist at State or Commonwealth level. During the fires, DGS engaged with all carriers to build a picture of communities that may be under threat of losing connectivity. This included the status of assets within their networks across the fire footprint, including for the Longwood fire. DGS engaged with carriers and Triple Zero Victoria to identify any issues impacting the industry standard camp on (network switching) functionality for Triple Zero services that ensures where one carrier's network service is offline the 000 calls switch to other available networks to connect. To date, there have been no reports from telecommunications carriers or from Triple Zero Victoria of any communities having complete loss of access to Triple Zero Victoria.

Health Service Infrastructure

No health service infrastructure impacts were reported for this emergency as a direct result of fire or smoke impact. However, health services including hospitals and aged care facilities faced service disruption and relocation, as detailed below:

Note: In the Victorian health system, a Code Brown is a formal emergency alert for an external emergency that places significant pressure on a health service or the broader health system and requires additional capability and capacity to be mobilised.

Relocation/Evacuation

- **Corryong Health** delivers community-based services through a hospital and urgent care centre, medical clinic, allied health and aged residential care services. On 8 January 2026, Corryong Health activated a Code Brown in response to the bushfires and actively discharged patients that were able to return home safely, transferred patients and residents as appropriate to other facilities and supported the community to seek alternative health services. The Code Brown was stood down on 16 January 2026. On 9 January 2026, following a risk assessment with the Department of Health (DH), Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and the Incident Controller, the Corryong Health CEO made the decision to undergo a planned evacuation of all remaining patients who had not already been discharged or transferred to another facility. A primary consideration for this decision was the ability to get staff and supplies into the facility to be able to manage the safety of patients. The Urgent Care Centre successfully re-opened on 12 January 2026, with a staged return to other services complete by 22 January 2026. Corryong health operated on generator power during power outages, with sufficient fuel maintained throughout.

Service Disruption

- **Yea District Hospital** activated a Code Brown on 8 January 2026 in response to fire impacts, which was stood down on 14 January 2026. During the emergency, the facility implemented shelter-in-place measures and reverted to back-up generator power during power outages, with adequate fuel maintained the department provided support to resolve logistical issues including food, bottled water and laundry supply. Staffing pressures were significant due to personal impacts on staff and road closures affecting access to the site, with essential staff movements through impacted areas coordinated with the control agency and Victoria Police. Alternate arrangements for continued pathology service were also coordinated.
- **Alexandra District Health** activated a Code Brown on 9 January 2026 in response to bushfire impacts, which was stood down on 15 January 2026. During the emergency the facility sheltered-in-place and reverted to back-up generator power during power outages, with adequate fuel maintained. Staffing shortages were experienced due to road closures and fire affected staff, with essential staff movements through impacted areas coordinated with the control agency and Victoria Police. The department provided support to coordinate resolution to logistical issues, including continued food and laundry supply and bottled water for patients and staff. Alternate arrangements for continued pathology service were also coordinated.
- **Colac Area Health** faced some staffing gaps as a result of the fires and subsequent staff displacement. These gaps were able to be managed by the service, with resources reallocated to maintain service continuity. Alternate pathology transport arrangements were also made to cover a suspension of courier services due to fire risk.
- **Great Ocean Road Health, Apollo Bay**, faced some staffing gaps due to staff personally affected by the Otways Complex fires. The facility enacted contingency plans to support affected staff and maintain service continuity.
- **Omeo District Health** faced some minor staffing shortages due to staff personally affected by the Dargo fire. The service enacted contingency plans to maintain service delivery.
- **Dargo Bush Nursing Centre** enacted contingency plans to maintain service delivery, including the procurement of an air filter to enable environmental safety during fire conditions.

- **Corryong Pharmacy** was closed for 2 days during the period of fire risk. The Department and Murray Primary Healthcare Network coordinated with Corryong Health and Khancoban Pharmacy to ensure alternate arrangements were in place.
- **Darlingford Nursing Home** activated a Code Brown on 10 January 2026 in response to fire impacts, which was stood down on 15 January 2026. During the initial phases of the event the facility sheltered-in place, with close monitoring of staffing fatigue and shortages.
- **West Wimmera Health – Natimuk Aged Care** sheltered in place on 9 January 2026 and was protected by fire authorities as fire approached. Service delivery was maintained in the days following. The facility experienced power outages but remained functional through generator support, with adequate fuel supplies in place. A loss of fixed line telecommunications and internet occurred, although mobile coverage remained available.

DH participates in the Critical Infrastructure Sectors Resilience Forum (CIRSF), convened by EMV. CIRSF facilitates the exploration of cross-sectoral dependencies and promotes shared understanding of critical infrastructure resilience and emergency risks across Victoria's eight critical infrastructure sectors.

DH convenes the Health Sector Resilience Network (HSRN), which meets at least twice a year. The purpose of the HSRN is to continuously improve the resilience of critical infrastructure assets and operations through joint planning, information sharing and reporting to government. HSRN members are provided with opportunities to participate in State and Commonwealth specific and cross-sector activities (including exercises) relating to critical infrastructure resilience, security, risk and emergency management.

A key focus for the HSRN is the preparation of an annual Health Sector Resilience Plan (HSRP), with Secretarial attestation, as part of Victoria's critical infrastructure resilience arrangements. The HSRP provides the Victorian Government with the status of, and continuous improvement arrangements for, the health sector's overall resilience. Initiatives identified through learnings from the 2026 fires that will help build health sector resilience to emergency risks will be included in the HSRP 2026-27.

2.6 Relief and recovery

The Victorian government was quick and targeted in providing relief and recovery supports.

These supports have ensured those impacted had their relief needs immediately met while also supporting longer-term recovery needs. The impacts of the event on individuals, families, businesses, primary producers, and the broader environment is central to investment decisions, and recovery supports have been targeted accordingly.

The first package of investment of $19.5 million was announced on 11 January 2026 and was followed up by additional support packages of $15 million on 13 January, close to $100 million on 14 January, $81 million on 15 January and $160 million on 30 January.

These announcements total more than $370 million, with more than $328 million of this total funded under the joint Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

The effort put into preparedness through these forums ahead of the January 2026 bushfires has supported a coordinated response across all phases of the emergency.

32 Emergency Relief Centres and 15 Recovery Information Hubs were opened to provide food, water, psychosocial, financial and accommodation supports, as well as general recovery information.

Case Study: Core emergency relief and recovery programs

Following the 2019-20 Victorian fire season, the Inspector-General for Emergency Management recommended the development of a recovery funding model that would enable greater consistency in the support provided to communities.

In response to this recommendation, DPC partnered and worked closely with all relevant Victorian government departments leading relief and recovery initiatives to identify a set of core emergency relief and recovery programs that should be prioritised in the aftermath of natural disasters of state significance. These programs have been stood up during major emergencies across Victoria in the past and have proven to meet the needs of disaster impacted communities and councils across the state. This collaborative approach also ensured that the most essential services are delivered effectively and with greater alignment across the sector.

Building on this work, and in preparation for the upcoming Higher Risk Weather Season, EMV updated the guiding framework supporting these core programs. These updates focused on simplifying processes and streamlining the pathway from funding approval to on-the-ground support.

As a result of these upgrades, funding was mobilised rapidly, enabling a timely rollout of critical assistance to impacted communities following the bushfires.

Shortly following the bushfires, several key recovery programs were stood up to address the needs of impacted communities and provide supports to those in need. Some of these programs included:

- **The 1800 Recovery Hotline** – which acts as a gateway to recovery services and is providing a single pathway for bushfire impacted Victorians to access general enquiry information and navigate relevant recovery services.
- **Primary producer grants** – noting the impacts on farming communities these grants were opened for applications on the 23 January 2026. Under this program, grants help pay for the costs of the clean-up and reinstatement of the primary producer's operation, including hiring and leasing equipment, purchasing materials or paying additional wages to clean a property, premises or equipment; and costs associated with removing and disposing of debris, damaged goods, and injured or dead livestock. The program also enables repairing or replacing damaged buildings, plant or equipment, including fencing, as well as purchasing fodder, repairing or restoring fields and salvaging damaged crops. Grants can also support purchasing, hiring or leasing equipment or materials that are essential for immediately resuming operation of the primary producer operation.
- **Council support fund** – to provide support for immediate clean-up and restoration of assets, facilities and services. This program will also provide additional supports to significantly impacted councils to undertake minor repairs to non-essential assets and infrastructure owned or managed by councils, including walking trails, playgrounds and sporting fields. The fund could also be utilised to support clean-up of council owned or managed land, such as parks and reserves.
- **Financial counselling** – enabling counsellors to support people to navigate the financial impacts of natural disasters, including access to recovery grants, negotiation of insurance claims, accessing finance to replace cars and personal items, as well as the management of debts to help people rebuild their lives. The program also enables counsellors to assist clients to negotiate with creditors, such as for properties, vehicles and belongings, to assess damages for insurance claims, and to understand potential grants and other funding available. Importantly, they provide advocacy and negotiation with insurers at crucial times, liaise with legal support and provide important advocacy for other debts.

- **State coordinated clean-up program** – to enable clean-up works to commence as early as possible and provide other critical supports to impacted communities to support them making decisions on their rebuild journey. The program also plays a significant role in ensuring appropriate temporary accommodation arrangements can be made once structural debris and damaged material eligible under the program is cleared from private properties impacted by the bushfires.
- **Emergency recovery support program** – acts as a single-entry point to navigate recovery supports, including housing, clean-up, health and wellbeing, finances, legal matters and practical assistance such as filling in forms, or accessing payments and grants. This support is usually required for multiple years following major emergencies.

No two emergencies are the same and people are impacted in different ways. Recovery programs are developed for the circumstances and impacts of each emergency. They aim to provide support to people during their recovery journey and help communities to start their recovery journey.

This approach is applied across all our recovery support programs, like the Clean-up program, which provides eligible homeowners who don't have adequate insurance with free demolition of their home and the removal of resulting debris. The scope – which is limited to uninsured and underinsured – focuses on where support can have the greatest immediate impact to communities, not to substitute for, or replace, private home insurance. This aligns with Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement principles which acknowledges recovery as a shared responsibility for individuals.

Further details about Victoria's relief and recovery efforts are available in **Appendix I.**

Victoria's Fire Service Agencies

Key points

This chapter provides an overview of Victoria's three fire agencies, the CFA, FFMVic and FRV. It explains the roles and responsibilities of these agencies and how they work together effectively. It also provides an overview of the funding arrangements, key assets, and workforce capacity.

3.1 Overview of Victoria's fire agencies

Interoperability provides a mechanism for achieving better outcomes by allowing the control and support agencies to effectively work together before, during and after an incident. It also provides a foundation for meaningful connections with the community and a wide range of partner agencies.

To achieve a cooperative response to bushfire emergencies, each fire agency maintains an understanding of the systems, structures, resources, capabilities and statutory obligations of the other agencies, and there are also multiple inter-agency agreements to allow operations across fire districts and define how agencies interact in those circumstances. Interoperability maximises the capability of the agencies to work effectively and efficiently together to deliver information, communications, and technology.

All roles and responsibilities for the mitigation of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from bushfire are as per the SEMP Sub-Plan:[49]

- outlines participating agencies for mitigation activities specific to bushfire.
- identifies three Control Agencies for bushfire response: CFA, DEECA/FFMVic and FRV.
- the Chief Officer (CFA)/Chief Fire Officer (DEECA/FFMVic)/Commissioner (FRV) of each fire services agency is a statutory officer, accountable for delivering the bushfire-related responsibilities of their respective agency.

Response Support Agencies (RSAs) provide skills, expertise or resources to contribute and support a Control Agency during the response to a form of emergency.

3.1.1 Country Fire Authority (CFA)

The CFA is a community-based volunteer fire and emergency service. CFA's 1,210 volunteer brigades protect more than 2.2 million people in the Country Area of Victoria, covering 22.2 million hectares of the State spanning rural, regional and parts of peri-urban Victoria.

CFA's mission is to protect lives and property. CFA puts safety first and its commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its people underpins CFA's objectives and priorities across all phases of fire (including bushfire) management.

The overarching objectives and priorities can otherwise be found in section 20 of the CFA Act.

CFA's responsibilities are further outlined in the SEMP and its core services span:

- community preparedness

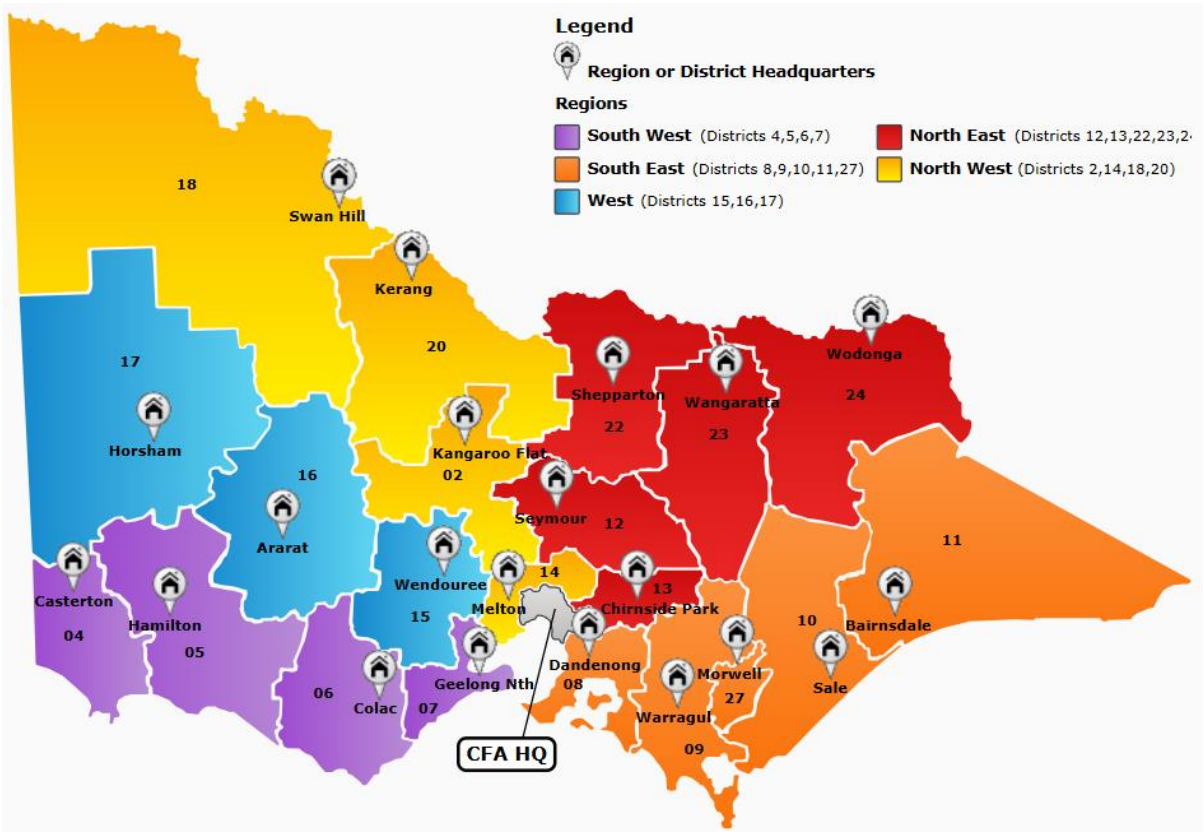
[49] https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-management-plan-sub-plans/semp-bushfire-sub-plan

- fire prevention and preparedness
- emergency response (fire and non-fire incidents)
- incident/emergency management planning
- post incident response
- regulatory services

The CFA Services Catalogue[50] provides further detail on CFA activities and the legislative basis for these.

CFA administers itself through 5 Regions and 21 Districts, working to support the vast network of fire brigades.

Figure 12: CFA Regions and District Headquarters



Operations and services

CFA Victoria is responsible for combating fires on private land across most of non-metropolitan Victoria, including bushfires and structure fires. It also responds to a wide range of other emergencies such as road crashes, hazardous materials incidents, technical rescues, and support during floods and storms. It plays a role in incident management at the incident, region and state tiers.

[50] Understanding CFA's Services | CFA (Country Fire Authority)

CFA shares statewide fire responsibilities with FRV (career firefighters) and FFMVic (public land fire management). During major bushfire seasons, CFA often supports and is supported by interstate and occasionally international agencies.

Volunteer base and structure

CFA's community-based volunteer brigades are core to the achievement of the CFA vision that Victorian communities are prepared for and safe from fire. Volunteers are supported by a smaller cohort of professional staff providing training, logistics, planning, and operational appliances, equipment and support.

CFA volunteers deal with complex structure fires and wildfires, provide and support motor vehicle accident first response in vast areas of the state, and attend incidents at complex industrial sites such as mining sites, gas plants and large battery storage facilities. CFA brigades also provide specialist fire and rescue services, critical community education and fire prevention initiatives.

CFA volunteers are actively involved in empowering their communities to be prepared for fire risk. They provide critical community fire education and take part in fire prevention initiatives. As CFA volunteers are part of the communities they protect, the capacity and capability of CFA volunteers go beyond traditional fire service approaches – capitalising on local knowledge, empowering the community and changing localised human behaviour.

In addition to localised response to communities across Victoria, CFA's volunteer firefighters provide an unrivalled and critical surge capacity across Victoria and Australia during campaign fire seasons when demand vastly outweighs the capacity of both local volunteers and career firefighters. The CFA model is agile – being able to flex up within minutes to respond to major campaign fires and other significant events (such as flood) while also maintaining normal day to day service delivery. The strength of this model has been evidenced for over 150 years.

CFA's volunteer firefighters are trained to a high standard using nationally recognised training packages which facilitate interoperability. CFA offers training in a variety of modes and locations and trained more than 10,750 members across 1,418 courses in the period January to December 2025.

Community safety and education

CFA members regularly work with personnel from other emergency management organisations to provide an integrated approach to fire and other emergencies in Victoria. These partnerships are critical to the successful delivery of services to the community and are in keeping with the legislative requirements of the fire agencies, and the Victorian Government's intent of the Fire Services Statement and Fire Services Reform. A complementary operating model with FRV provides the opportunity to leverage the existing strengths of both fire agencies. CFA also supports mutual aid responses nationally and internationally.

Beyond emergency response, CFA invests heavily in community education and fire-ready programs. Initiatives such as Get Fire Ready, Fire Safe Kids, and seasonal bushfire-awareness campaigns aim to improve household preparedness, safe use of fire, and understanding of total fire bans and Fire Danger Ratings. CFA messaging is closely integrated with the state's VicEmergency information platform.

3.1.2 Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)

FRV was established under the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958* (FRV Act) on 1 July 2020 and is the career fire and rescue service to communities across metropolitan Melbourne and many of Victoria's major regional centres.

Organisation structure

Fire Services Reform merged all former Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and all career firefighters in CFA into the new agency. FRV and CFA work to support a complementary fire services model that provides an opportunity to leverage the strengths of both fire agencies and ensure that all Victorians receive a world-class fire service response no matter where they live.

Operations and services

FRV responds to structural and industrial fires, hazardous materials incidents, complex rescues, road crashes, and emergency medical calls. Its firefighters train at the FRV Training Academy and provide specialist capabilities including marine response, urban search and rescue, and drone operations. The agency also delivers community education and fire-prevention initiatives to reduce risk and build resilience.

Collaboration and Community

As part of Victoria's integrated emergency management system, FRV works closely with CFA, AV, Victoria Police, and other agencies during large-scale incidents such as bushfires and storms. It also supports mutual aid responses nationally and internationally. FRV emphasises mental-health programs for its staff and fosters diversity and inclusion within its workforce.

3.1.3 DEECA/FFMVic

FFMVic is an operational brand of DEECA and is responsible for managing bushfire prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery on public land in Victoria, Australia. It coordinates the fire management activities of several departments and partner agencies to protect lives, property, and natural ecosystems from bushfire risk. FFMVic has more than 2,600 seasonal and permanent personnel with a fire and emergency management role. FFMVic partners also include a network of over 500 independent contractors all across Victoria who supply a range of forest and civil contracting services and play a vital role in the state's bushfire management and emergency response capacity. Most of these businesses also make themselves available for deployment to respond to bushfire and emergency events.

Formation and Structure

FFMVic was formed to unify land and fire management responsibilities under one coordinated structure. It integrates staff and resources from DEECA (formerly DELWP), Parks Victoria, and Melbourne Water, ensuring consistent planning and field operations across the state's public lands. FFMVic works closely with the CFA, FRV and EMV to align community safety and emergency response strategies.

Operations and Responsibilities

FFMVic's responsibilities include risk-based bushfire management planning, fire prevention and preparedness, fuel management programs and emergency response and recovery across more than seven million hectares of public land, including state forests, national parks, and protected reserves.

Collaboration and Community

FFMVic works with CFA, FRV, other emergency services, Traditional Owners and communities to deliver local approaches to managing bushfire risk in Victoria.

3.1.4 Cooperation with other Departments and agencies

As noted in Chapter 1 of this submission, Victoria's emergency management arrangements reflect an 'all hazards, all agencies, all communities approach to emergency management'

This approach recognises no single agency can address all the impacts of a particular emergency. Instead, effective mitigation, response and recovery require multiple agencies to work together as one. This philosophy has led to a more prepared and informed community and a stronger, more capable emergency management sector.

In Victoria, bushfire mitigation, response and recovery activities involve cooperation between numerous government Departments and Agencies. Other agencies which are key to bushfire response include:

Department of Transport and Planning (DTP)

Working with councils and the fire services agencies, DTP administers the land use planning and building systems relevant to bushfires. Land use planning and building systems are important for creating more bushfire resilient communities. Particularly, strategic planning, through local planning schemes is critical in setting out how settlements and rural areas will grow and change in response to the threat of bushfire. Building regulations ensure new buildings are constructed with regard to likely forms of bushfire attack.

Bushfire mapping is a key element of the land use planning and building regulatory framework. Mapping criteria identifies whether an area should be designated a Bushfire Prone Area, and if a Bushfire Management Overlay should apply.

DTP also undertakes the following:

- protection and management of listed historic heritage places through mitigation of and recovery from bushfire.
- taking all practicable steps to prevent the occurrence of fires and minimise the danger of the spread of fires on and from any land or roads under DTP control or management (as per the CFA Act).
- facilitating fire agency access to DTP owned land to conduct fuel management.
- supporting the reopening of transport access to communities (including to support restoration of power and telecommunications) once it is safe to do so.

Energy Safe Victoria

Energy Safe Victoria works with power companies to install new protection mechanisms to reduce the risk of starting fires, and work closely with fire agencies to review expected conditions to assist in identifying priority areas over high-risk periods. The bushfire mitigation programs of electricity distribution companies typically include activities such as asset inspection, maintenance, construction, upgrading, replacement, vegetation management, performance monitoring and auditing.

Victoria Police

Victoria Police, in recognising the serious impact bushfire can have on communities, undertakes an intelligence-led, partnership approach to preventing the incidence of bushfire arson, preserving life, protecting property and detecting offenders.

Enforcement links inextricably to community education, because the main aim is to change the behaviour of people.

The fire services share a Victorian Fire Investigation Inter-Agency Agreement - signatories include the State Coroner, Victoria Police, EMV, FRV, CFA, FFMVic, Energy Safe Victoria and WorkSafe regarding an integrated approach to fire investigation. The approach aims to identify trends and improve the targeting of fire prevention and community safety strategies.

As outlined in Chapter 1, TMPs are established at the direction of the Incident Controller, in consultation with Victoria Police and DTP, to regulate the flow of traffic into an area where

bushfire has occurred, is occurring or has the potential to occur. Smoke, fire, hazardous trees, emergency services vehicles, wildlife and electrical assets are all hazards that can be reasonably expected on and around roadways in bushfire affected areas. For these reasons travelling on roads during or immediately after a bushfire can be particularly hazardous. Emergencies are not static and therefore the conditions of TMP may change over the course of and incident, and at any time.

Fire cause investigations are undertaken through an integrated, multi-agency approach involving Victoria Police and specialist partners. Determining the cause of a fire can be complex and evidence led, and in some cases a definitive cause may not be able to be established. Investigative processes operate independently of operational response and recovery activities and are not always aligned with public or inquiry timeframes.

Victoria State Emergency Service

VICSES is a volunteer-based organisation with responsibilities for the mitigation, response and recovery phases of emergency management across the state. It is the control agency for flood, storm, earthquake, tsunami and landslide events. VICSES also performs road crash rescue functions, with 104 accredited road crash rescue units across the state. The statutory functions of the VICSES Authority, set out in the *Victoria State Emergency Services Act 2005* (VICSES Act) include responding to floods and storms and their effects, and providing rescue services. VICSES also supports other agencies and organisations with emergency mitigation, response and recovery in accordance with emergency management arrangements established under the EM Act 2013.

VICSES volunteers and personnel supported response activities in relation to the 2025–26 HRWS fires by participating in incident management teams across the state. In particular, VICSES and Victoria Police undertook extensive door knocking operations, and evacuation planning was implemented.

Triple Zero Victoria (TZV)

TZV is a statutory authority within the Victorian Minister for Emergency Services' portfolio, providing the link between the Victorian community and the state's emergency services, through 24/7 call-taking and dispatch services for ambulance, police, fire and Victoria state emergency service. This service is delivered using a range of communications technologies, including a Computer Aided Dispatch system and telephony system. In addition to call-taking and dispatch, TZV also provides critical operational communication services for Victoria's emergency services. This supports emergency personnel in the field and other incident management functions.

In addition to the delivery of call-taking and dispatch services, TZV supports the emergency management sector through a range of activities it undertakes in relation to its role statement in the SEMP.

On request of the control agency, TZV can also deploy Emergency Field Communications Officers (EFCOs) to the SCC and Incident Control Centres (ICCs) for major events and during severe weather events. This season alone, TZV personnel were deployed to three separate ICCs in Walwa, Ravenswood and Longwood. January 2026 represented TZV's largest external deployment month on record, totalling 23 deployment days (363 hours).

3.2 Funding arrangements

3.2.1 CFA funding arrangements

CFA is provided with Victorian Government funding primarily from grant payments via DJCS to support operational service delivery. These grant payments include annual base funding

(operating and capital), new initiative funding from the annual State Budget and funding for competitive volunteer grants programs. CFA has also consistently received in year budget supplementation following emergencies via Treasurer's Advances.

The CFA also receives grant payments through other departments such as DEECA as well as own source revenue (e.g. sale of goods and services, interest income and fair value of assets and services received free of charge or for nominal consideration, the latter includes FRV provision of resourcing under the Secondment Agreement – further details are provided below).

The total grant income recognised (under AASB 1058) in CFA's Annual Reports[51], as a note to the operating statement, represents CFA's output appropriation received from government each year. In addition, capital appropriations are separately listed in CFA's Annual Report[52], under the statement of changes in equity. Total grants (output) provided to CFA through DJCS and DEECA are reported at 30 June each year and included in the CFA[53], DJCS[54] and DEECA[55] Annual Reports.

In 2024-25, CFA received the majority of its $477 million revenue and income (around $361 million or 76%) through grant payments from DJCS.[56] In addition to grant income, CFA recognised income of around $72 million (15%) relating to services received free of charge from FRV, to meet the cost of a defined number of staff for specific senior operational roles to support volunteer brigades. [57]

The DJCS Annual Reports show that the department's grant payments to CFA have increased each year from $332.73 million in 2022-23 to $352.60 million in 2024-25.[58] Funding changes from 2021-22 to 2022-23 were due to once-off implementation funding provided to CFA to support fire services reform implementation.

CFA's total revenue and income from transactions have increased from $430.57 million in 2021-22 to $477.41 million in 2024-25.[59]

Since the 2025-26 Budget, additional budget supplementation of $11.61 million[60] has been approved by government for CFA in 2025-26 for additional emergency preparedness activities for the high-risk weather season, including large capacity water storage and transport, fuel logistics, and a statewide 'Get Fire Ready' initiative facilitated by CFA brigades to increase community preparedness.

Competitive volunteer grant funding is also provided to CFA via the Victorian Government's Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) and Valuing Volunteers Program (VVP). A summary of funding provided to CFA via competitive grants programs is provided in the figure below. Funding for VESEP increased in 2025-26, with more than $62 million over four

[51] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 80, Note 2.2.1 Grants)

[52] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 77, Statement of changes in equity)

[53] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 80, Note 2.2.1 Grants)

[54] DJCS 2024-25 Annual Report (Page 84, Table 3.3 - Grant expense and page 132)

[55] DEECA Annual Report 2024-25 (Appendix 6: Disclosure of grants and transfer payments: Table 6 – Environment and Biodiversity, page 327 and Table 7 – Fire and Emergency Management, page 328)

[56] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 64, financial summary 2024-25 – Grant income)

[57] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 64, financial summary 2024-25 – Grant income)

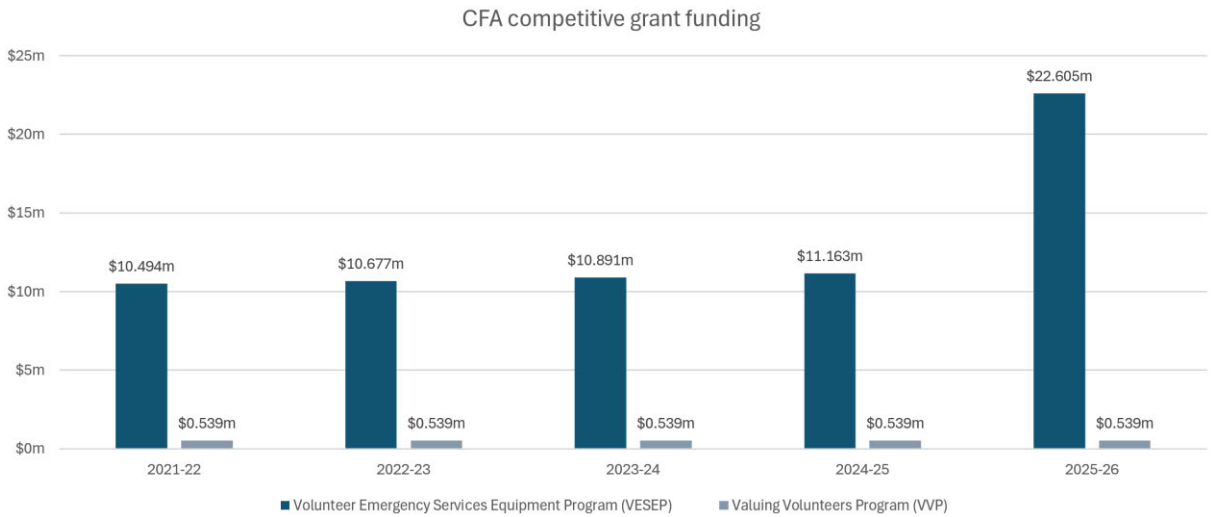
[58] DJCS 2022-23 Annual Report (page 84, Table 3.3 - Grant expense); DJCS 2024-25 Annual Report (Page 84, Table 3.3 - Grant expense)

[59] CFA Annual Report 2022-23 (Page 62) and CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 80)

[60] https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/cfa-board-statement

years being invested in the program [61]. CFA's allocation under VESEP increased from $11.16 million in 2024-25 to $22.61 million in 2025-26.

Figure 13: Summary of funding provided to CFA via the VESEP and VVP competitive grants programs[62]



A proportion of CFA's allocated base funding is provided for capital works and is used by CFA to purchase new trucks, equipment and to build and upgrade CFA stations. Government funding across the last 4 financial years has provided over $200 million in additional asset investment, including CFA infrastructure (predominantly new station builds or upgrades), and for CFA to replace its digital radios, ensuring continued reliability and interoperability with other emergency services agencies and to further improve responsiveness to emergency events.

The 2025-26 Budget announced new funding for CFA, including $18.36 million asset and $2.43 million output over 5 years under the *Building more Country Fire Authority stations* initiative to deliver stations at Wendouree, Hampton Park, Hoddles Creek, Winnindoo, Dartmoor, Leitchville, Kinglake West, Raywood and Yarram.[63] CFA also received a share of the $53.06 million over 4 years provided for the *Further supporting our emergency services and volunteers* initiative, which built on the $200 million announced in the 2024-25 Budget Update for the *Supporting our emergency services volunteers* initiative. This funding will help support CFA to replace its existing fleet by providing $10 million per annum for fleet replacement. Further detail on capital expenditure for fleet is outlined in Section 3.3.1.

Supplementation is also expected at year-end for the direct costs of Emergency Response for the season.

3.2.2 FRV funding arrangements

ESOs are provided with Victorian Government funding primarily from grant payments via DJCS to support operational service delivery. These grant payments include new initiative funding from the annual Budget, budget supplementation released in year, and annual base funding.

[61] www.premier.vic.gov.au/biggest-ever-grants-emergency-services-volunteers and www.premier.vic.gov.au/supporting-those-who-keep-victorians-safe

[62] www.emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/grants-and-awards/volunteer-emergency-services-equipment-program-vesep/volunteer-emergency-services-equipment-program-vesep-grant-recipients Summary provided by EMV grants team for PPQ process.

[63] 2025-26 Budget Paper 3: Service Delivery (Pages 70 and 78)

FRV can also receive grant payments through other departments as well as own source revenue (e.g. sale of goods and services, interest income and other income).

The total grant income recognised (under AASB 1058) in FRV's Annual Reports[64], as a note to the operating statement, represents FRV's output appropriation received from government each year. In addition, capital appropriations are separately listed in in FRV's Annual Report[65], under the cash flow statement. Total grants (output) provided to FRV through DJCS are reported at 30 June each year and included in the FRV[66] and DJCS[67] Annual Reports.

In 2024-25, FRV reported that it received the majority of its $1,189 million income from transactions (around $1,128 million or 95%) through grant payments from DJCS. In addition, FRV recognised income of around $41 million (3%) for sale of goods and services including fire suppression equipment sales and servicing and road accident rescue.[68]

The financial summary[69], shows that FRV has received grants income averaging nearly $1 billion a year from 2021-22 to 2024-25. This includes an increase in grants from government from $1,070.03 million in 2023-24 to $1,120.83 million in 2024-25[70]. The DJCS Annual Report shows that grant payments to FRV have continued to increase year on year since 2021-22.

In addition, FRV in 2024-25 spent $72.40 million complying with the secondment agreement which CFA receive free of charge from FRV. These roles assist the CFA with providing specific senior operational roles to support volunteer brigades.

FRV's total revenue and income from transactions has increased from $919.73 million in 2021-22 to $1,189.80 million in 2024-25. This includes government grants plus other revenue and income, including sale of goods and services, interest income, and other income.

The 2025-26 Budget provided $57.44 million in new initiative funding for FRV including:

- $40.00 million asset over 4 years under the *Fire Rescue Victoria – rolling fleet replacement program* initiative for replacement of heavy pumpers and ladder platform appliances.
- $17.44 million output funding over 3 years under the *Better protecting Fire Rescue Victoria from cyber security threats* initiative for the continuation of improvements to FRV's cyber security.

Supplementation is also expected at year-end for the direct costs of Emergency Response for the season.

3.2.3 FFMVic funding arrangements

FFMVic's funding for its bushfire and emergency functions are funded under DEECA's Fire and Emergency Management output.

Like all government agencies, DEECA receives annual base funding and initiatives funding through the annual budget process. These sources of funding are also supplemented each year for urgent and seasonal needs. For example, emergency response and recovery activities cannot be accurately predicted or quantified at budget time, so the operational costs for responding to

[64] FRV Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 131, Note 2.2 Grants)

[65] FRV Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 126, Cash flow statement)

[66] FRV Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 131, Note 2.2 Grants)

[67] DJCS 2024-25 Annual Report (Page 84, Table 3.3 - Grant expense and page 132)

[68] FRV Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 117, financial summary)

[69] FRV Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 117, financial summary – Grants)

[70] CFA Annual Report 2024-25 (Page 74, Comprehensive operating Statement)

bushfires are funded via supplementation after the end of the bushfire season each year, when the full scope and costs are known.

DEECA typically seeks supplementary funding for the following requirements (with the quantum varying year-on-year based on seasonal factors):

- Aviation Firefighting Resource: to secure the fleet of firefighting aircrafts on contract for the upcoming fire season.[71]
- Emergency Response costs: DEECA base funds the first $5 million of direct response costs, and applicable additional costs are supplemented at year-end via a Treasurer's Advance.
- Enhanced Preparedness: If the emerging seasonal outlook predicts an extreme bushfire season, funding is requested ahead of summer to support enhanced seasonal readiness activities and additional capacity for a likely large and protracted season. This is typically necessary in drought years.
- Bushfire Prevention: If the emerging seasonal outlook in December predicts favourable autumn planned burning conditions, additional funding is requested to maximise planned burning and risk reduction activities. This enables FFMVic to extend its seasonal workforce longer and run a 7-day a week operation to make the most of all burning opportunities.
- Emergency recovery costs: DEECA seeks direct applicable recovery costs via a Treasurer's Advance request.

Consistent with this funding model, in 2025-26, DEECA had an opening budget for its Fire and Emergency Management Output of $400.6 million. Funding supplementation of $101 million has since been provided, resulting in a revised budget of $501.6 million in the year to date.

DEECA's funding of $400.6 million includes $376.6 million in base funding and $24 million from State Budget initiatives, including:

- Enhancing Victoria's Emergency Response Workforce - $6.9 million (this funding becomes ongoing from 2025-26 onwards)
- Maintaining Strategic Fuel Breaks - $950,000 (this funding becomes ongoing from 2027-28 onwards)
- Bolstering the forest firefighting workforce - $7.3 million (this funding becomes ongoing from 2027-28 onwards)
- Securing the forest fire firefighting workforce - $8.8 million (this funding becomes ongoing from 2028-29 onwards)

Supplementation is also expected at year-end for the direct costs of Emergency Response for the season.

It should be noted that FFMVic also has access to funding for the Forest Contractor Program, which is a 5-year investment of $362.3 million from 2024-25 to provide contractor capability for integrated forest and fire management. This funding is provided in DEECA's Management of Public Land and Forests output.

[71] https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/aircraft-deployed-victoria-prepares-fire-season

Aviation

FFMVic's aviation contract model ensures that Victoria has an effective, flexible and innovative aviation firefighting capability to help fight fires and keep communities, assets and environment safe.

DEECA works closely with, and is partially funded by, the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC). NAFC's role is to facilitate the procurement of aviation services. This is conducted via a Resource Management Agreement (RMA) in place with all Australian states and territories. The RMA states NAFC will provide a brokerage procurement service and execute contracts on behalf of Victoria on request and affirms the contract management of all services is the responsibility of the jurisdiction for which the procurement has been carried out.

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) coordinates the tendering process for aviation firefighting nationally; Victoria provides aviation firefighting service needs into this process.

Aircraft are subsequently contracted through the NAFC-coordinated national tendering process and the contracts for use in Victoria are managed by DEECA.

In addition to the 54 contracted fleet, more than 100 aircraft are available on a call when needed to assist with emergencies, planned burning and other activities as required, dependent on suitable weather conditions. These aircraft have supplemented the fleet on days of high fire risk and response and will continue to be accessed as needed to respond to agency needs.

DEECA is responsible for procuring and managing Victoria's aviation capability to support rapid response to bushfires and other major emergency events. This capability also supports bushfire risk reduction activities, including planned burning and the delivery of land management programs. These aviation arrangements are guided by interagency governance to determine the right mix of aircraft required. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) exist between DEECA and other agencies that detail funding, administration and other supporting details.

All Victorian firefighting aircraft are strategically placed across the State for use in emergency response and are repositioned at short notice based on risk.

Victoria has access to a National Fleet of aircraft through the resource sharing arrangement, in which during the high activity fire period, Victoria engaged 2 national black hawks and the national large airtanker with the lead plane to support Victorias fire response.

Forest Contractor Program

The Forest Contractor Program is a Victorian Government initiative, with a $362.3 million investment over five years, established under forest industry transition arrangements following the cessation of commercial native timber harvesting, designed to retain and repurpose the skills, specialised plant, and workforce of former forest contractors to support forest and fire management outcomes across the state. Retaining these contractors under long term agreements, ensures the availability of specialised machinery and operators capable of operating in complex forested and steep terrain environments—capability that would otherwise not be readily available at the required scale during and after fire events.

Under the program, DEECA has secured long term Forest and Fire Management Services Agreements with a cohort of accredited forest contractors, providing additional capacity to deliver authorised works under the *Forests Act 1958*, including fuel management, construction and maintenance of strategic fuel breaks and road networks, hazardous tree management, planned burning preparation and delivery, forest health and regeneration works, and recovery activities following fire, storms, or other emergencies. The program is managed as a coordinated statewide work program with strong governance, planning, and oversight arrangements to ensure works are delivered safely, lawfully, and in line with departmental priorities.

Beyond direct fire deployment, the program has contributed substantially to fire risk reduction and readiness outcomes by enabling the delivery of expanded fuel management works, strategic road and fuel break construction and maintenance, hazardous tree management, and preparation of landscapes for planned burning ahead of and during the fire season.

3.3 Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF)

From 1 July 2025, the ESVF replaced the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL) and includes the broader emergency and disaster response services, in line with other Australian jurisdictions.

The ESVF funds vital life-saving equipment, vehicles, staff, training for volunteers, community education, and recovery support for when Victorians need it most.

The purpose of the ESVF is to provide a dedicated, sustainable funding source for Victoria's emergency services, in the face of more frequent and natural disasters. These emergency services include:

- Fire Rescue Victoria
- Country Fire Authority
- Victoria State Emergency Service
- Triple Zero Victoria
- Emergency Management Victoria
- Forest Fire Management Victoria
- State Control Centre.

As enshrined in legislation, all funds collected by the ESVF have to support Victoria's emergency services.

Any changes to the funding recipients must be made through amendments to the *Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012*.

On 30 May 2025, the Government published in the Victorian Government Gazette the ESVF rates for the year commencing 1 July 2025. It also published the forecast budget allocation from the ESVF to funding recipients.

The forecast funding requirements for each organisation or program are indicative, at a point in time, and only reflect the proportion of each budget funded through the ESVF. These figures are not directly comparable with actual expenditure and do not represent the total funding available to these ESOs.

Actual expenditure will also include funding provided outside of the ESVF such as funding provided during the year in response to urgent unforeseen circumstances – such as bushfires and floods – that cannot be met within existing budgets.

Active eligible volunteers from CFA, VICSES and Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad are able to apply for a rebate on their ESVF liability on their principal place of residence or farm.

3.2.4 Impact of the ESVF on recipients' budgets

The ESVF, like the former FSPL, is only one source available to Government to fund eligible Emergency Services. Government has consistently funded emergency services, above and beyond what is collected through the levy.

The ESVF creates more funding certainty for more emergency services to better reflect the wide range of natural disasters which impact Victoria. For example, VICSES was not included in the FSPL - their inclusion in the ESVF provides legislative protection to their budgets and recognises their important work as an emergency service.

Some elements of ESO budgets are out of the scope of the ESVF, for example sales of goods and services and interest income received by CFA and FRV, that support the operations of these fire entities, are out of scope for ESVF, as they were under the FSPL.

The ESVF Gazette separately identifies some components of ESO budgets, for services and programs delivered on behalf or to the benefit of the ESO through:

- TZV – in relation to the call taking dispatch services for CFA, FRV and VICSES provided by and reflected under TZV for the ESVF
- DJCS – such as the Emergency Management Operational Communications (EMOC) Program, which is separately listed as a recipient in the gazette.

Amendments to the scope of the ESVF or changes to the ESVF gazetted 'percent of funding recipient budget' do not impact the overall budget or State's previously funded investment in eligible Emergency Services.

3.3 Capacity and workforce

Victoria's emergency management sector workforce comprises both paid staff and volunteers.

The Victorian Government has acknowledged that volunteers form a vital part of the emergency management system and considers it is critical they are recognised for the selfless contributions they make to the sector and for their communities. It acknowledges that work continues to engage, train and retain volunteers in all aspects of emergency management[72].

Volunteers provide capacity to manage risk that would otherwise be unachievable on a state-wide scale. Research conducted by EMV in 2020 estimated that approximately 100,000 Victorians contributed their time, skills and resources to ongoing volunteer work in local communities before, during and after emergencies. The total economic value to the community of emergency management volunteers was conservatively valued in 2020 to be $1.9 to $2.5 billion annually[73].

Victoria's career firefighters are among the highest-paid in Australia[74], reflecting the State Government's significant investment in its career firefighting workforce. This contributes to Victoria maintaining the most well-resourced career fire services in the country. In 2024–25 Victoria had the largest paid firefighting workforce of any jurisdiction. Over the past 5 years, the state's total paid firefighting workforce has grown by 17.7%. Based on population, Victoria recorded 90.2 FTE in the firefighting workforce for every 100,000 people, maintaining the highest rate in Australia (excluding volunteers but including support staff).

It is also important to recognise that a response to a major emergency, such as the major fires which occurred over the 2025 - 26 HRWS will involve contributions (including volunteers and personnel) from multiple agencies and departments.

[72] Victorian Government (October 2020) Gov Response Review of 10 years of reform of EM sector and Inquiry into 2019 20 Vic fire season phase 1 report.pdf

[73] Emergency Management Victoria (March 2020) 3Vs Final Report Uncovering the hidden value.pdf

[74] 2026 Report on Government Services (Section D – Emergency Management)

3.3.1 CFA capacity, workforce and assets

As at 30 June 2025, CFA had 28,753 operational volunteers and 23,043 support volunteers. They were supported by 1,374 staff, including 1,132 CFA employees and 242 operational staff seconded from FRV.

In accordance with the FRV Act, the secondment arrangement commenced from 1 July 2020, with FRV and CFA entering into a Secondment Agreement on 31 October 2020. This agreement established arrangements for CFA seconding a defined number of FRV Assistant Chief Fire Officers (50 positions), Commanders (96 positions), Instructors (53 positions), Practical Area for Drills (PAD) Supervisors (8 positions) and PAD Operators (21 positions) to provide operational and volunteer support. Subsequent to the Secondment Agreement CFA and FRV agreed to the provision of an additional 14 Commanders including Commander Relievers and 5 additional ACFOs. These matters are the subject of ongoing work between CFA and FRV.

CFA Volunteers

CFA is committed to sustaining and growing a diverse volunteer base in the context of broader patterns of decline in formal volunteering across Australia.

Over the past 3 years, CFA's coordinated statewide campaigns (e.g. Give Us a Hand) have successfully increased its volunteer intake. The focus of these campaigns is to increase recruitment enquiries from priority groups and regions, particularly people aged 18-44 years, those able to respond to emergency calls in the daytime, women, and people from ethnically diverse communities. CFA has seen an increase in the number of people expressing an interest in being a volunteer (a 37% increase in 2023 and a 21% increase in 2024, compared to 2022 levels). The majority of expressions of interest (62%) have been from people aged 18-44 years and 31% were from women. From 1 January to 30 June 2025, CFA had over 1,400 new volunteers join the organisation, this includes members re-joining CFA and junior members transitioning to senior members. There was also an 11% increase in the number of new applicants in October 2025 compared with the same period in 2024.

In recent years CFA has been focused on building a more positive recruitment and induction experience for new volunteers, including through the development and refinement of the Volunteer Recruitment Hub, a redesign of the General Firefighter course and the development of clear training pathways.

The average recruitment duration for new members has steadily improved in recent years, with the process in 2025 taking almost half the time compared to 2024. Applicant withdrawals also dropped significantly in 2025 compared to the same period in 2024 (148 vs 318). CFA recognises there is more work to be done.

In 2025 CFA commissioned an external review of its recruitment and induction processes and is working to implement a range of improvements. It also released an options paper on a contemporary volunteer membership model to be more in line with member and brigade needs. Consultation with CFA volunteers is currently underway and there will then be further work to determine a sensible approach to implementing the options that have the support of CFA's members.

CFA fleet and maintenance

At 16 January 2026, CFA's fleet of firefighting appliances consists of 2,361 vehicles, including 1,961 tankers, 218 pumpers, and 44 pumper tankers. It is one of the largest firefighting fleets in the country.

CFA maintenance activities ensure that its emergency response vehicles are safe, appropriately equipped and fit for purpose. All CFA emergency response vehicles are subject to an annual

maintenance program and fire-worthy inspection by qualified technical staff to ensure they are in good working order to meet operational need, regardless of age. CFA uses its appliance cascade program to gain maximum value from new investment. When CFA introduces a single new appliance into its fleet, it cascades other existing appliances to brigades within the CFA network which delivers an increase in overall capability across the brigade network. For every new appliance given to a particular brigade there can be up to 3-4 other brigades that receive an appliance of improved capability better suited to their brigade area risk profile.

CFA delivered 89 trucks in 2025 and has programmed to deliver 167 over the next 24 months through the build program.

In 2025 CFA completed the rollout of 29 new ultra heavy tankers. They have predominantly been deployed to areas in the CFA North-West, South-West and West regions with open grasslands. The ultra heavy tankers are valued at $440,000 each, with $12.8 million investment in CFA's Capital Fleet Replacement in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

CFA receives funding for the replacement or upgrade of its fleet in two ways. The grant funding agreement provides ongoing annual base capital funding, of which a significant proportion is applied to fleet. Additional Government investment is provided through the State Budget process.

The 2024-25 Budget provided new funding of $18.58 million over 4 years to replace 15 CFA New Urban Pumpers. In December 2024, the Government announced a further $70.00 million to establish a rolling fleet replacement program for both CFA and VICSES. This funding will help support CFA to replace its existing fleet by providing $10.00 million per annum for fleet replacement.

CFA also receives funding through VESEP, which supports CFA brigades and other eligible volunteer organisations by providing grants for appliances and essential operational equipment. VESEP offers grants of up to $250,000 for items such as new tankers, trucks, pumps, generators, and facility improvements.

The 2024-25 Budget Update *Supporting our emergency services and volunteers* initiative included increased investment in VESEP of more than $62 million over four years, providing $2 for every $1 of funding contributed by CFA brigades to purchase new or upgraded vehicles, equipment and better station facilities.

In 2025-26 CFA will receive $22.61 million in VESEP funding, approximately doubling CFA's allocation in 2024-25, including:

- 13 brigades receiving $445,000 each for new Medium Tankers, including Balnarring, Lorne, Mansfield, Marong Mortlake, Seymour, Silvan, Strathkellar, and Warragul.
- 10 CFA brigades, including Belmont, Corangamite, Grenville, Lake Boga and Whipstick, receiving over $150,000 each to purchase new Big Fill vehicles, significantly improving their operations capability
- 31 CFA brigades, including Benalla, Birch, Churchill, Corryong, Geelong West, Grampians, Kyneton, Nareen, Northern Campaspe, Point Cook and Sale, receiving over $70,000 each to purchase new Field Command Vehicles

CFA Built Assets

CFA maintains the following built assets:

Table 6: CFA built assets

	Number
Fire stations (includes satellite sites)	1,199

Regional, district and HQ offices	23
Command and control facilities	29
Mechanical workshops	13
Training grounds	8
Support facilities (including residences)	9

CFA Equipment

CFA invests in a range of small equipment and in Personal Protective Clothing and Personal Protective Equipment to support volunteers perform their work safely. The Next Generation Wildfire PPC has delivered modernised wildfire PPC with an enhanced level of protection from radiant heat and heat-related illness. The garments have been specifically tailored for both men and women, ensuring a safe and comfortable fit. The design, simulation testing, fit-testing and the procurement of the new garment stocks was supported by supplementary funding from the Victorian Government. In an Australian fire service first, CFA is currently sourcing a new supplier to make fire rated safety boots and gloves specifically designed for women.

3.3.2 FRV capacity and workforce

As at June 2025, FRV employed 4032 professional firefighters, in addition to 765 corporate and technical staff, as outlined in the 2024-25 Annual Report.

The Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* shows that Victoria has the most professional firefighters in the nation, and this significant resourcing helps Victoria to deliver faster response times to structure fires than any other state.

FRV receives funding for the replacement or upgrade of appliances through Government investment. As outlined in FRV's Annual Report, funding for capital expenditure was $28.67 million in 2023-24 and rose to $30.75 million in 2024-25.

The 2024-25 Budget committed new investment of $15.38 million over 4 years to FRV for 5 new Pumper Platform appliances, which will join FRV's fleet by 2028. A further new investment of $40.0 million over 4 years was committed to FRV in the 2025-26 Budget to establish a rolling fleet replacement program. This $40.0 million is expected to provide for up to 19 new appliances, including four Ladder Platforms. Significant resources and planning have gone into the allocation of these committed funds to secure procurement contracts for critical fleet replacement vehicles.

The modernisation and regular replacement of vehicles is a critical part of FRV's fleet management strategy. FRV's priority is not only replacing its fleet of fire appliances over time, but ensuring it is embracing innovation and the latest technology to optimise emergency response capabilities and improve firefighter safety.

Since 2020, FRV has successfully delivered 25 appliances and support vehicles to Victorian communities. This includes:

- 4 Heavy Pumper fire appliances deployed to Carlton (FS03), Northcote (FS13), Ascot Vale (FS50), Hawthorn (FS18) in December 2025.
- 2 Heavy Pumper fire appliances deployed to South Melbourne Fire Station (FS38) and $430.57 million in Windsor Fire Station (FS35) in October 2025.
- 3 new Pumper Platform fire appliances deployed to Mildura (FS72), Warrnambool (FS70) and Shepparton (FS75) in late 2024 and early 2025.

Current Fleet

FRV's current fleet (as at 31 December 2025) is made up of a mixture of different vehicle types. The fleet currently operates out of 85 fire stations and specialist facilities across the state.

Table 7: FRV firefighting appliances by category

Category	Type	Number
Firefighting road appliances	Primary appliances (pumpers)	156
	Aerial appliances (e.g. ladder platforms)	25
	Specialist appliances (e.g. heavy rescue vehicles)	31
Other firefighting appliances	Fireboats	10
	Technical operation pods	28
	TOTAL firefighting appliances	**250**

FRV ensures that appropriate equipment is deployed to emergencies and utilises its full fleet across Victoria to ensure a high level of availability. When appliances undergo scheduled or extended maintenance, FRV utilises its service exchange appliance pool to ensure the community is well protected and capability levels at fire stations are maintained. Appliances that are taken out of service for repair are not released from FRV workshops and reintroduced to FRV's fleet until they are safe and fully operational.

Fleet age and maintenance

At 30 June 2025 FRV had 212 firefighting road appliances in service. 40 new appliances are set to come online through to 2030.

FRV's medium to long-term planning is based on a target fleet replacement age of 15 years, but fire trucks do not expire simply because they reach a certain age. FRV's firefighting appliances are specially built and can remain in service for long periods, depending on their usage and workload. Before a vehicle is considered for replacement, FRV undertakes a detailed vehicle assessment to determine its priority in the Fleet Replacement Program.

FRV has also recently opened an additional metropolitan workshop to provide additional maintenance support, increasing capacity and enabling more trucks to be serviced proactively.

3.3.3 FFMVic capacity and workforce

As referred in 3.1.3, FFMVic has more than 2,600 seasonal and permanent personnel with a fire and emergency management role. FFMVic partners also include a network of over 500 independent contractors all across Victoria who supply a range of forest and civil contracting services and play a vital role in the state's bushfire management and emergency response capacity.

FFMVic proactively monitors fire risk statewide, drawing on input from regional and district staff to ensure that workforce and equipment — including vehicles — can be deployed responsively as conditions change.

FFMVic has access to plant and fleet to support preparedness and response activities. These are broken into Specialist Fleet, Plant, and Trucks. These resources are available for deployment to

response efforts throughout the season and are also used for preparedness activities and training activities.

Table 8: FFMVic fleet, equipment and assets as at 19 February 2026

Specialist fleet	**Number of resources available**
Ultralight G-Wagens	290
Ultralight Toyota Landcruiser slip-on units	206
Surge Ultralight Tanker Landcruiser slip-on units	52
Heavy Tanker – Unimog	51
Heavy Tanker – Isuzu	36
Light Tanker	4
Vehicles for transporting personnel	390 base fleet; 38 seasonal surge pool; 40 additional seasonal hire for enhanced preparedness
Fire Boat	2
Plant	**Number of resources available**
Small dozer	43
Large dozer	15
Wheeled tractors	30
Graders	13
Loaders	9
Backhoe	15
Excavator	5
Trucks and other equipment	**Number of resources available**
Transporters	112
Fork lifts	59
Aviation fuel trucks	5
Trucks and other equipment	**Number**
DEECA Managed Level 3 ICC Facilities	18
DEECA Managed RCC facility	1
Fire Towers	65
Work Centres	82
DEECA Retardant Mixing & Loading Facilities	13

External Plant

DEECA manages a State-wide External Plant Panel that provides the Department with access to skilled contractors, qualified operators, and fit-for-purpose mobile plant to support fire, land, and forest management activities across Victoria. Established in 2010 and managed by DEECA's Forest and Fire Fleet Unit, the panel is mandatory for engaging external plant for DEECA-managed fire suppression, readiness, and response, as well as for civil and planned land management works. Contractors on the panel are rigorously assessed to ensure compliance with safety, operational, insurance, and contractual requirements, enabling consistent and reliable engagement across emergency and non-emergency activities.

The External Plant Panel delivers significant value by strengthening Victoria's bushfire response capability through rapid mobilisation of compliant resources during emergencies, while also supporting planned works through transparent and competitive procurement processes. The panel improves safety outcomes by enforcing consistent plant guarding, operator competency, and inspection standards, reducing risk to personnel and communities. It also provides value for money through pre-determined rates for fire suppression and market-tested pricing for civil works, underpinned by strong governance and audit arrangements. Importantly, the panel supports regional and rural economies by prioritising local contractor participation, embedding external plant capability within communities and ensuring scalable, flexible operational capacity during periods of heightened fire risk.

Appendix A – Fuel management arrangements

Roadsides

The management of roadsides for fire prevention purposes is specifically referred to in the CFA Act in section 43(1), which states that:

It shall be the duty of every municipal council and every public authority to take all practicable steps to prevent the occurrence of fires on and to minimise the danger of the spread of fires on or from:

- any land vested in it or under its control or management, and any road under its care and management.

CFA has developed and published *Roadside Fire Management Guidelines*[75]. These guidelines detail the following objectives in respect to roadside fire management:

- Prevent fires on roadsides,
- Contain fires on roadsides,
- Manage safety of road-users,
- Provide control lines, and
- Assist recovery from roadside fires.

Councils and road managers routinely work with fire agencies through an integrated planning process to identify, plan and deliver a planned program of works that aims to mitigate the risks associated with fire and roadside fuels. Typical roadside fuel management treatments include mowing, slashing, spraying and burning.

Public land

Approximately one third of Victoria is public land managed by DEECA, Parks Victoria and other public authorities. The *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land* [76] provides the primary objectives for bushfire management on public land in Victoria which are:

- People and community safety
- Critical infrastructure and economic resilience
- Aboriginal self-determination in cultural fire and bushfire management
- Ecosystem resilience and nature conservation.

To support fire and emergency management, DEECA maintains a network of approximately 50,000 kilometres of fire access roads.

Leaves, small branches, long grass and undergrowth can fuel bushfires, making them faster, more intense and harder to control. DEECA's fuel management program helps reduce this danger by removing excess vegetation (or fuel), protecting communities, the environment and critical infrastructure.

DEECA reduces fuel-driven bushfire risk in many ways – from delivering planned burning and non-burn management works, to preventing new ignitions through fire bans and campfire controls, early detection of bushfires from our fire towers and reconnaissance flights, aggressive first attack by aircraft, rappel firefighters and ground crews to keep bushfires small, community engagement and

[75] Roadside Fire Management Guidelines

[76] Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025

emergency warning systems such as the VicEmergency website and app to help Victorians stay safe from bushfires.

The two main approaches to reducing fuel are:

- Planned burning – a carefully planned and controlled process where low intensity fire is used to reduce dry vegetation such as leaves and small branches that can build up over time and make forests more flammable.
- Non-burn fuel management – using techniques like mowing, spraying, and maintaining public road networks to manage fuel in areas with steep slopes, high fuel loads or close to communities and critical infrastructure.

Since 2021 DEECA has also undertaken a storm debris program, following major storm events that created large tracts of course woody debris in areas across the State that increased bushfire risk. This program is on target to have treated all impacted areas by 30 June 2026.

Fuel management on public land is informed by the four Fuel Management Zones (FMZs):

- Asset Protection Zone - An area around properties and infrastructure where fuel is managed intensively to provide the highest level of localised protection from bushfire to human life, residential property and other key community values.
- Bushfire Moderation Zone - An area around properties and infrastructure where fuel is managed to reduce the size, spread and intensity of bushfires as they move through the landscape.
- Landscape Management Zone - An area where fuel is managed to prevent bushfires and support their safe and effective suppression and apply fire for other land and resource management outcomes.
- Planned Burn Exclusion Zone – An area to prevent direct impacts of planned burning in areas which are intolerant to fire and/or to prevent planned burning being applied in areas which are not considered suitable for safe and effective delivery.

Private land

Under the CFA Act, CFA has responsibility for the prevention and suppression of fires in Country Area of Victoria. The Country Area of Victoria is defined in the CFA Act and is approximately two-thirds of the State by land area.

Fuel reduction to minimise impacts and aid suppression is a key component of mitigation of bushfire risk. CFA is not a land management agency and relies heavily upon grant funding received from DEECA to build, maintain and deliver its fuel management capabilities. CFA, as the fire authority for the Country Area of Victoria, can only conduct fuel reduction activities on behalf and at the request of the land manager or landowner.

CFA fuel management activities are conducted by CFA brigades, who consist of volunteer firefighters. The tactical planning and authorisation of fuel management operations is supported by CFA staff who are technical specialists.

Strategic planning for the delivery of fuel reduction activities is coordinated at the municipal and regional tiers through respective fire planning committees under Victorian Emergency Management legislation. The committees are multi-agency and cover all land tenures.

CFA brigades are supported to undertake fuel management work through the Safer Together Program, and the development of second-generation Strategic Bushfire Management Plans. Both structures inform the inclusion of treatments under the Joint Fuel Management Program, which establishes a three-year program for scheduling of fuel management activities on all land

tenures. CFA's fuel management activities have continued to mature following the implementation of recommendations received from the *Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) inquiry into Reducing Bushfire Risks*[77] that was tabled in Parliament in October 2020. CFA continue to work cooperatively with VAGO as they seek to monitor the progress made through the Final Engagement Strategy: Reducing Bushfire Risks, which was commissioned in late 2025.

Private landowners and occupiers are responsible for ensuring their activities, use of fire and the level of vegetation on their land does not present an unacceptable danger to life or property from the threat of fire.

As part of the strategic bushfire management planning process, land and fire management agencies have undertaken an analysis to define Bushfire Risk Engagement Areas (BREAs). BREAs identify parts of the landscape where managing bushfire fuels is most effective in reducing risk. This helps to indicate the priority areas in a region where agencies can work with communities to reduce bushfire fuels.

BREAs help focus conversations on the range of treatment options to reduce bushfire risk. This may include other actions where reducing fuels may not be possible. On-ground discussions and assessments between agencies and the community will determine the treatments that best suit a particular place. Other measures for preparing a property include retrofitting existing dwellings so they can better withstand bushfires.

Landowners and occupiers are encouraged to remove fire hazards and manage fuels around their property before the Fire Danger Period. This routinely includes cutting long grass, removing fallen timber and rubbish, and clearing leaves and branches from gutters. Information on the clearing of native vegetation around houses can be found by contacting the relevant council.

To assist property owners in the management of vegetation on their land and mitigate their bushfire risk, specific planning permit exemptions exist in Victorian planning schemes to allow the clearance of vegetation around certain dwellings to create or maintain defendable space that assists bushfire protection. The level of hazard reduction on private land can influence fire behaviour, survivability and can either complement or detract from the effectiveness of hazard reduction on adjoining private and public land.

Where unacceptable risks are identified, Municipal Fire Prevention Officers (MFPOs) appointed under the CFA Act and the FRV Act enforce fuel hazard management on private land. Authorised Officers under the Forests Act 1958 may also direct any owner or occupier or person or body of persons having the control or management of any land within 1·5 kilometres (unless excised) of the boundary of any State forest, national park or protected public land - to remove, destroy by burning or abate in any manner directed, a fire hazard on such land.

Farmers, farm managers and other primary producers have special need to consider fire safety, actively plan for and mitigate fire risk, manage vegetation and on occasion undertake farming activities that present a fire risk. Fire safety on the farm content has been developed for farmers and other rural landholders.

[77] Reducing Bushfire Risks | Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Appendix B – CFA community preparedness programs

Community engagement approach

CFA defines Community Engagement as "a planned process with a specific purpose: to empower communities to prevent and prepare for fire." It involves working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.

Community engagement builds the community's preparedness for fire by:

- enhancing their knowledge
- developing their skills
- strengthening their connection to CFA
- creating understanding of shared responsibilities for fire safety.

Engaging with communities is critical for CFA to achieve its vision and the way we engage is foundational to our success as a progressive, community-based organisation that puts the community at the centre of everything we do and provides programs and services that make a positive difference.

CFA's Community Engagement Approach[78] outlines CFA's capability and commitment to meaningfully connect with local communities and empower them to prepare for fire. CFA have adapted the Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework to establish how CFA will continue to enhance its community engagement through the delivery of evidence-based, tailored resources for the benefit of the Victorian community.

CFA's approach draws on the concept of sharing responsibility. CFA articulates its role and its expectations of communities as part of the engagement process. In doing so, it highlights that collective effort, experience and expertise makes both community and the CFA better prepared and safer from fire.

Fire safety programs

CFA offers a range of Fire Safety Programs to empower and prepare individuals and communities to survive fire. Its suite of tailored programs and resources help build the capacity and capability of communities by enhancing their knowledge, developing their skills and strengthening community bonds. Refer to below for a summary of CFA's Fire Safety Programs.

Table 9: CFA Fire Safety Programs

Grassfire and bushfire programs	
Fire Safety Essentials	As CFA's entry level bushfire safety program, this is a practical session focused on personalising risk and prompting action, delivered by a trained CFA member using storytelling and local knowledge.
Fire Safety Planning Workshops	For community members with some knowledge of their risk, this is a facilitated community workshop covering local risk and fire behaviour, leading to development of a bushfire or grassfire survival plan.
Community Fireguard	A behaviour-change program that assists small community groups to build knowledge, networks, and capacity to prepare for, respond to, and

[78] CFA community engagement approach

	recover from fire through a series of facilitated workshops or independent group meetings
Community-based Bushfire Management	Community Based Bushfire Management (CBBM) is a place-based, community-centred approach to reducing bushfire risk. Ten facilitators work directly with select high-risk communities across Victoria, with a focus on developing long-term partnerships between communities, fire and land management agencies, and local governments. Through community-centred practice, facilitators create opportunities to share knowledge, support respectful conversations and encourage learning and shared decision making based on the values, priorities and strengths of communities.
Community scenario workshops	Using a real or hypothetical scenario, this is an interactive workshop using localised mapping and modelling to give people a good understanding of resident's specific risk and how fire could impact their environment.
Farm Fire Safety	Practical fire safety information for farmers, land holders, contractors, and agricultural workers, often delivered in partnership with agricultural industry organisations
Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS)	PAVS provides property-based, face-to-face interaction between CFA and residents living in high bushfire risk areas and enables the delivery of safety information relevant to their risk.
Residential and structural fire safety programs	
Reduce the Risk (Home Fire Safety)	Delivered to a group, this is a practical one-hour session about how house fires commonly start, how to prevent them, use of fire blankets and fire extinguishers and home fire escape plans.
Early Fire Safe	Delivered to a group of new parents, this is a practical one-hour information session which provides information about the prevention of burn and scald injuries.
Alpine Resort Program	Delivered via visits to Alpine resorts, this program seeks to increase awareness of fire risk and compliance with fire safety requirements
Programs and activities for children and young people	
Fire Wise Kids (FWK)	Fire Wise Kids (FWK) offers five lessons delivered by CFA for kindergarten and primary school students, to teach kids fire safety. The program aligns with the Victorian curriculum (F-10 V2). It is meant for kindergarten and primary school students - 4 to 10 years old. Different lessons are available for each age group and are based on developmental levels. Fire Wise Kids is designed to give children age-appropriate information about fire safety, including how to help prevent fires starting. This is important as children under 12 are at high risk during a home fire or bushfire.
Truck Time	CFA offers Truck Time which is CFA's hands-on fire truck and equipment experiential program for children where they can see a fire truck, watch a fire hose demonstration and meet a firefighter in person. Truck Time can take place at community events, school fetes, fire brigade open days, kinders and schools.

Programs for people at higher risk	
Smoke Alarm Installation Service	CFA members and partner and service groups visit local households at higher risk of residential fire to check and install smoke alarms, plus deliver home fire safety information.
Emergency Planning Advice Service	Delivered in partnership with the Red Cross, EPAS engages people in their homes and provides a way to consider their capabilities and support needs in planning and preparing for emergencies
Prevent Detect Escape: home fire safety for people at higher risk	Delivered as a e-learning module or as a group session, this program uses a person-centred capability approach to increase awareness about home fire risk and provide practical ways to increase fire safety in the home.
Bushfire Planning – how to support your clients (Fire Ready for Community Service Providers)	Delivered as a e-learning module or as a group session, this program provides fire safety information for the community and social service workforce traveling to high-risk locations and equip them with the knowledge and skills to assist their vulnerable clients/patients with their bushfire survival plan.
Bushfire Planning - you and the person you care for (Fire Ready for Community Service Providers)	Delivered as a e-learning module or as a group session, this program support people who are providing unpaid care or support to family or community members living in high bushfire risk areas with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or age-related condition.
Bushfire Safety for Workers	Delivered as a e-learning module or as a group session, this session is for people who work and travel in high-risk bushfire areas, raising awareness of risks and provide safety advice to prevent loss of life during a bushfire or grassfire.

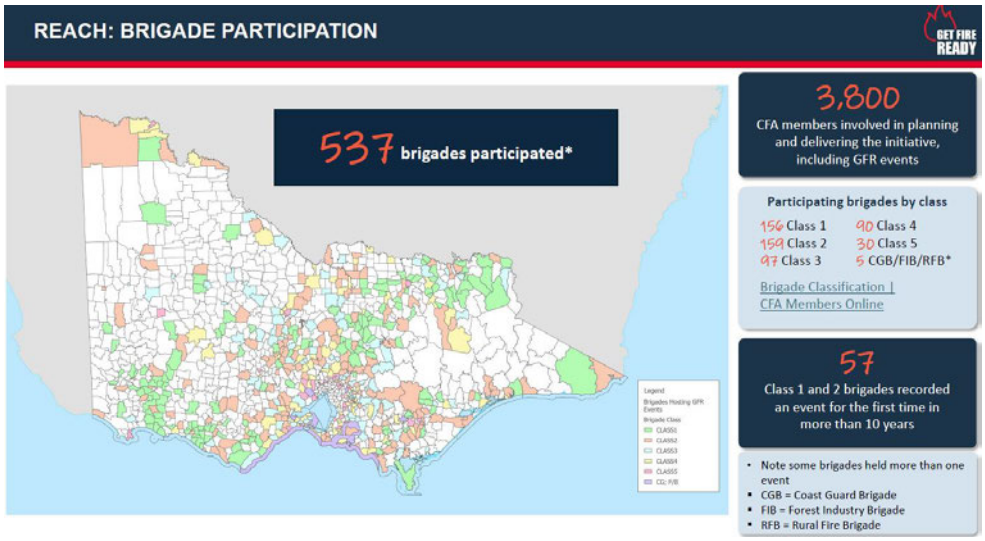
Case Study – CFA's Get Fire Ready initiative

The inaugural Get Fire Ready (GFR) initiative was designed to help communities across Victoria prepare for what the AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook Spring 2025 predicted to be a challenging fire season.

GFR focused on three areas: Property preparation, fire planning, and knowledge and use of the VicEmergency App. The initiative was sponsored by the Chief Officer.

More than 500 brigades elected to participate (compared with the initial target of 250 brigades) and in total 3,800 CFA members delivered 547 events across Victoria. The events directly engaged more than 40,000 people about fire safety. Another 310,000 residents receiving direct mailouts of newly-created flyers which brought together information about fire plans, fire danger ratings and the VicEmergency App for the first time. Millions more Victorian citizens were reached through GFR statewide advertising.

Figure 14: Brigade participation in GFR

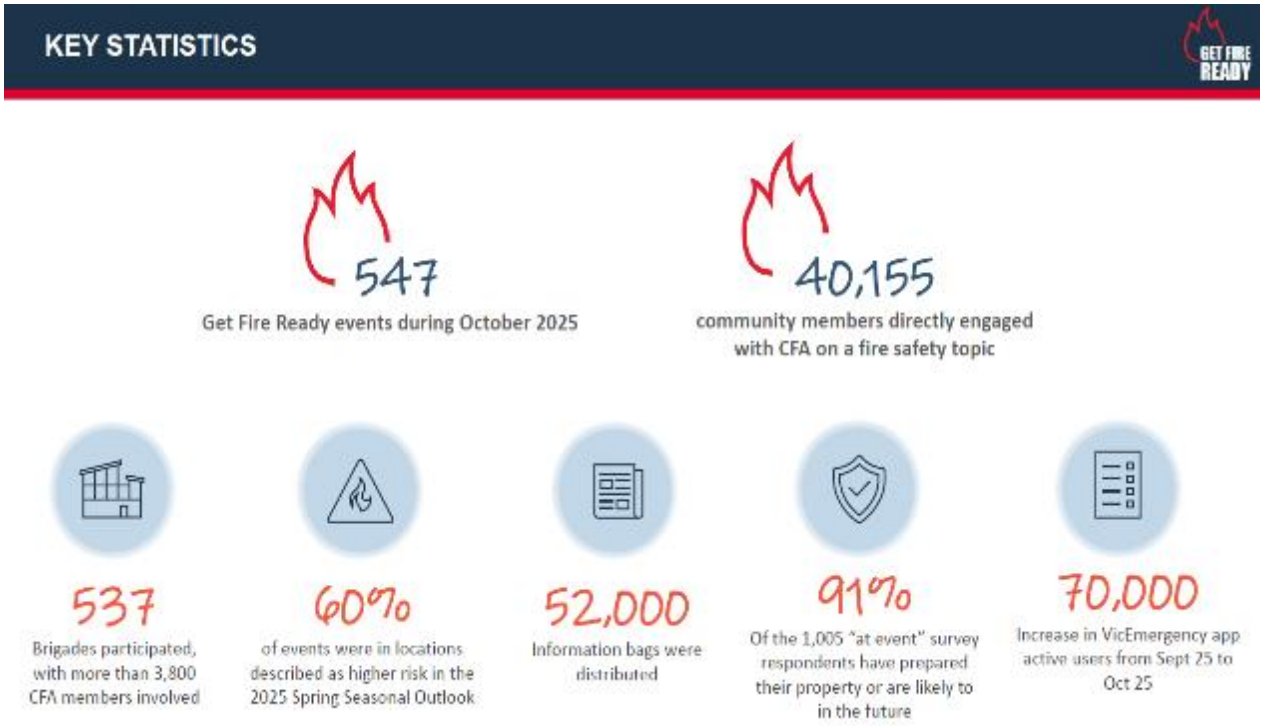


GFR events were supported by new resources such as large-format maps of local fire risk to facilitate conversation with community members and information packs with key resources focused on property preparation, what to do in the event of fire and how to set watch zones on the VicEmergency app.

Figure 15: Brigade participation in GFR

The majority of events (60%) were held in higher fire-risk areas and featured a mix of station-based open days, community events, targeted fire safety sessions and demonstrations, with many family-friendly activities that attracted large audiences.

Figure 16: Key GFR statistics



To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, face-to-face structured interviews were conducted with 1,000 community members. This showed that 70% of attendees felt better informed to prepare for the fire season. The VicEmergency app gained 70,000 new users between September and October and there was an increase of almost 300% in visits to the VicEmergency *"How do I create a Watch Zone"*, and increased traffic to the Victorian Government Fire Planner. Independent follow-up research shows high levels of reported post event property preparation actions, strong community sentiment toward the initiative, and clear opportunities to strengthen support through practical assistance, reminders, and resources.

Appendix C – Information and warnings

The provision of information and warnings in relation to fires in Victoria is detailed in the State priorities and all fire agencies have legislated responsibilities.

The EMC may also seek support from the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC) to ensure the state-level messages from all agencies involved in the management of emergency response, recovery and the consequences of the emergency are included in the key messages to the public. Regional and Incident Joint Public Information Committees may be stood up if required or directed by the Regional Controller (RC) or Incident Controller (IC).

Provision of warnings to the community

Timely, relevant and tailored warnings and information must be issued to potentially affected communities. The IC is responsible for authorising all warnings and information provided to the public. To assist the rapid communication of warnings and information, the IC may authorise a Deputy IC or Public Information Officer (PIO) to authorise the release of warnings and information to the community. No additional authorisation is required once the IC or delegate has authorised the information or warning.

Where an extreme and imminent threat to life exists and it is not practicable to obtain authorisation from the IC in the circumstances, warnings may be initiated by any response agency personnel. The IC is required to be advised as soon as possible.

Victoria's emergency warnings arrangements[79] include the use of Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS), telephone alerts and message standards.

Warning levels and templates

Warning templates provide the IC and Public Information personnel the opportunity to include targeted information and specific actions for the communities affected. Warnings should be tailored to the community and reflect the impacts the bushfire is having or may have on the community. This includes information such as road closures, the direction the fire is moving in, where the community should go and information about what the community might see or experience; relief and support services, and health advice as required.

Levels of community warnings and information

The Australian Warning System[80] has three warning levels, with a consistent set of icons for a number of emergencies, including bushfire.

[79] Victoria's emergency warnings arrangements

[80] Australian Warning System

Table 10: Australian Warning System relevant to bushfire

Icon	Warning Level	Description
	Advice	An incident has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.
	Watch and Act	There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.
	Emergency Warning	An Emergency Warning is the highest level of warning. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

Threat is Reduced messages

A Threat is Reduced message is issued when the threat has subsided and people may return to normal activity. A Threat is Reduced message needs to be issued whenever a Warning (Watch and Act) or Emergency Warning has been issued. A Threat is Reduced – Safe to Return message is required to be issued if Evacuation warnings have been issued.

Community information

Community Information is used to provide the community with information if an incident is creating community interest but does not pose a threat to the community.

Publishing Warning and Information Areas (Polygon)

Warnings and information issued to the community will have the warning area (polygon) shown on the map published to the VicEmergency website[81] and app. Incident Controllers (ICs) should ensure that the polygon associated with the warning or information captures the community who needs to act.

Community meetings

To ensure that local communities feel supported and informed, it is important to engage in two-way interaction to help foster community connection. The Public Information Officer (PIO) can provide advice on the best ways to engage the impacted community.

A key way of engaging the community is through community meetings. It is important to ensure that any community meetings planned:

[81] VicEmergency website

- Are led by people with local knowledge, preferably people who are trusted by the community.
- Are structured for two way conversations.
- Use the tools available to properly record issues raised by community members, so you can respond.
- Outcomes from the meeting should be reported to the Incident, Regional and State tiers to add to situational awareness, with a focus on sharing outcomes with councils.

An example is the importance of staying up to date with emergency warnings was emphasised throughout the meeting, with community members urged to make decisions while they still had time.

It is well established that the use of trusted voices during emergency events is highly effective and fosters cooperation and confidence during a crisis. Case studies from CFA and the Deputy Incident Controller during the initial days of the Longwood fire is provided in **Appendix H**.

Warning channels

There are numerous methods for providing information and warnings to the community during an emergency, which include:

- emergency broadcasters (designated community radio stations, ABC radio, local radio, Sky News). For Emergency Warning and Evacuation Warnings, the SEWS can be played prior to the warning being read
- media releases, press conferences and interviews
- social media (Facebook, Twitter)
- VicEmergency website
- VicEmergency app
- variable message signs and VicRoads overhead gantry signs
- email distribution lists (local communities and EMTs)
- community meetings and door knocks.

Community Alert Sirens

There are Community Alert Sirens[82] in 40 communities across the State; many in bushfire prone areas.

A siren is triggered through the warnings platform with the issue of any Warning (Watch & Act), Emergency Warning or Prepare to Evacuate or Evacuate Now, unless otherwise requested by the IC. The siren will sound for five minutes to indicate that a significant emergency has been identified and the community should 'seek further information'.

JSOP04.01 Public Information and Warnings for Class 1 Emergencies[83] provides guidance on community information and warnings before, during and after emergencies.

[82] https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/emergency-information-and-services/community-alert-sirens

[83] https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/JSOP/SOP-J04.01.pdf

Appendix D – Operational safety arrangements

Safe Person Approach (SPA)

Applying the SPA, agencies have responsibility to make sure systems of work are in place which allow work to be undertaken safely and, equally, personnel have a responsibility to ensure they work in accordance with agreed protocols. Each person has a responsibility for ensuring that their work practices do not result in an unacceptable level of risk to themselves or to others around them.

Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA)

DRA is a simple continuous risk assessment process that allows operational personnel to rapidly and effectively assess risk, to decide on appropriate actions and controls and ensure responder safety in the rapidly changing operational environment.

When assessing risk, emergency services personnel safety is paramount.

DRA applies to all hazards associated with emergency response and operational activities and is carried out by all personnel from all agencies whenever there is an unexpected change to the plan or work environment. DRA is an intuitive thought process and is typically not recorded.

JSOP08.02 – Dynamic Risk Assessment[84] outlines the practice of continuous DRA as a component of all operational activities, including emergency response and training, to ensure responder safety is maintained.

During established incidents, documented risk assessments are used to assess the options developed for fire containment and control.

Red Flag Warnings

Red Flag Warnings is a process used by fire agencies for communicating critical safety information to all incident personnel, to support decision making regarding strategy, tactics and deployment of resources.

JSOP03.11 – Red Flag Warnings[85] details this process.

A Red Flag Warning is a message issued when there is a significant change to any critical information that may adversely affect the safety of personnel located at an emergency.

A Red Flag Warning should be issued when there is, or is predicted to be, a significant risk to safety due to changed circumstances, including but not limited to:

- weather conditions
- incident conditions and/or behaviour
- equipment availability
- communications arrangements
- access.

[84] JSOP08.02 – Dynamic Risk Assessment

[85] JSOP03.11 – Red Flag Warnings

LACES

In emergencies like bushfires, on ground responders rely on the use of safety zones and escape routes for safety as conditions change. In these situations, LACES provides a system to maintain safety. Alternate systems of work may be available to manage particular risks encountered during emergency work. If an alternative system is not available, or is unsuitable, LACES (see below) should be considered as part of the Dynamic Risk Assessment process.

Figure 17: LACES

L	OOKOUTS
A	WARENESS
C	OMMUNICATIONS
E	SCAPE ROUTES
S	AFETY ZONES

Health monitoring

Health Monitoring helps mitigate health risks to responders and identify those who may be at risk of adverse health outcomes as a result of their response to an emergency incident.

It includes taking vital signs, and the assessment of presenting symptoms and relevant medical history to determine if a person's health is impacted by their involvement in incident response.

All personnel attending and working at bushfires are strongly encouraged to undertake health monitoring to support their health and welfare, however health monitoring is not mandatory except in circumstances where the Standard for Managing Exposure to Significant Carbon Monoxide Emissions - Responder Health[86] states that all personnel are required to undertake health monitoring.

JSOP08.05 – Health Monitoring – Emergency Personnel[87] for further information and the process for requesting Health Monitoring.

Hazardous trees

Tree hazard is a major risk to firefighters and responders at all stages of operations, from active suppression, mopping up and patrol, through to recovery. All reasonable steps must be taken to protect firefighters and responders (including those providing relief and recovery functions) from tree hazards. Awareness and identification of trees which present a hazard need to form part of ongoing dynamic risk assessment performed by all personnel. During an attack on a going fire, personnel need to be particularly vigilant in identifying hazard trees and treating any unacceptable risk.

Following the passage of the fire, hazard trees within striking distance of access/control lines or transport corridors require assessment and treatment as soon as possible, and before the commencement of any mop-up/blacking out/patrol. Only appropriately qualified or endorsed personnel can assess, mark and treat hazardous trees on the fire ground (including staging/briefing/assembly points), where practicable.

Hazardous trees are a significant and often unseen threat following bushfires, and their instability frequently requires roads and access tracks to remain closed for extended periods. Fire-affected

[86] Standard for Managing Exposure to Significant Carbon Monoxide Emissions - Responder Health

[87] JSOP08.05 – Health Monitoring – Emergency Personnel

trees can fall without warning, sometimes days or weeks after a fire has passed, posing a fatal risk to anyone entering the area. This danger, combined with the presence of fallen powerlines, compromised telecommunications and public infrastructure, and asbestos from destroyed buildings, meant that reopening roads before full assessment and treatment would have exposed the public and responders to unacceptable risk. Safety therefore remained the overriding priority, with extensive briefings focused on hazardous trees, electrical hazards and strict traffic management controls to prevent unauthorised entry into the fireground. Aerial Information Gathering flights provided updated perimeter mapping and supported impact assessments to guide these safety decisions.

JSOP08.03 – Tree Hazard – Fire[88] has developed to mitigate the risk to emergency services personnel.

WATCHOUT

WATCHOUT (see below) is an acronym used to remind firefighters of potential dangers to their safety and to give advice on safe work practices. Understanding the meaning of the acronym will help perform a more comprehensive risk assessment.

Figure 18: WATCHOUT

W	EATHER dominates fire behaviour, so keep informed
A	CTIONS need to be based on current and expected fire behaviour
T	RY OUT at least two safe escape routes
C	OMMUNICATE with your supervisor, your crew and adjoining crews
H	AZARDS beware of variations in fuels and steep slopes
O	BSERVE changes in wind speed, direction, temperature, humidity and cloud
U	NDERSTAND your instructions, make sure that you are understood
T	HINK clearly, be alert and act decisively before your situation becomes critical

[88] JSOP08.03 – Tree Hazard – Fire

Appendix E – Long term impacts in fire patterns/conditions

General temperature and rainfall

Australia's mean temperature has increased by 1.4 °C since 1910 with a rapid increase in extreme heat events, while rainfall has declined in the southern and eastern regions of the continent[89].

Research conducted at the Australian National University (ANU)[90] and CSIRO[91] clearly demonstrated the links between climate change and fire activity in south-eastern Australia.

Climate change and Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI)

In Melbourne, climate projections suggest that by 2100, the number of days where the FFDI is expected to be above 25 will increase by more than 100% under a high emissions scenario[92].

Research[93] looked at effects of climate change on future fire seasons and agency Incident Control Centre (ICC) activation triggers.

Across Victoria, climate change will increase ICC activations by up to 26% by mid-century, and up to 60% by the end of the century, compared to the reference period (2000-2020) under the high emissions (RCP 8.5) scenario.

Climate change and overnight fuel moisture content (FMC) and relative humidity (RH)

Anecdotal evidence from forest firefighters suggests that nighttime relative humidity is lower in recent years compared to their heuristic baseline, low RH at night can make fire management operations, including night-time backburning, more challenging.

Recent research from the US provides an evidence base for these observations:

- Large wildfire driven increases in nighttime fire activity observed across CONUS from 2003–2020[94]
- Multifactor Change in Western U.S. Nighttime Fire Weather[95]
- Warming weakens the night-time barrier to global fire[96]

Data and research from an Australian perspective are lacking, this would be a valuable area for future agency research, with direct links to fire suppression strategy selection and effectiveness in the future.

Case study analyses of data from a DEECA's Automatic Fuel Moisture Meter (AFMM) site during the Yarram Gap fires illustrates field observations of low overnight humidity (see below graph). The red arrow points to evening FMC changes the night before a significant "blow up" day on 26 December 2024. FMC typically increases overnight with cooler temperatures and higher RH values, which can be seen in the standard cycling of FMC up and down in the graph below. However, the overnight increase before 26 December 2024 is much lower than other nights,

[89] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27225-4

[90] https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-020-00065-8

[91] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27225-4

[92] https://connectsci.au/wf/article-abstract/30/8/596/21809/Downscaled-GCM-climate-projections-of-fire-weather

[93] Research funded by the Safer Together program

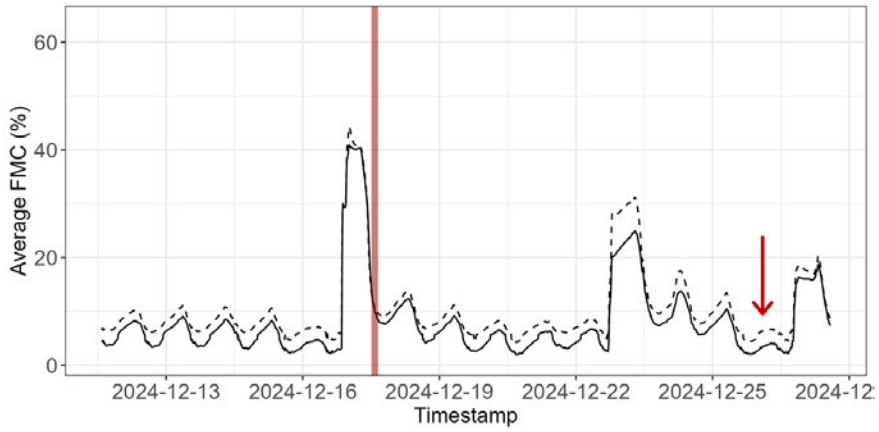
[94] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0034425721004971

[95] https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/clim/38/10/JCLI-D-24-0473.1.xml

[96] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-04325-1

demonstrating that fuels remained dry. Given the relationship between FMC and RH in the absence of rain, this is likely strongly linked to poor RH recovery overnight.

Figure 19: Modelled fuel moisture content taken from the AFMM at Field's Tk during the Yarram Gap fire. The vertical red line is when the fire ignited, the increase in FMC is associated with the passing of a storm, lightning from this storm started the fire. The red arrow toward the right of the figure is point to the FMC value the evening before a significant "blow up" day on 26 December 2024.



Appendix F – Specific department/agency-led preparedness activities

Individual departments and agencies undertook a range of preparedness activities. Below is information on key department / agency led preparedness activities.

DEECA/FFMVic

DEECA/FFMVic undertakes extensive preparedness activities year-round to ensure readiness for all emergency types that DEECA is responsible for under the SEMP. This includes bushfires on public land, wildlife welfare arising from an emergency event, biosecurity incursions (such as emergency animal disease and emergency plant pest and disease), energy supply disruption, and water and wastewater service disruption.

Pre-season preparedness activities include:

- Issuing the Chief Fire Officers Directive and Intent
- Accreditation, testing, training and equipping of firefighters and incident control staff, including administering annual fitness and medical testing programs.
- Delivery of preseason briefings, State, Regional and District. (includes multi agency level 3 briefings)
- Recruitment of Seasonal Forest and Fire Operational Officers. For 2025-26, this included recruitment of an additional 133 Seasonal Forest and Fire Operations Officers based on forecast elevated bushfire risk across the state. These staff were deployed on taskforces as part of response operations across the state, providing additional capacity for fire suppression. These resources were bolstered by deployment of interstate and international resources.
- Developing and publishing of Departmental, District, Regional, State and multi-agency rosters.
- Preseason maintenance of mobile firefighting assets, servicing of operational firefighting fleet including provision for a contingency fleet, contractor plant compliance inspections, and base camp refresh.
- Procurement and management of aviation contracted fleet on behalf of Victorian Emergency Management Sector.
- Maintenance, auditing and testing of Level 3 Control Centres, Airbases and Regional Control Centres.
- Auditing of state retardant stock levels and resupplying of regional airbases.
- Maintaining forest roads, including track clearing, debris removal, crossings, bridges and fire towers; and
- Creating and maintaining fuel breaks in the forest to support rapid access and to provide control lines for backburning.
- Procurement of additional seasonal supplies of PPE and PPC consumables and essential firefighting equipment into DEECA’s State Logistics Centre.
- Delivery of capability programs including fire and emergency training events and accreditation of personnel, including surge resources from across DEECA.

- Rappel training for specialised crew (Additional recruitment of 4 positions to enhance effectiveness of program based on elevated risk profiles).
- Development of regional Local Mutual Aid Plans, detailing joint business operations to support Victorian communities.
- Publishing the Regional Readiness and Response plan supplements, detailing first attack response protocols and authorised accredited departmental staff.
- Training for agency staff and members of the Wildlife Emergency Support Network (veterinary staff and wildlife welfare volunteers) to undertake wildlife assessment and triage.
- Testing of IT systems to support coordination and management of staff deployed to emergencies, ensuring robust arrangements in place with vendors to support 24hr EM response.
- Implementation of Seasonal Emergency Management Workforce Framework. Specifically targeting former FFMVic Staff holding specialist skills (for example Level 3 Roles) to ensure enhance capability.

FFMVic's bushfire prevention program is a multi-year program and includes planned burning and mechanical fuel treatment. Its role is to moderate fire behaviour and create safer opportunities for control.

Agriculture Victoria

Agriculture Victoria undertook a range of preparedness and readiness activities leading into the 2025-26 summer, including:

- Delivering and promoting bushfire preparedness information for farm businesses through its website, service delivery programs and media channels. Key activities included promoting the Fire Preparedness Toolkit, publishing the Resilience and Recovery newsletter, using media platforms to communicate seasonal risk messages, and participating in briefings during high-risk weather periods.
- Working closely with local government and emergency management partners through REMPCs and MEMPCs.
- Reviewing and updating emergency response and recovery plans, conducting staff briefings and training programs and undertaking emergency response exercises including with the Victorian Farmers Federation to exercise the Emergency Fodder Distribution Agreement.

In accordance with maintaining year-round emergency readiness, Agriculture Victoria had rostered emergency roles, including an IMT, ready throughout January 2026 to support activation of an agriculture response as required.

Department of Health

The Department of Health (DH) undertakes systematic, seasonal preparedness and planning activities to ensure the Victorian health system is ready and able to respond to the health and service delivery impacts of bushfires. This planning occurs across preparedness, readiness, response, relief and recovery, and is coordinated through established emergency management arrangements.

Seasonal preparedness and sector readiness

In advance of each high-risk weather season, DH leads Health Emergency Management Seasonal Preparedness briefings for the health sector. These briefings strengthen sector understanding of roles, responsibilities and arrangements during emergencies, provide an overview of the seasonal weather outlook, and outline key health system considerations for bushfires and other concurrent hazards. The briefings share practical guidance, resources and lessons from recent events to support preparedness across hospitals, aged care, primary care, public health units and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

As part of annual seasonal preparedness activities, the department reviews and updates its Catastrophic Fire Danger Plan. The Catastrophic Fire Danger Plan details the responsibilities of the department and health services to plan for and respond to Catastrophic fire danger and events. This includes both business continuity and emergency response arrangements. The updated 2025/26 Catastrophic Fire Danger Plan came into effect on 23 November 2025, and was activated on 7 January 2026 in response to the forecast Catastrophic fire danger.

Monitoring, risk assessment and readiness

DH maintains active monitoring of bushfire risk and Fire Danger Ratings, supported by a 24/7 specialist emergency management duty system capability. This includes early notification to the health system of Extreme or Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings, mapping of potential impacts on health assets, and readiness to rapidly escalate to formal response arrangements, including full Health Incident Management Team capability where required.

Planning frameworks and coordination arrangements

Bushfire preparedness and response are guided by the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) and the SEMP Health Emergencies Sub-Plan, under which DH operates as a support agency for bushfire events. Planning and decision-making occur across strategic, operational and tactical levels, ensuring alignment with whole-of-government emergency management arrangements and clear coordination with control agencies, Ambulance Victoria, wider health system and other partners.

Health system preparedness actions

In preparation for bushfire seasons, DH also supports health services to review and strengthen:

- emergency management and business continuity plans
- evacuation, relocation and shelter-in-place arrangements
- workforce surge and backfill arrangements
- continuity of critical services during infrastructure disruption (e.g. power, access, supply chains). The Department works closely with health services located in fire-prone areas to support informed decision-making and preparedness actions ahead of elevated risk periods.

DH works closely with health services located in fire-prone areas to support informed decision-making and preparedness actions ahead of elevated risk periods.

Public health preparedness and messaging

Bushfire season planning includes readiness for public health impacts, such as smoke exposure, heat-related illness and other fire-related health consequences. The Department prepares to deliver coordinated health messaging to the community and to monitor emerging health impacts during bushfire events, ensuring advice aligns with broader emergency warnings and response arrangements.

During the emergency, DH delivered health-related public messaging to support community awareness, protective behaviours and system preparedness in relation to extreme heat, fire risk,

smoke and air quality, power outages and associated health impacts. Public information activities were undertaken in close coordination with emergency management partners and aligned with whole-of-government warning and information arrangements. Public information was delivered across multiple channels, including media, social media, digital platforms, emergency advertising and direct stakeholder engagement. Messaging was scaled and adjusted in line with changing risk profiles, geographic impacts and response arrangements, with a focus on clarity, timeliness and consistency across channels.

DH issued public health warnings and information through the VicEmergency platform in response to extreme heat conditions and drinking water quality incidents during the event period. Warnings were used to support community awareness of health risks, promote protective behaviours, and provide timely, location-specific information where local impacts were identified.

Warnings included statewide advice related to extreme heat, aligned with forecast and observed heatwave conditions, as well as targeted water quality and boil water advisories for affected localities. Warning activity reflected the evolving risk environment, including concurrent heat, fire and infrastructure impacts, and was coordinated through the SCC in line with whole-of-government arrangements.

Training, exercising and continuous improvement

Preparedness activities are reinforced through scenario-based discussions, exercises and post-season after-action reviews, which inform continuous improvement of health emergency management arrangements. Lessons identified from previous bushfire seasons and concurrent emergencies are incorporated into future planning and seasonal preparedness activities to strengthen system resilience.

Critical Infrastructure Sector Preparedness

Energy sector preparedness

DEECA undertook preparedness activities and has resources, policies, and procedures to manage energy emergencies, including those caused by heat and fire. Examples include:

- Participation in key multi-jurisdictional and government-industry emergency management and resilience forums, including the National Electricity Market Emergency Management Forum (NEMEMF), Victorian Electricity Emergency Committee (VEEC) and the Critical Infrastructure Resilience Sectors Forum (CIRSF).
- Undertaking preparedness activities such as emergency exercises with other jurisdictions, industry, and the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO).
- Resourcing the energy emergency management response, including maintaining a skilled and available pool of resources for the emergency management duty roster.
- Delivery of year-round training programs and capability development of energy emergency personnel.
- Delivery of pre-season training and briefings for the Electricity-Emergency Management Liaison Officers (EMLO) from the distribution businesses at the state and regional tiers. The E-EMLOs work as a part of the State Energy Emergency Team, Regional and Incident Control Teams during an energy emergency and provide close coordination to support public and private sector response.
- Enhancing Victoria's energy emergency risk management and response capabilities through scenario planning and workshops, developing and participating in exercises (all energy types), and updating emergency management procedures.

- Creating and refreshing internal doctrine, policies, and procedures for the management of energy emergencies.

Energy sector continuous Improvement

- Following an emergency event, DEECA Energy leads an After-Action Review (AAR) and implements identified improvement actions applicable at state level.
- Representatives from the affected electricity distribution companies also contribute to these reviews.

Water emergency preparedness

Victoria's water sector maintains essential services through strong critical infrastructure planning, emergency preparedness, and regular sector coordination. DEECA leads the statewide sector resilience network, water emergency planning, exercises, and 24/7 incident oversight, supported by clear command arrangements. DEECA Water and Catchments also:

- Resourcing the water emergency management response, including maintaining a skilled and available pool of resources for the emergency management duty roster
- Delivery of year-round training programs and capability development of water emergency personnel
- Setting annual policy priority areas for water corporations including that water corporations ensure interoperability with other emergency responders through the appropriate links with the State Control Centre, Regional Control Centres and Incident Control Centres before, during and after emergencies. Water corporations are expected to continue to provide clear, accessible and tailored public information about emergency operations to enable impacted communities to make informed decisions.
- Enhancing Victoria's water emergency risk management and response capabilities through scenario planning and workshops, developing and participating in exercises (all water hazards), and updating emergency management procedures.
- Creating and refreshing internal doctrine, policies, and procedures for the management of water emergencies.
- Pre-summer water critical infrastructure sector resilience forum, a forum for water critical infrastructure owners and operators to convene with an emphasis on infrastructure resilience and emergency risk planning and management.
- Coordination of statewide water emergency exercises with Water Corporations to test and validate response arrangements, strengthen cross-sector coordination, and enhance preparedness for high-consequence, all-hazards events.
- Pre-summer briefings for the water sector using the Water SRN and the energy sector using the Energy SRN.
- 24/7 State Duty Officer - Water (SDO - Water) maintains situational awareness and receives notifications of incidents from Water Corporations.

Water Corporations strengthen resilience through business continuity planning, emergency exercises, and alternative supply arrangements. CMAs provide complementary emergency support, including flood mitigation, recovery leadership, and advice on waterway risks infrastructure planning, emergency preparedness, and regular sector coordination.

The Water and Wastewater Service Disruption Response Plan, prepared by DEECA, details the Victorian command and control arrangements for managing service disruptions, including Departmental and water portfolio arrangements.

Water sector continuous improvement

Following an emergency event, DEECA leads an AAR and implements identified improvement actions applicable at state level. Impacted Water Corporations and CMAs also conduct internal operational review activities and implement identified improvement actions at the entity level.

These reviews examine what happened, why it happened, and how to improve future performance, identifying key observations, lessons, and best practices across the water sector.

The sector also collaborates in forums to share learning experiences, including through sub-forums facilitated under the Water SRN (as occurred in February 2026).

Transport sector preparedness

Ahead of the 2025-26 Higher-Risk Weather Season, DTP oversaw a range of activities to promote preparedness among Critical Infrastructure operators. This included annual “Resilience Improvement Cycle” activities, with operators of critical transport infrastructure undertaking emergency exercises, updating risk management plans and attending preparedness briefings.

Key preparedness activities included:

- A transport sector-wide Summer Season Risk Overview workshop, held on 15 September 2025.
- The Transport Sector Resilience Network forum, held on 22 October 2025
- EMV’s Critical Infrastructure Industry Preparedness Briefing for the Higher-Risk Weather Season, held on 30 October 2025
- An operationally focused Transport Coordination Group (TCG) pre-season workshop on 7 October 2025.

With extreme heat wave and fire danger conditions predicted for Victoria from early 2026, DTP enacted the following readiness arrangements to support operators in the response:

- Transport Coordination Group (TCG) and internal DTP readiness and response meetings, to develop a common operating picture and confirm readiness arrangements
- Preparedness rosters for transport coordination to support state structures at the SCC, including after-hours/overnight coverage
- Internal briefings following the 1300hr SCC weather teleconferences and State Control Team meetings. This information was also shared to the TCG where relevant for their planning and readiness
- Formal enactment of the Department’s Catastrophic Fire Danger Day arrangements on 7 January 2026.

These forums supported development of a common operating picture and confirmed readiness arrangements. This was complemented by the activation of DTP personnel at the State Control Centre and the activation of processes to ensure DTP personnel were linked into State Control Centre messaging.

Transport Operator Preparedness

Transport operators have comprehensive emergency management plans in place to support effective incident response as part of their summer preparedness arrangements. In addition, operators implement enhanced seasonal measures, including increased maintenance activities, more frequent rotation of fleet and rollingstock, and the introduction of specific service plans

designed to manage operations during periods of extreme heat or elevated fire danger. These measures are intended to maintain service continuity, protect passenger safety, and minimise disruption during the summer period.

Country Fire Authority

During winter 2025, worsening climate indicators – record low rainfall, depleted soil moisture and expanding drought conditions – signalled an atypical and high-risk 2025–26 season. In response, the CFA Chief Officer directed the organisation to bring forward preparedness activities to ensure full operational readiness by 1 October 2025.

CFA also emphasised its responsibility to support community preparedness, particularly in elevated-risk areas, and began seeking additional government funding for targeted community engagement and operational readiness initiatives.

Specific internal prepared activities completed included:

- Section 29 Inspections to ensure CFA brigades are operationally efficient and ready.
- Service Delivery Preparedness Program – all 21 Districts and 8 emergency management regions conducted seasonal preparedness audits, supplemented by the delivery of a bushfire focused exercise or Tactical Exercise without Troops (TEWT).
- Pre-season briefing package developed and distributed to all brigades and groups to provide consistent messaging on key operational risk/focus areas, preparedness arrangements and safety considerations.
- Bushfire exercise regime tailored to local areas. Exercising activities undertaken at brigade, group, district, regional and state levels.
- Multi-agency exercising at Incident, Regional and State tiers.
- Seasonal focus sessions – fortnightly sessions with all State, Regional and District personnel, focused on maintaining situational awareness, weather outlook, emerging risks (as detailed by Districts), readiness actions, exercising opportunities and the communication of changes / initiatives.
- Fire-fighting fleet of more than 2000 vehicles inspected and serviced to ensure readiness and safety of personnel.
- Firefighting equipment testing and servicing.
- Procurement of additional seasonal supplies of consumables and essential firefighting equipment into CFA's State Logistics Centre to meet increased demand.
- Operational Communications equipment, infrastructure and ICT systems tested, and Triple Zero Victoria data updated and confirmed.
- Audits of command and control facilities across CFA's vast network at all tiers of operational management.
- Review and updating of endorsements, accreditations and re-accreditations for operational roles including Incident Management.
- Aviation briefings completed, airbases checked, pre-determined dispatch arrangements confirmed, supporting personnel rostered.
- Municipal and Regional Emergency Management Committee briefed and coordinated cross agency readiness arrangements enacted.

- Critical operational doctrine and agreements such as cross board MoU's and Local Mutual Aid plans reviewed and updated.
- Delivery of training including Hazardous Tree and Entrapment Drills undertaken.
- Environmental scan of readily available surface water to support both ground and aerial firefighting operations.
- Emergency procurement provisions utilised to contract bulk water solutions to ensure rapid deployment of bulk water to required areas.

Specific community preparedness activities completed include:

- Annual inspection and review of Neighbourhood Safer Place / Bushfire Place Last Resort.
- CFA Community Fire Refuge inspections.
- Community Siren Network checks.
- Delivery of Joint Fuel Management Plan activities.
- Delivery of CFA community engagement and fire safety programs.
- Delivery of Summer preparedness campaigns including the "Get Fire Ready" initiative.

Acknowledging major bushfire response environments are highly dynamic and can become confusing, the Chief Officer issued a CFA Command Intent to all members for the 2025-26 summer season. A clear, concise statement of intent ensuring that all team members, even when dispersed or in chaotic situations, are working toward the same objective. When plans become obsolete or communication breaks down, the command intent acts as a guiding compass, empowering subordinates to make decisions consistent with the overall mission and take the initiative.

Figure 20: CFA Chief Officer's Command Intent Statement

CHIEF OFFICER'S COMMAND INTENT STATEMENT
2025-26 HIGH-RISK WEATHER SEASON

Our duty is to carry out CFA's mission by maintaining constant readiness to respond to fires and other emergencies. This means acting quickly and using the right number of resources for the situation, while working as one with Victoria's emergency services. Our actions will be based on guiding principles, shared awareness of what's happening, and a strong commitment to our members' and community's safety while actioning the state emergency management priorities.

What we want to achieve by season end

- Keep fires small to prevent major emergencies, with no serious harm to our members or consequences to the community.
- Maintained operational integrity and issued timely public warnings that are actionable by affected communities.
- Victorian communities continue to trust and respect CFA.

To achieve this, we will need to

- Maintain order and communicate clearly up and down the chain of command.
- Prepare our equipment and people through briefings, training, exercising and testing.
- Support and empower our frontline leaders.

Leadership in action

All leaders are trusted to use their judgement to achieve this Command Intent. If communication breaks down, the situation changes quickly, or plans stop working, leaders should take whatever reasonable actions are needed to preserve life and maintain control.

Guiding principles

Safety First – Everyone goes home.
Situation reports – Accurate and regular updates.
Clear and transparent intent – No ambiguity in direction or expectations.
Community focus – Protect life and property. Our actions aim to keep communities safe and informed.
Leadership – Be consistent and calm, build effective teams.
Continuous improvement – Debrief and identify opportunities for improvement.
Celebrate wins – Recognise achievements and maintain morale.

State emergency management priorities

- Protection and preservation of life and relief of suffering is paramount.
- Issuing of community information and community warnings.
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets.
- Protection of residential property.
- Protection of assets supporting livelihoods and economic production, including agricultural.
- Protection of environmental, cultural and conservation assets.

OUR VALUES: SAFETY – TEAMWORK – ADAPTABILITY – INTEGRITY – RESPECT

Emergency Management Victoria

EMV undertook a range of preparedness and readiness activities leading into the 2025-26 higher-risk weather season, including:

- Working closely with local government and emergency management partners through Regional Emergency Management Planning Committees and Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees.
- Refining the Regional Relief Coordination Operating Model which was actively used during this emergency event.
- Conducting two exercises regarding the stand up of the clean-up program.
- Regularly reviewing and updating state and regional relief and recovery policies, guidelines, frameworks and programs to ensure they reflect lessons from previous emergencies and current arrangements.
- Leading regional relief and recovery preparedness forums, workshops and exercises through Regional Emergency Management Committee – Relief and Recovery sub-committees (chaired by EMV).

- Providing relief, recovery and impact assessment presentations at all regional pre-season briefings.
- Participating in municipal, regional and state tier exercises, workshops and preparedness activities across all regions.
- Engaging in one-on-one meetings with relief partners representatives and not-for-profit organisations to develop a common understanding of relief coordination, lead and support functions and understand how best to operationalise arrangements.
- Conducting pre-briefings for surge staff, including both new and returning team members to the State Control Centre Relief and Recovery Functional Unit.
- Commencing the rollout of capability uplift sessions for Municipal Recovery Managers and Municipal Emergency Management Officers in the Grampians and other regions.
- Mapping of regional resources to improve operational resource response times.
- Forward planning roster for readiness in regional relief and recovery coordination.
- Contributing to reviews of the State Emergency Management Plan sub-plans as required.
- Updating impact assessment guidance and doctrine and making it available to the emergency management sector.
- Providing training for users of the EM-Impact system, Victoria's central repository for impact assessment data, and ensuring there is sufficient user capacity available in EM-Impact to support larger emergency events.
- Preparing impact assessment personnel readiness, including state coordination leadership, initial impact field assessors and technical and system support.
- Leading training and information sessions with councils and relevant Victorian Government departments (in consultation with the National Emergency Management Agency) on the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, ensuring Victoria remains compliant with cost-sharing relief and recovery programs with the Commonwealth.

The Victorian Government's contracted donations management service provider, GIVIT, also intensified its outreach and engagement with local government authorities to promote registration to its online portal. This included delivering training for newly registered councils and refresher sessions for existing users and increasing engagement with EMV's regional teams to ensure they were familiar with the services available and able to advise councils to utilise the platform during an emergency, supporting timely and coordinated assistance for impacted communities.

Fire Rescue Victoria

Specific internal prepared activities completed included:

- Support of Victoria's State emergency management arrangements.
- Strengthening interoperability with key partner agencies.
- Preparation of staff for the HRWS – all staff briefings, command sessions with key FRV operational leaders, annual skills maintenance sessions focusing on fire behaviour, fire ground operations and safety.
- Bushfire focused exercises conducted for FRV personnel in various locations, including ICCs.
- Equipment testing and servicing to ensure operational readiness.
- IMT endorsements, accreditations and re-accreditations.
- Preparing and planning with community – coordinated media campaign targeted at people who live, work and travel in areas of high bushfire risk, work by multicultural liaison officers and district-based community engagement commanders to deliver bushfire safety messages.

- Continuous improvement in agency readiness – growth of RPAS program with additional resources and trained pilots.
- Impact Assessment capability enhanced.

Victoria State Emergency Service

Specific internal prepared activities completed included:

- Statewide seasonal preparedness program – capabilities to support fire agencies with IMT personnel, ground support, staging areas, base camp support in addition to storm and flood capabilities which is core responsibility of VICSES.
- Delivery of large-scale multi-agency exercises, training, masterclasses, agency courses for increasing IMT capability, exercising programs and volunteer briefings across 154 units.
- Extensive legislative Planning on out hazard as listed in SEMP at State, Region and Municipal tiers.
- Expanded higher risk weather seasonal preparedness and safety campaigns addressing flash flooding risks in metro and regional areas.
- Engagement with CALD communities – community preparedness information available in 38 languages, along with engagement through the Victorian Refugee Health Network and Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council.
- Cross border communities – continued collaboration with NSW SES and SA SES on community warnings and resourcing sharing, along with planning for cross border evacuations and relief operations.
- Targeted yearly masterclass sessions for staff and volunteers to build knowledge and capability on VICSES core responsibilities as per SEMP
- Skills training, maintenance, and enhancement sessions on VICSES core skills for Volunteers on a regular basis.
- Equipment readiness checks on a regular program for 24/7, 365-day capability and response.

Victoria Police

Victoria Police sustained prolonged and high visibility operations throughout the 2025–26 fire season, including evacuation support, traffic management, public safety enforcement and coordination roles across multiple regions. Workforce welfare and fatigue management arrangements were applied in accordance with established Victoria Police frameworks and the SEMP to support sustained operations over extended periods.

Specific internal prepared activities completed included:

- Statewide capability development:
    - Basic Wildfire Awareness training
    - Evacuation and Traffic Management Manager training
    - Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO)Training
    - Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) uplift
    - Incident Command and Control System (ICCS) learning updated
    - Continued work on Register Find Reunite
- Pro-active media campaign – “You light it – You own it”.
- Arson & Explosives Liaison Officer training/engagement.

- Intelligence led (Arson & Explosives Squad, Swinburne University – Centre for Behavioural Science & Forensicare) targeting of persons of interest utilising the Bushfire Arson Target Screen (tool).
- Crime Command - Extreme / Catastrophic Major Incident Response plans.
- Exercising – delivery of Exercise EMBER 2 at Incident Police Operations Centre
- Evacuation Manager and Traffic Management Manager Training focused on high-risk areas
- MERC/RERC/SPLO roles in position
- Capabilities exercised as part of preparedness regime
- Specific requirements for Class 3 emergencies exercised

Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria undertook proactive preparation and clear community messaging ahead of the 9 January 2026 Catastrophic and Extreme Fire Danger Ratings. In line with statewide emergency advice, Parks Victoria implemented the early closure of all parks within Catastrophic Fire Danger districts, and additional high-risk parks elsewhere, with clear direction for visitors to leave on 8 January 2026 and avoid travel the following day.

Comprehensive messaging was issued across public channels including website alerts, social media, direct emails/SMS to campers, updates to tourism stakeholders, and signage on-ground reinforcing that it was too dangerous to enter or camp in parks, bookings would be cancelled and refunded, and that the clear directive was to stay home and stay safe.

These measures were supported by coordinated operational readiness activities, including preparation of closure lists, activation of digital alerts, and on-ground ranger presence to ensure visitor safety and compliance.

As conditions improved, Parks Victoria began reopening parks where safe, while fire-affected parks remained closed, with ongoing monitoring of fire risk and advice guided all future opening and closure decisions to keep park visitors safe.

Appendix G – Overview of the Fires in State Line of Control

The narrative and data for the fires in the following have been sourced from the following systems/teams:

- Fires in Line of Control – data sourced from EO to State Response Controller
- Fire maps and hectares burnt – data sourced from e-map
- Fire Cause – Victoria Police (Note: Cause of the fires continue to be investigated and information will be updated as information becomes available)
- Narrative – data sourced from EM Incidents, CAD (TZV), Agency Situation Reports, Incident Management System (CFA)
- Community warnings, Emergency Alert campaigns and Potential Impact Zone (Red) map - data sourced from EM-COP Public Publishing, Emergency Alert reports, VicEmergency Content Management System (CMS) and VicEmergency Facebook analytics
- Impact Assessment Summary – data sourced from Initial Impact Assessments reported and verified by Incident Controllers in EM-Impact or from the line of control.

Barwon South West

Otways Complex

On 9 January 2026, the Carlisle River (Pipeline Road) and Kennedys Creek (King Track) fires ignited. As both fires expanded under elevated fire danger conditions, they were managed collectively as the Otways Complex.

A total of 324 community warnings were issued, along with 20 Emergency Alert campaigns.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: FRV commenced Initial Impact Assessment on 25 January 2026. FRV concluded Initial Impact Assessment for the fire on 31 January 2026, completing 533 total assessments at 274 unique addresses.

FRV completed 533 structure-damage assessments, reporting 17 residences destroyed, 1 residence damaged, 37 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 435 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV Impact Assessment data metric reports were: hazards (6), assessment required (1), affected property (24), assistance required (2) and inaccessible (0).

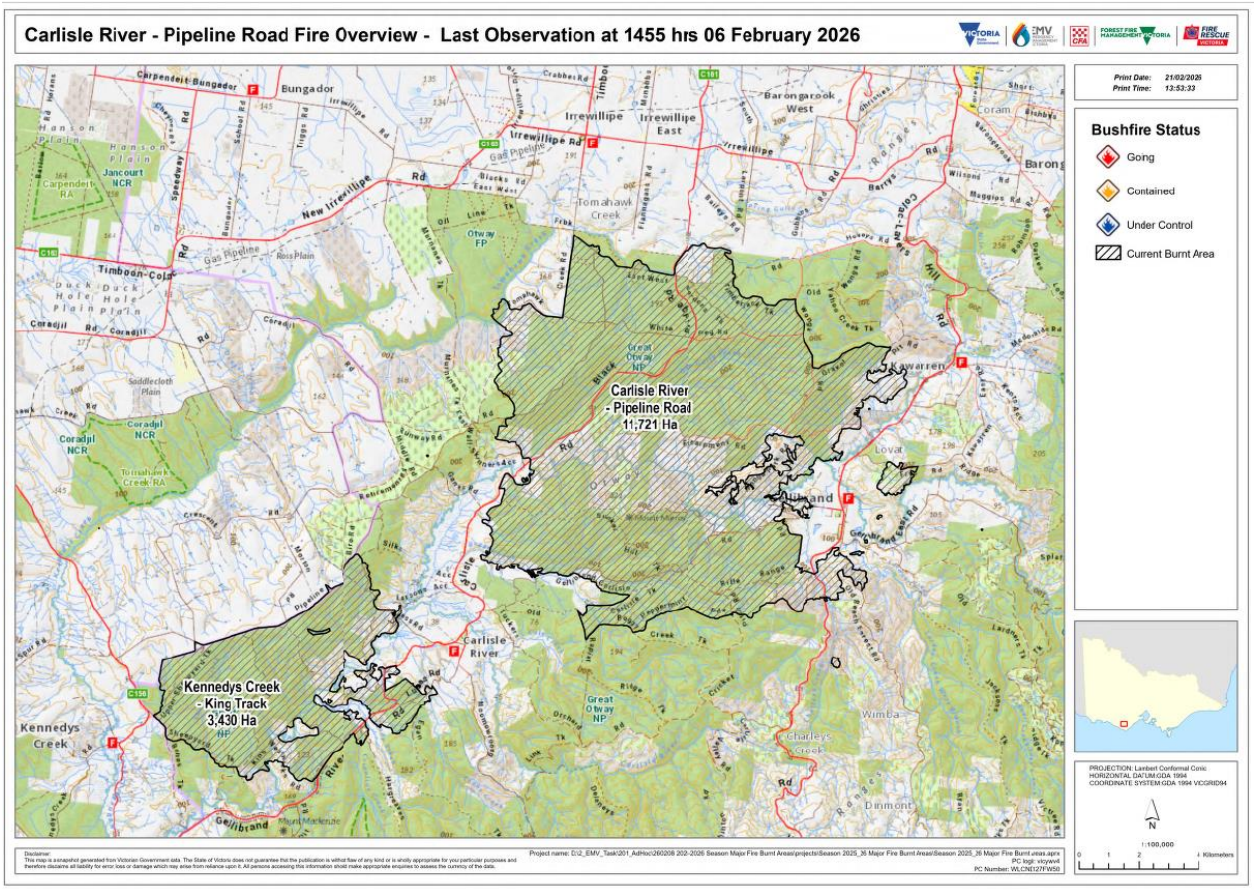
Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, both councils (Corangamite Shire and Colac Otway Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

Carlise River - Pipeline Road

Table 11: Summary of the Carlisle River – Pipeline Road fire

Fire Name:	Carlisle River - Pipeline Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan	24-Jan
Region:	Barwon Southwest	**Fire Contained Date:**	20-Jan	1-Feb
ICC:	Colac	**Duration:**	12 Days	9 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes	
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	11721ha	

Figure 21: Overview of the Carlisle River – Pipeline Road fire



The Carlisle River - Pipeline Road fire ignited on 9 January 2026 in the Otways near Pipeline Road, travelling initially in a north-easterly direction toward Irrewillipe East. Lightning was determined as the cause of the fire.

Initial first attack involved FFMVic crews and heavy plant tasked with tracking the edge of the fire. Fire behaviour was described as very active with significant spotting associated with high fuel loads and stringybark dominated forest, with crews falling back to asset protection due to limited effectiveness of aerial suppression in heavy fuels. CFA strike teams were deployed to Irrewillipe East and surrounding private properties for asset protection. Control of the incident was transferred to Colac ICC on 10 January 2026.

On 11 January 2026, high fuel loads in stringybark forest resulted in significant spotting beyond containment lines, including around Black Bridge Road and plantation areas. Control strategy shifted toward strengthened perimeter containment and strategic backburning. Between 12 and 16 January 2026, backburning along Timberjack Track, Wonga Road and Wall–Skinners Access areas formed the primary containment approach. The fire spread into private land and plantation, requiring asset protection and hazardous tree management. Fire behaviour remained active despite milder weather due to underlying dryness in forested areas.

By 19 January 2026, the fire had exceeded 5,000 hectares, with ongoing burning out operations creating a 200-300 metre edge along Wonga Road. The fire was declared Contained on 20 January 2026, following sustained backburning and aerial overwatch operations. However, under renewed heat and elevated fire danger on 24 January 2026, the fire returned to Going and breached containment near Gellibrand.

On 25 and 26 January 2026, the fire intensified, threatening Gellibrand township. Victoria Police and VICSES undertook extensive door knocking operations, and evacuation planning was implemented. Backburning progressed across Gravel Pit Road, Rifle Range Road and Gellibrand-Carlisle Road sectors. On 27 January 2026, significant fire behaviour was observed during strong winds. The fire crossed Colac-Lavers Hill Road and impacted the Gellibrand Water Treatment Plant, resulting in a Do Not Drink Notice issued by Barwon Water. Power interruptions occurred due to fallen trees and infrastructure impacts.

By 28 January, the water treatment plant was unable to supply water to the Gellibrand township, requiring investigation of tankered supply and establishment of mobile hydration stations at the Colac Showgrounds ERC.

Burning out operations continued through 29-31 January 2026, with hazardous tree assessment and infrastructure stabilisation prioritised. Partial reopening of Gellibrand River Road/Carlisle River Road occurred on 30 January, and safe drinking water was reinstated to Gellibrand on 4 February 2026. Due to the bushfire-rated design of the recent $10m upgrade, there was minimal damage to the Gellibrand Treatment Plant itself.

The fire was declared Contained on 1 February 2026, with blacking out and hotspot treatment continuing into early February, with a total burnt area of over 11,000 ha.

The Carlisle River fire resulted in impacts to private property, plantation assets, stock, transport corridors including Colac-Lavers Hill Road and Great Ocean Road connections, energy infrastructure, water treatment systems and telecommunications. The fire was deemed Under Control 1 on 11 February 2026 and transferred back to agency control, on the 24 February 2026.

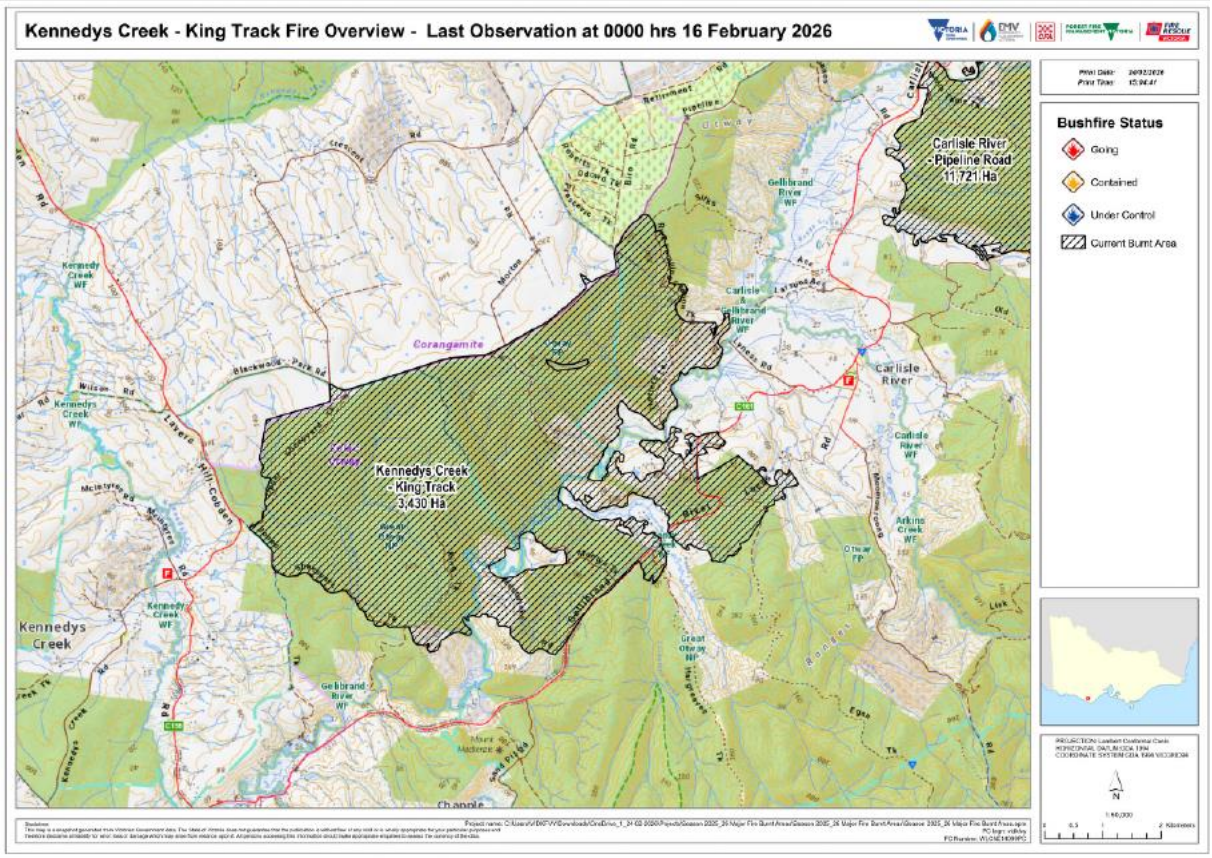
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Kennedy's River - King Track

Table 12: Summary of the Kennedys Creek - King Track fire

Fire Name:	Kennedys Creek - King Track	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Barwon Southwest	**Fire Contained Date:**	15-Jan
ICC:	Colac	**Duration:**	7 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	3430ha

Figure *22: Overview of the Kennedys Creek - King Track fire*



The Kennedys Creek - King Track fire started on 9 January 2026 at Trotters Lane, Carlisle River, detected by the Crowes Fire Tower and was observer travelling in a south-easterly direction toward Bones Track as a result of lightning.

FFMVic crews initiated first attack. Due to safety issues associated with very active fire behaviour in difficult terrain, crew withdrew until conditions moderated.

The fire spotted across multiple roads including Gellibrand Road, threatening private property and critical infrastructure.

On the evening of 10 January 2026, the fire merged with the Carlisle River – Trotters Lane fire and was subsequently managed under a single incident, and control of the incident was transferred to Colac ICC. Spotting into plantation beyond Pipeline Road and across Upper Sheepyard Track required aerial retardant application and dozer line reinforcement. CFA strike teams focused on private property asset protection along Carlisle River Road.

On 11 January 2026, an Emergency Relief Centre was established and wildlife response teams were deployed. Fire behaviour moderated overnight, allowing direct attack and strengthening of containment lines.

Backburning became the primary control tactic from 12 to 14 January 2026, with fallback lines constructed and machinery reinforcing containment edges. On the 15 January 2026 the fire was deemed Contained. By 16 January 2026, fire behaviour had reduced, and no containment breaches were reported.

From 17 to 21 January 2026, patrol and hotspot suppression continued, supported by Aerial Information Gathering to identify residual hotspots. Under renewed elevated fire danger on 24-25 January 2026, crews undertook proactive patrol and reinforcement of control lines in anticipation of warmer north-westerly winds.

Despite the severe fire weather experienced across the State on 27 January 2026, the Kennedys Creek fire did not experience containment breaches. Ongoing blacking out, hazardous tree treatment and infrastructure assessments continued through late January.

The fire was declared Under Control 1 on 30 January 2026. Power was fully restored to the community by 6 February 2026.

The fire was transferred back to agency control, on the 24 February 2026.

The Kennedys Creek fire impacted a small area of private land, and transport routes within the Otways region. It required coordinated asset protection, aerial suppression, heavy machinery operations and relief arrangements. Wildlife impacts were recorded, and infrastructure assessments included water pumping stations and energy distribution assets.

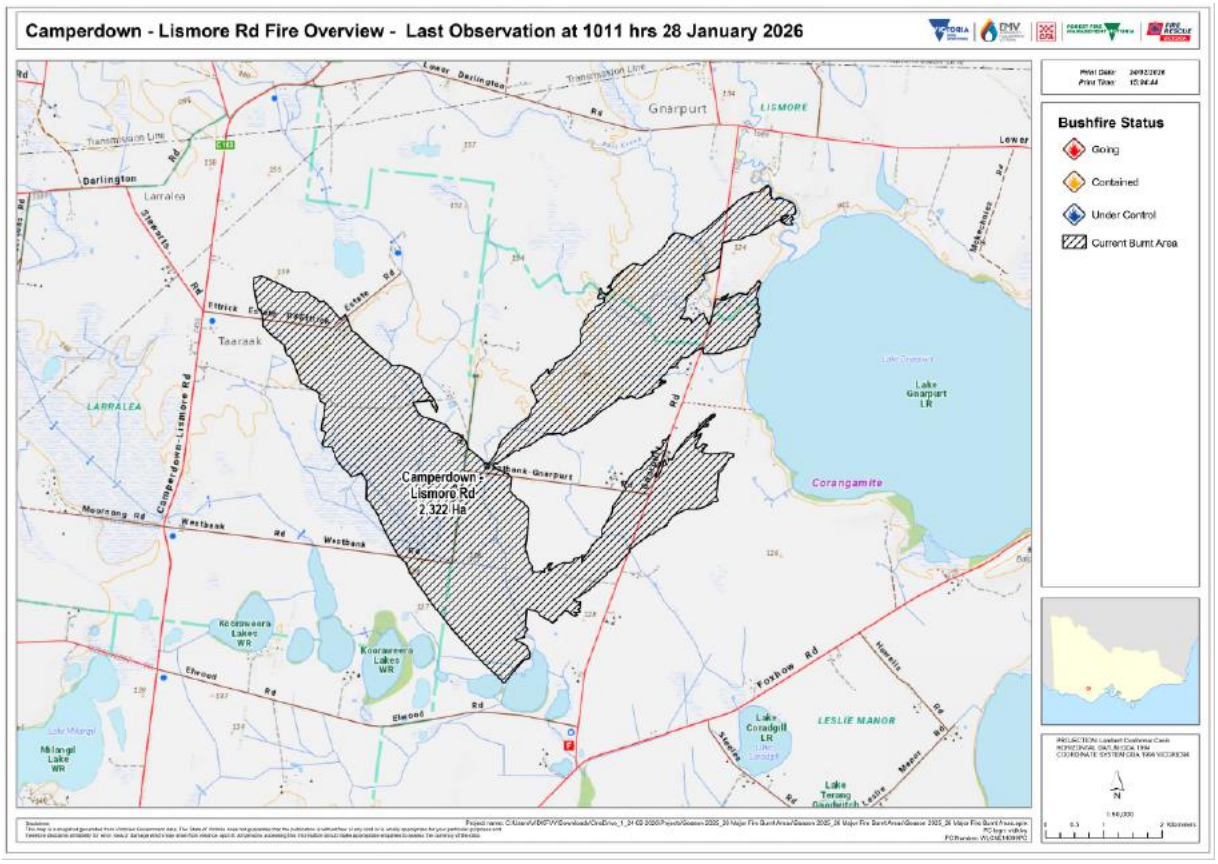
As of 6 March 2026, the fires remain at Under Control 1.

Lismore Road – Ettrick Estate Road

Table 13: Summary of the Lismore Road – Ettrick Estate Road fire

Fire Name:	Lismore Road – Ettrick Estate Road	**Fire Start Date:**	27-Jan
Region:	Barwon Southwest	**Fire Contained Date:**	28-Jan
ICC:	Geelong	**Duration:**	2 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Mechanical (not criminal)	**Fire Size:**	2322ha

Figure 23 Overview of the Lismore Road – Ettrick Estate Road fire



The Lismore Road – Ettrick Estate Road fire ignited on 27 January 2026 after a column of smoke was reported from a fire tower. The grass and scrub fire impacted a plantation and spread rapidly in a south-easterly direction towards Lake Gnarpurt under elevated fire danger conditions.

Line of control was transferred to Geelong ICC on 27 January 2026. The fire was declared Contained on 28 January.

On 28 January 2026, blacking out operations and significant hazardous tree works continued, supported by local brigades and heavy plant. Agriculture impacts identified included livestock, pasture and fodder losses. Roads were impacted with traffic management arrangements in place as operations progressed.

On 29 January 2026, impact assessments were undertaken and hotspots identified through Aerial Information Gathering were prioritised for treatment. The incident was transferred back to agency control on 29 January 2026.

In the days following containment, local brigades conducted daily patrols, with flare-ups occurring along Ettrick Estate Road during higher FBI days due to internal tree and root system burning. Excavators were deployed to address hazardous trees and deep-seated hotspots. Rehabilitation works commenced, including restoration of control lines and clean-up of felled trees. A community meeting was held to provide updates to residents. With patrol and monitoring continuing into early February, the fire was brought Under Control on 9 February 2026. The fire was deemed Safe on 6 March 2026.

There were 27 community warnings issued along with 3 Emergency Alert campaigns.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: FRV commenced Initial Impact Assessment on 29 January 2026. FRV concluded Initial Impact Assessment for the fire on 29 January 2026, completing 112 total assessments at 57 unique addresses.

FRV completed 112 structure-damage assessments, reporting 1 residence destroyed, 0 residence damaged, 7 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 91 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (1), assessment required (2), affected property (10), assistance required (0) and inaccessible (0)

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, the council (Corangamite Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

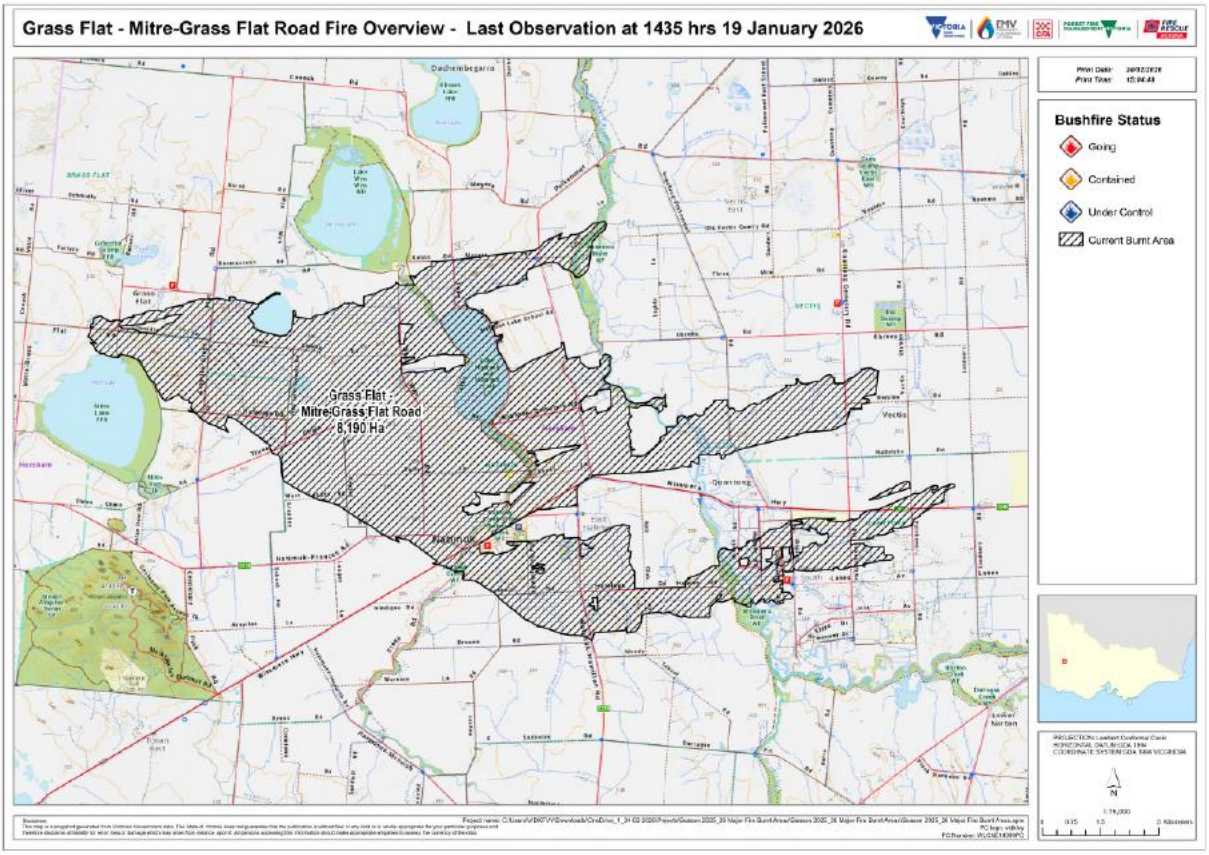
Grampians

Grass Flat - Mitre-Grass Flat Road (also known as Telfers Rd)

Table 14: Summary of the Grass Flat - Mitre - Grass Flat Road fire

Fire Name:	Grass Flat - Mitre - Grass Flat Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	10-Jan
ICC:	Horsham	**Duration:**	2 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Electrical	**Fire Size:**	8190ha

Figure 24: Overview of the Grass Flat - Mitre - Grass Flat Road fire



The Grass Flat - Mitre-Grass Flat Road fire ignited on 9 January 2026 near Telfers Road, Grass Flat, approximately 25 kilometres from Horsham, due to an electrical fault. The fire spread rapidly in a south-easterly direction toward Arapiles, Grass Flat and Natimuk, prompting escalation in response. Line of control was transferred to the Horsham ICC.

Initial crew deployed form CFA and FFMVic were tasked with asset protection on Quantong and Horsham townships. Further work involved the deployment of graders to build containment around Natimuk ahead of the forecast wind change.

The fire was deemed Contained on 10 January 2026.

Between 10 and 13 January 2026, efforts focused on consolidating control lines and extensive hazardous tree assessments across Natimuk and surrounding road networks.

Power outages affected nearby communities, with power poles damaged, and booster pumps in Natimuk lost power, though water supply was maintained via gravity feed. Road closures were progressively lifted by 11-12 January 2026.

The fire was declared Under Control 1 on 13 January 2026, with patrol and hotspot treatment continuing through mid-January. While quickly contained, the fire resulted in notable structural loss, agriculture infrastructure, pasture, fodder and livestock loss, infrastructure disruption and recovery challenges across the Grampians region.

The fire was declared Safe on 25 February 2026.

There were 33 community warnings issued along with 3 Emergency Alert campaigns and 1 Potential Impact Zone (Red) map.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: FRV commenced Initial Impact Assessment on 11 January 2026. FRV concluded Initial Impact Assessment for the fire on 12 January 2026, completing 104 total assessments at 84 unique addresses.

FRV completed 35 structure-damage assessments, reporting 17 residences destroyed, 0 residence damaged, 18 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 50 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (4), assessment required (0), affected property (11), assistance required (3) and inaccessible (1).

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, both councils (Mitchell Shire and Horsham Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

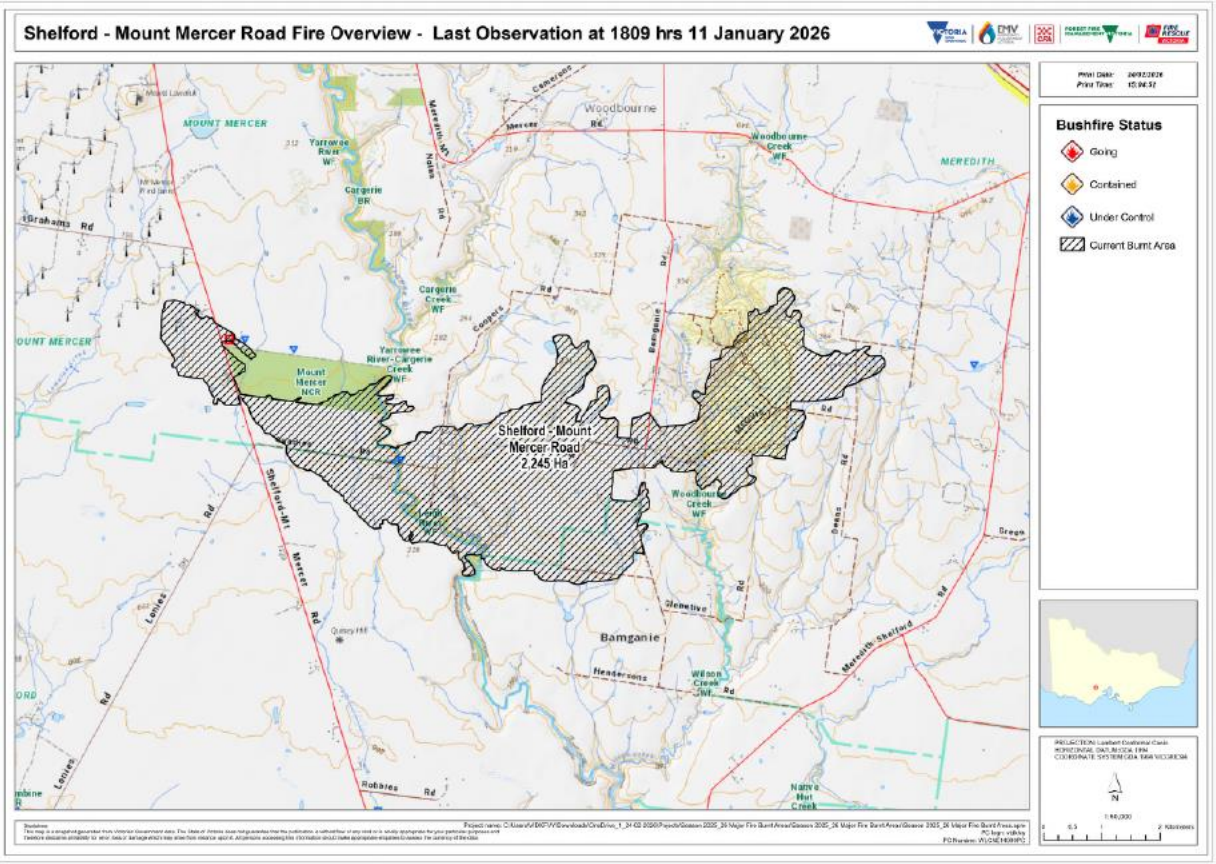
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Mount Mercer – Shelford-Mount Mercer Road

Table 15: Summary of the Mount Mercer - Shelford - Mount Mercer Road fire

Fire Name:	Mount Mercer-Shelford - Mount Mercer Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	13-Jan
ICC:	Geelong	**Duration:**	5 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Reignition of old burn	**Fire Size:**	2245ha

Figure 25: Overview of the Mount Mercer - Shelford - Mount Mercer Road fire



The Mount Mercer - Shelford-Mount Mercer Road fire started on 9 January 2026 near Mount Mercer Road under extreme fire danger conditions, cause being the reignition of an old burn. The fire travelled in a south-easterly direction toward Lethbridge and Bamganie, with spotting reported ahead of the main fire front.

Control of the fire was transferred to Geelong ICC on 9 January 2026.

On the evening of 9 January 2026, an Emergency Relief Centre was established, remaining open overnight before closing later that night as fire behaviour moderated. The fire was heavily resourced with CFA and FFMVic crews instigated direct attack and asset protection.

On the 10 January 2026 as conditions moderated the primary focus of crew was blacking out operations, managing wind-driven spotting and strengthening containment lines. Strong westerly winds placed pressure on easterly containment lines on 10 January 2026, with active fire reported in the north and south of Bamganie State Forest. Primary and secondary containment line strategies were approved and implemented, while hazardous tree assessments were prioritised to enable reopening of key transport routes. Victoria Police TMPs were established during the peak period of fire activity.

From mid-January 2026, control management responsibilities were delineated, with DEECA managing public land and CFA managing private land.

On the 13 January 2026 the fire was brought Under Control 1 and on the 14 January 2026, the fire was transferred back to agency control. Through late January 2026, daily patrols and blacking out operations continued to ensure containment lines remained secure. The fire was declared Under Control 2 on 31 January 2026, with no hotspots detected for more than 10 days.

The incident primarily impacted grassland and forest fuels within and around Bamganie State Forest, resulted in agriculture losses to pasture and fodder, temporary road closures and traffic disruption, and required short-term relief arrangements for affected communities.

The fire was declared Safe on 27 February 2026.

There were 38 community warnings.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: There were 17 structure-damage assessments undertaken, reporting 1 residence destroyed, 0 residences damaged, 16 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, the council (Golden Plains Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

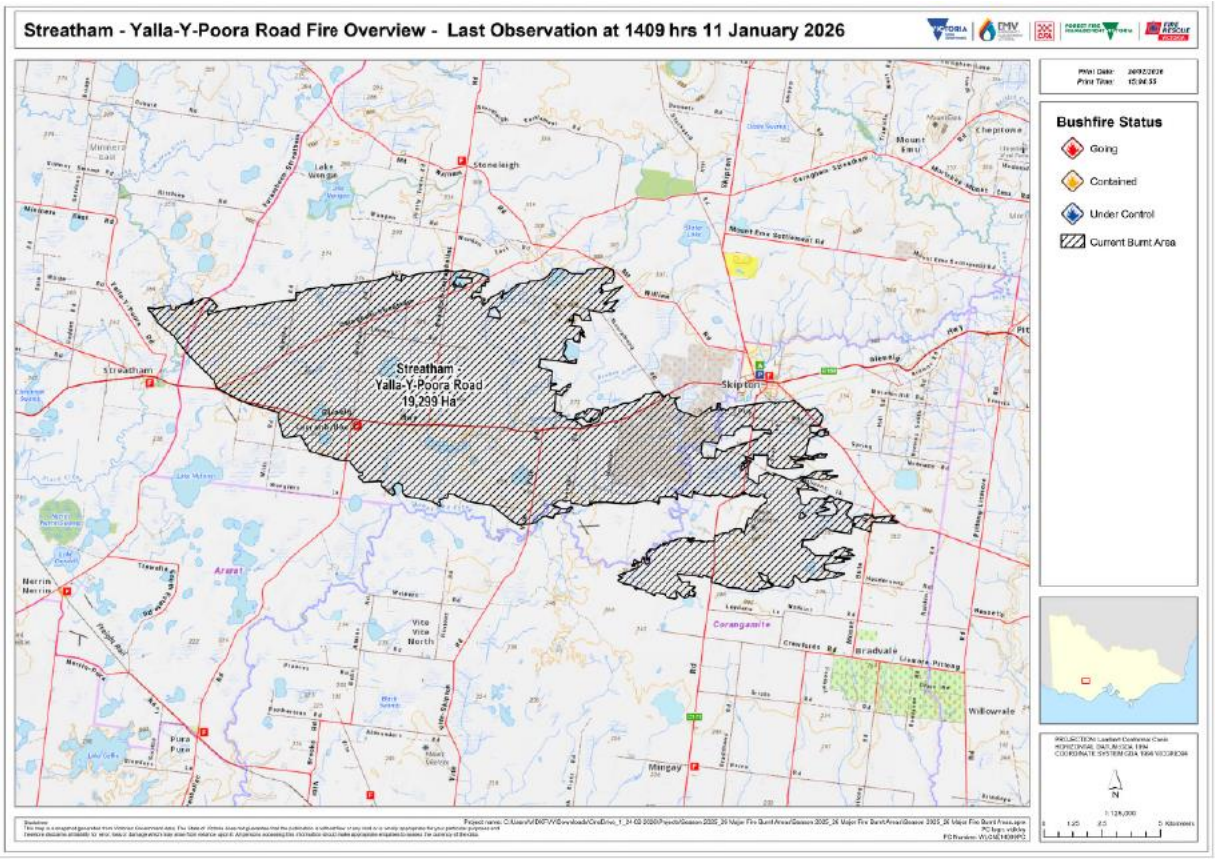
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Streatham – Yella – Y-Poora Road

Table 16: Summary of the Streatham - Yalla - Y-Poora Road fire

Fire Name:	Streatham - Yalla - Y-Poora Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	11-Jan
ICC:	Ararat	**Duration:**	3 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Reignition of old burn	**Fire Size:**	19299ha

Figure 26: Overview of the Streatham - Yalla - Y-Poora Road fire



The Streatham - Yalla-Y-Poora Road fire ignited on 9 January 2026 near the Carranballac Recreation Reserve and travelled rapidly in a westerly direction toward Skipton. Control was transferred to Ararat ICC the same day. The fire was expected to impact Skipton later that afternoon with one of the priorities being protection of the Skipton Age Care facility. Aircraft and ground crews worked intensively on the head and flanks, and by the evening of 9 January 2026 there was no running edge, with fire behaviour significantly reduced.

The fire was declared Contained on 11 January 2026, with suppression efforts focused on blacking out hotspots, consolidating control lines and undertaking extensive hazardous tree assessment and treatment, particularly along the Glenelg Highway and surrounding road network.

A minor breach of containment lines near Mooramong Road on 12 January 2026 was quickly controlled.

Significant agricultural impacts were recorded including livestock, fencing, pasture, fodder, infrastructure and crop losses.

Relief and recovery arrangements were activated on 9 January 2026 and an Emergency Relief Centre established. Community meetings were held to provide updates and recovery information. Power infrastructure was heavily impacted, with Powercor undertaking assessment and replacement works along the Glenelg Highway corridor.

On the 14 January 2026 the fire was transferred back to agency control.

The fire transitioned to Under Control 2 on 3 February 2026, having been contained since mid-January. By this stage the fire was no longer actively patrolled, with no ongoing control issues reported.

On 17 February 2026, the fire was declared as Safe.

There were 44 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign and 1 Potential Impact Zone (Red) map.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: FRV commenced Initial Impact Assessment on 11 January 2026. FRV concluded Initial Impact Assessment for the fire on 12 January 2026, completing 127 total assessments at 57 unique addresses.

FRV completed 59 structure-damage assessments, reporting 15 residences destroyed, 5 residences damaged, 39 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 44 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (2), assessment required (6), affected property (15), assistance required (1) and inaccessible (0).

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, both councils (Pyrenees Shire and Corangamite Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

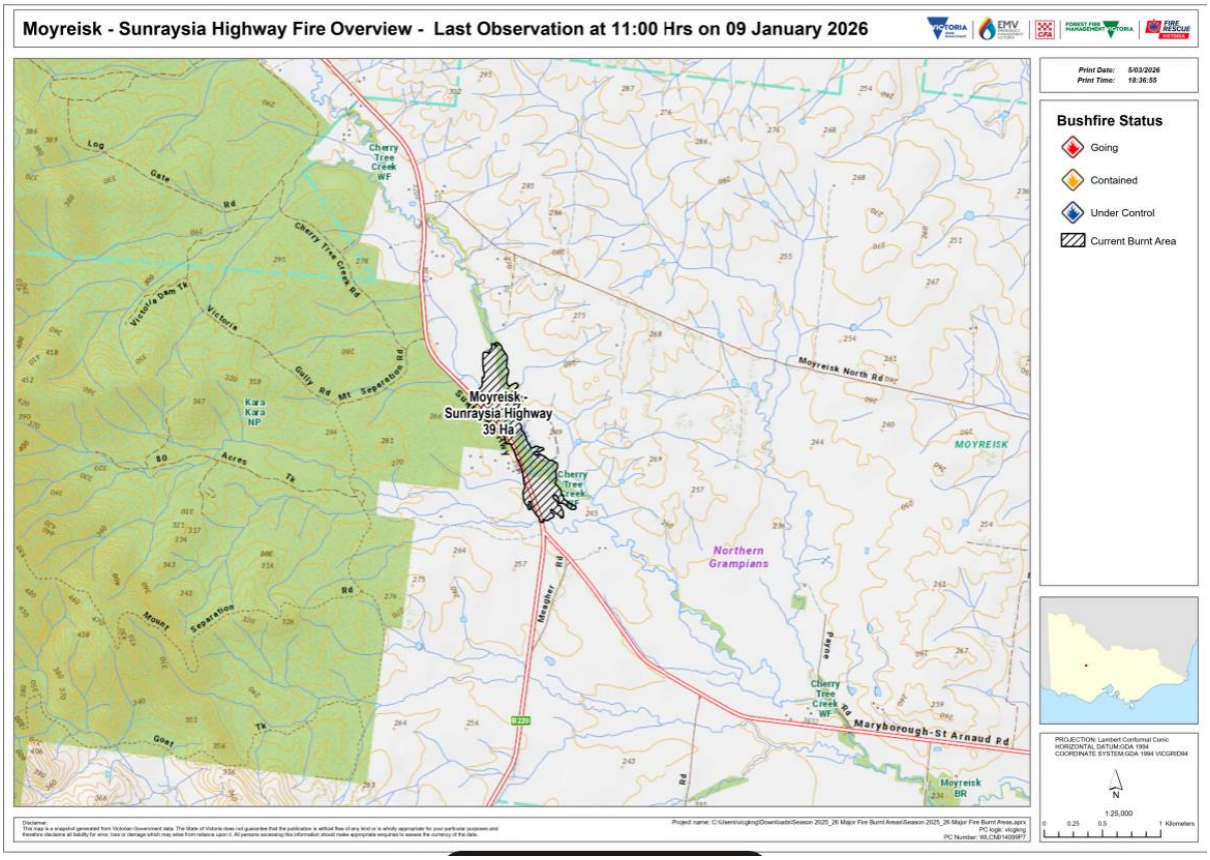
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Moyreisk – Sunraysia Highway

Table 17: Summary of the Moyreisk – Sunraysia Hwy fire

Fire Name:	Moyreisk – Sunraysia Hwy	**Fire Start Date:**	7-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	7-Jan
ICC:	Ballarat	**Duration:**	1 Day
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	mechanical (not criminal)	**Fire Size:**	39ha

Figure 27: Overview of the Moyreisk – Sunraysia Hwy fire



On 7 January 2026, a fire started on private land on the opposite side of the highway to Kara Kara National Park, spreading in south easterly direction. Resourcing was escalated due to fire activity and control was transferred to Ballarat ICC.

Soon after the fire was spotting across the Sunraysia Highway. On 7 January 2026, the fire became Contained and by mid-afternoon was declared Under Control – 1. Hazardous tree treatment occurred along the Sunraysia Highway and blacking out operations continued. On 8 January 2026, the Sunraysia Highway was closed, but re-opened in the evening. The fire was transferred back to agency control on the 9 January 2026. The fire became Under Control-2 on 23 January 2026 and deemed Safe on 18 February 2026.

There were 7 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

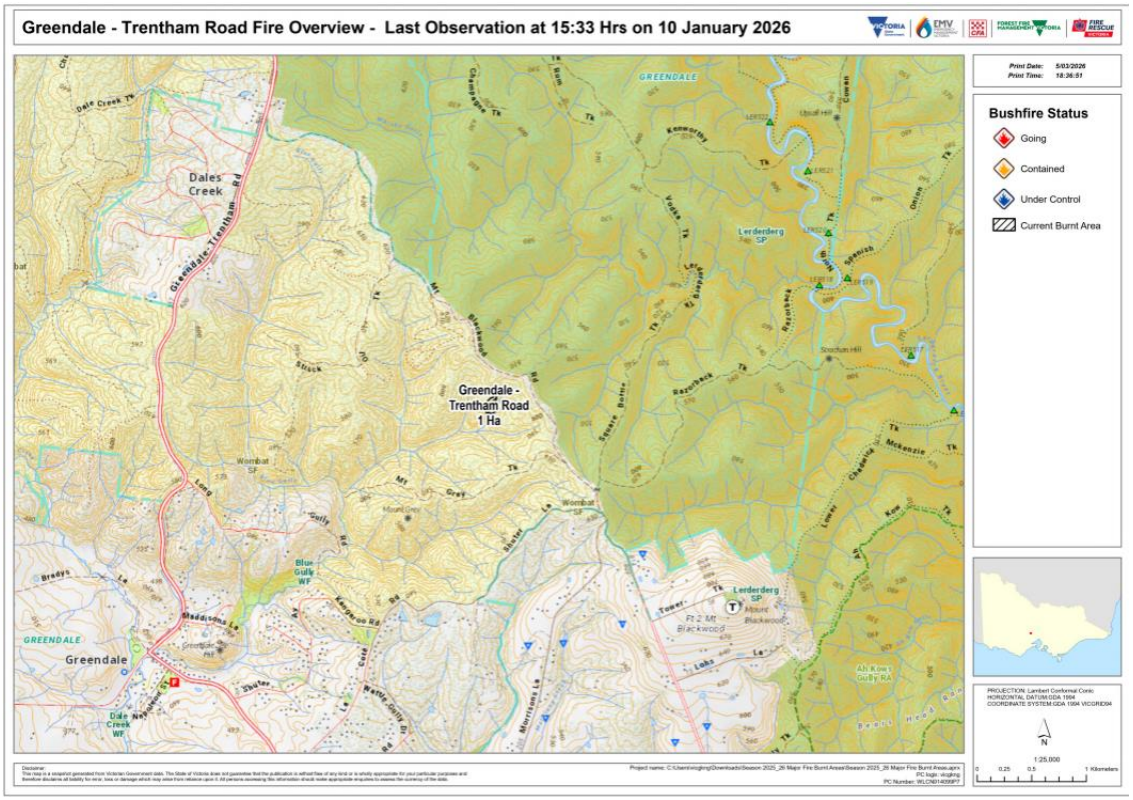
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Greendale – Trentham Road (also known as Mt Blackwood Road)

Table 18: Summary of the Greendale – Trentham Road fire

Fire Name:	Greendale – Trentham Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	9-Jan
ICC:	Ballarat	**Duration:**	1 Day
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	1ha

Figure 28: Overview of the Greendale – Trentham Road fire



On 9 January 2026 a fire was started by lightning. The fire was travelling from Greendale - Trentham Road in an easterly direction towards Mt Blackwood. Control of the fire was transferred to Ballarat ICC the same day. Low fire activity was reported by FFMVic crews who applied successful aggressive first attack principles to contain the fire. Sections of Mt Blackwood Road were brushed up by machines to improve firefighter access into the fire ground. On 09 January 2026, the fire was deemed Contained with crews constructing a control line around the perimeter of the fire. The fire was transferred back to agency control.

On 11 January 2026, the fire was deemed Under Control-1. On 12 January 2026, the fire became Under Control-2. On 23 January 2026 the fire was deemed Safe.

There were 3 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

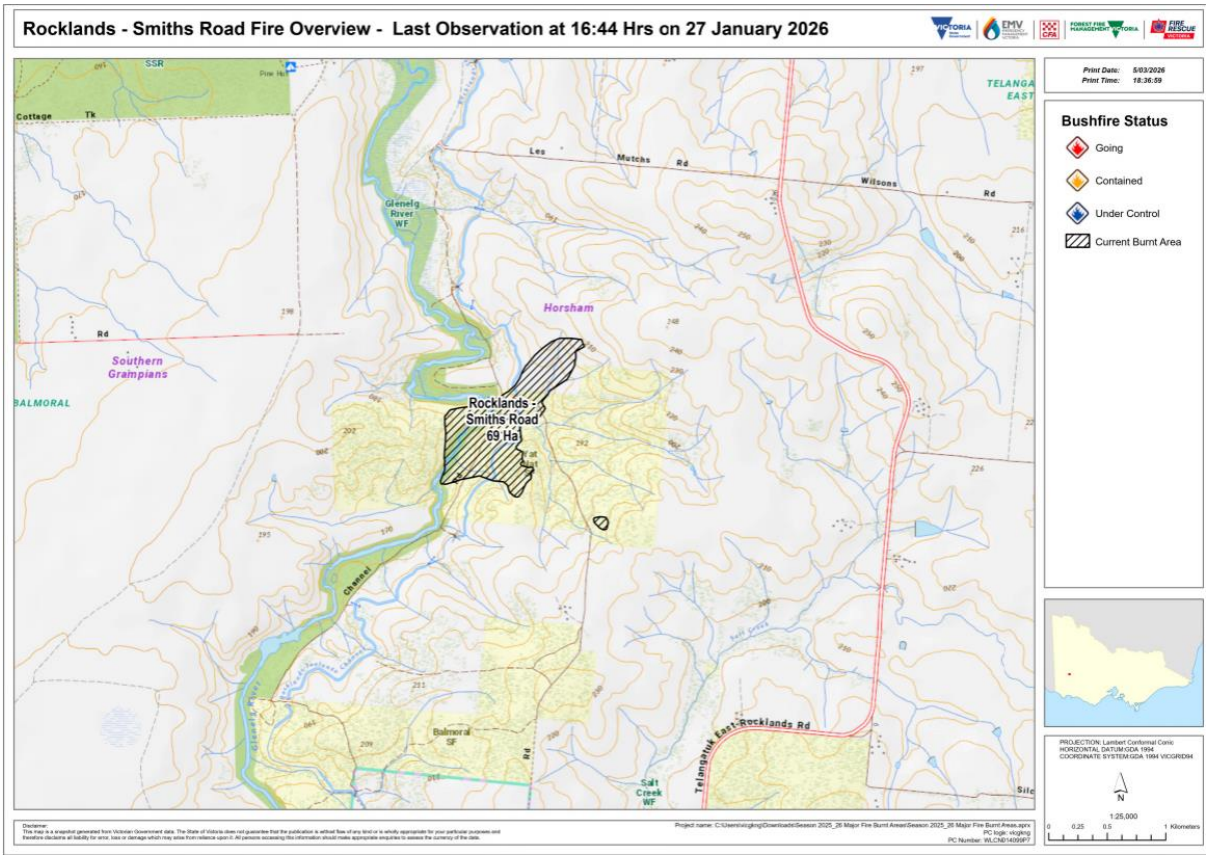
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Rocklands – Smiths Road

Table 19: Summary of the Rocklands – Smiths Road fire

Fire Name:	Rocklands – Smiths Road	**Fire Start Date:**	27-Jan
Region:	Grampians	**Fire Contained Date:**	28-Jan
ICC:	Horsham	**Duration:**	2 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Ongoing Investigation	**Fire Size:**	69ha

Figure 29: Overview of the Rocklands – Smiths Road fire



On 27 January 2026, a column of smoke was sighted from a fire tower.

The fire was travelling from Telangatuk East-Rocklands Road, Telangatuk in an easterly direction towards Black Range State Park with a wind change expected in the next few hours. A large number of FFMVic crew were deployed supplemented with CFA crew and plant tasked with aggressive first attack. Later that afternoon the control of the fire was transferred to Horsham ICC.

Later that evening the fire activity had reduced. Approximately 90% of fire edge had been tracked. Some fire behaviour remained on the western edge (west of the Glenelg River) and a large number of Red Gums remained actively burning. Hazardous tree assessment began along Channel Road. The fire was Contained in the early hours on 28 January 2026.

Throughout the day on 28 January 2026, crews were treating impacted trees along fire perimeter and fire activity was reduced. Crews continued to patrol, black out and undertake hazardous tree work. On 28 January 2026, hazardous tree treatment was completed on Channel Road and Smith Road. On 29 January 2026, the fire became Under Control-1 and the fire was transferred back to agency control.

Hazardous tree works continued in the following days and on 4 February 2026, the fire became Under Control-2. On 11 February 2026 the fire was deemed Safe.

There were 8 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

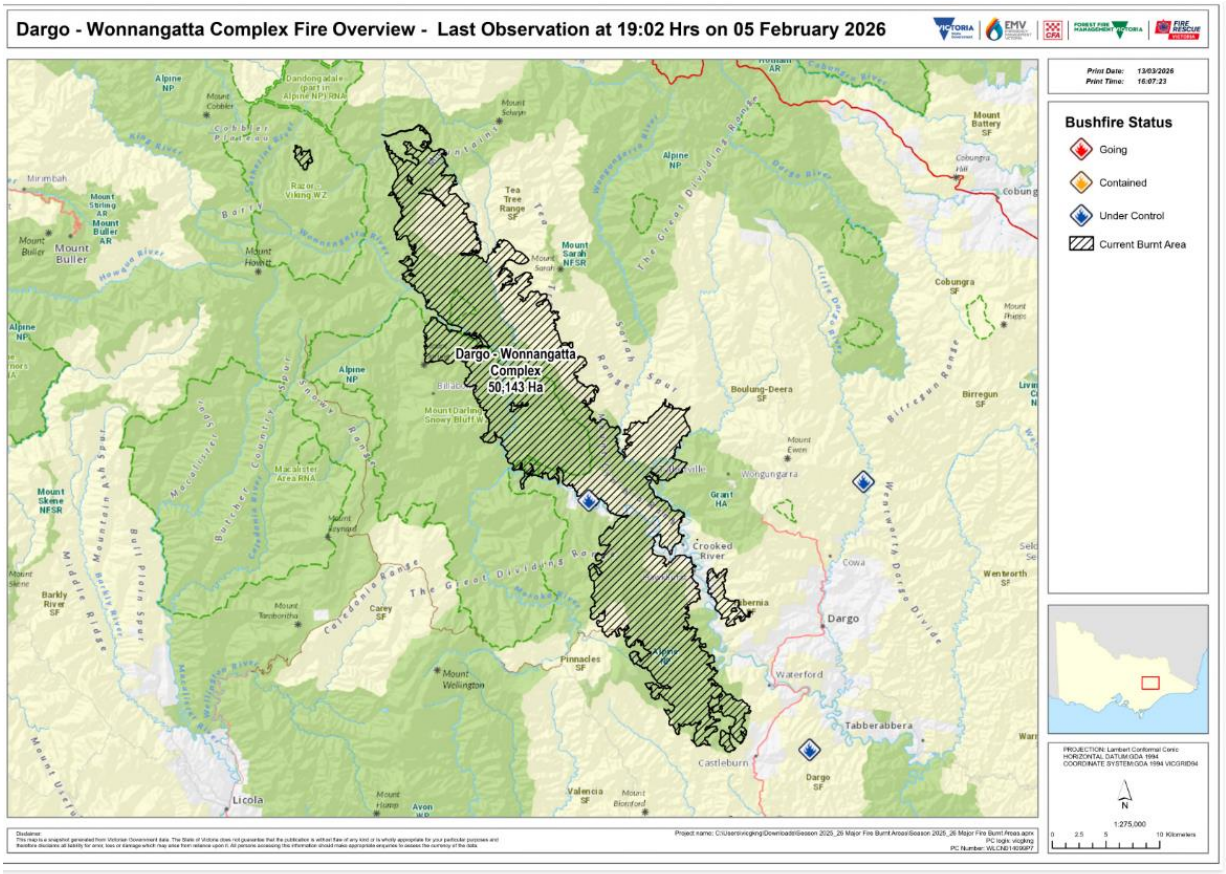
Gippsland

Dargo – Wonnangatta Complex

Table 20: Summary of the Dargo - Wannangatta Complex fire

Fire Name:	Dargo - Wannangatta Complex	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Gippsland	**Fire Contained Date:**	1-Feb
ICC:	Heyfield	**Duration:**	24 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	50,143ha

Figure 30: Overview of the Dargo - Wannangatta Complex fire



The Dargo – Wonnangatta Complex commenced on 9 January 2026, when multiple grass and scrub fires ignited in steep and remote terrain north of Dargo due to lightning, including the Talbotville (Brewery Creek) fire. Control of the incident was initially transferred to Warragul ICC on 9 January 2026, before being transferred to Heyfield ICC. Embers from fires north of Wonnangatta in the Alpine National Park were reported travelling up to 20 km, generating numerous spot fires and increasing the complexity of suppression operations. Aircraft were deployed for water bombing operations, while FFMVic crews, machinery and CFA strike teams undertook asset protection around the Dargo township and surrounding properties.

On 10 January 2026, the Talbotville (Brewery Creek) fire merged with the Van Dammes fire and was renamed the Eaglevale (Wonnangatta Road) fire, later collectively referred to as the Dargo – Wonnangatta Complex. The incident was divided into operational Divisions and Sectors to manage the expanding footprint. Aircraft access to southern sectors was restricted due to heavy smoke and visibility constraints, limiting suppression options in remote terrain. The fire spotted over McDonalds Gap Track on 11 January 2026, compromising intended southern containment lines. Damage to communications tower created significant challenges for both ground and air operations, necessitating deployment of a mobile communications unit.

Between 12 and 18 January 2026, FFMVic control strategy focused on establishing and strengthening containment lines along existing track networks, constructing fallback lines and undertaking strategic backburning operations. CFA strike teams were tasked with asset protection in and around Dargo township, while machinery prepared control lines in the North, West and East Divisions. Lightning and storm activity on 19-20 January 2026 brought isolated rainfall of up to 20mm in parts of the fireground, temporarily reducing fire activity in some sectors, though large areas received little rain. The Wabonga – Razor fire which started on 15 January

2026 was incorporated into the complex as the Wabonga Division on 18 January 2026, further expanding operational scope.

From 21 to 24 January 2026, significant containment and fallback works continued across most sectors, including Castleburn, Talbotville, Mount Darling and Buffalo Valley. On 24 January 2026, increased fire activity was observed in the Castleburn and Talbotville sectors, with aerial support critical to holding the fire north of the Wonnangatta River. AIG flights identified numerous hotspots across the fireground on 25 and 26 January 2026, requiring prioritised perimeter blacking out.

Despite elevated fire danger conditions on 27 January 2026, containment lines largely held, supported by aircraft reconnaissance and ground suppression. Rappel crews were deployed into remote sections of the Buffalo Valley sector on 28 January 2026 to address residual running edge. Progressive reopening of key access routes and National Parks commenced from 29 January 2026 following hazardous tree assessments and track stabilisation works. Rainfall of between 2-12mm across parts of the fireground on 1-2 February 2026 assisted containment, although plant and machinery operations continued given persistent underlying dryness. Aerial Information Gathering flights remained a critical tactic in confirming control and identifying residual hotspots through early February 2026.

The fire was declared Contained on 1 February 2026 and subsequently moved to Under Control 1 on 5 February 2026, with ongoing hazardous tree treatment, soil stabilisation and track repair works continuing across divisions. The fire was transferred back to agency control on 9 February 2026.

The complex impacted extensive areas of the Alpine National Park, state forest and private land, with prolonged park and road closures including sections of the Alpine National Park, Mitchell River National Park and surrounding recreation areas. Energy infrastructure was affected across parts of East Gippsland, with power outages impacting communities.

There were 103 community warnings issued along with 2 Emergency Alert campaigns.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: There were 0 residences destroyed, 1 residence damaged, and 2 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: No Secondary Impact Assessment assessments were undertaken for this event by the council (Wellington Shire) impacted by this fire.

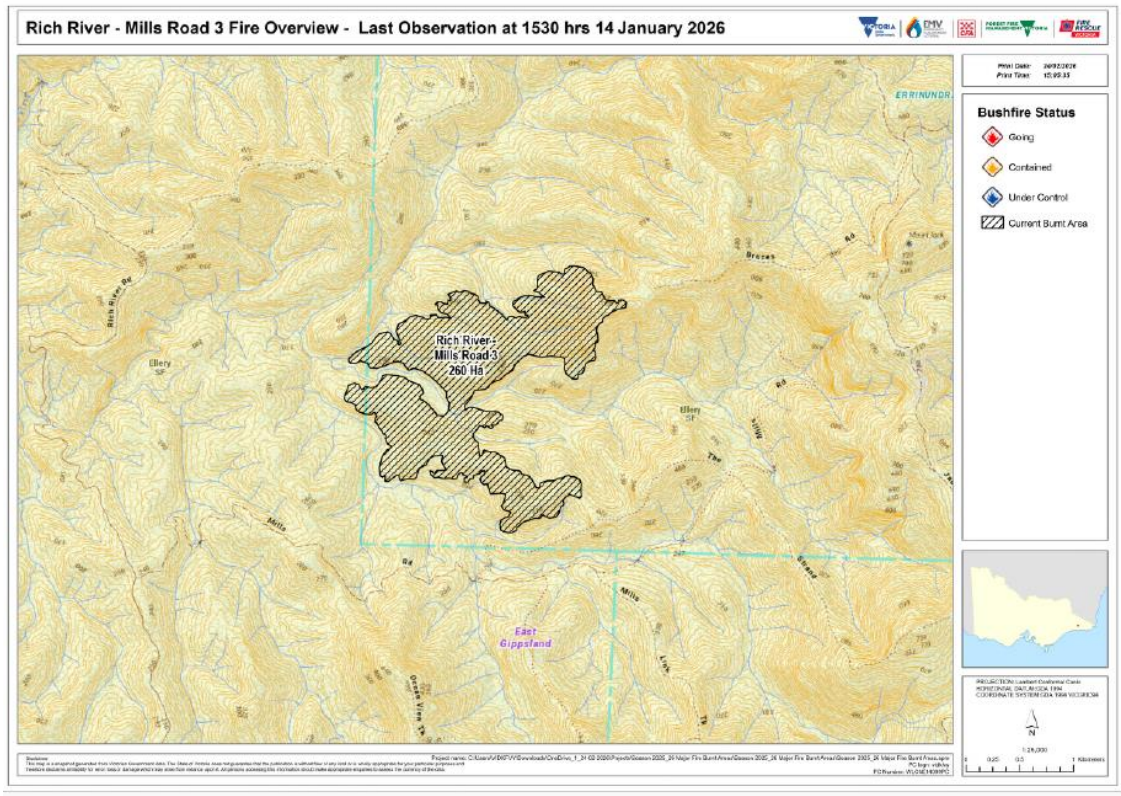
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Rich River – Mills Road 3

Table 21: Summary of the Rich River - Mills Road 3 fire

Fire Name:	Rich River - Mills Road 3	**Fire Start Date:**	8-Jan
Region:	Gippsland	**Fire Contained Date:**	21-Jan
ICC:	Orbost	**Duration:**	14 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	260ha

Figure 31: Overview of the Rich River - Mills Road 3 fire



The Rich River - Mills Road 3 fire started on 8 January 2026 following lightning activity across the region, as part of the broader Snowy Complex. With multiple ignitions occurring across the district, early intelligence assessed the fire as having potential to run toward Murrungowar and Glenn Arte.

In the first few days, the fire was monitored largely through reconnaissance and remote intelligence while priorities were set across competing lightning fires, and there were indications it may have linked with the nearby Mills Road 2 fire. Control of the incident was transferred to Orbost ICC on 10 January 2026.

From 10-15 January 2026, suppression escalated with FFMVic crews and contract plant establishing access and constructing mineral earth control lines using dozers and rakehoes, supported by aerial bombing and later retardant line placement along priority sections of the perimeter (including the north-eastern edge). Works progressively strengthened the southern and western perimeter and focused on securing the northern edge as a priority for containment. Hazardous tree assessment and treatment was completed along the fire edge, with additional hazardous tree works continuing along fallback lines, while access tracks were managed as they became increasingly vulnerable to wet weather and deterioration.

From 16 January 2026 onward, rainfall and wet conditions significantly limited safe access, shifting the operational focus toward planning, reassessment (including Aerial Information Gathering/linescan intelligence), and targeted treatment of residual hotspots as conditions allowed. By 21 January 2026, the fire was declared Contained, and by 25 January 2026 it moved to Under Control, with subsequent patrols and hotspot treatment continuing through late January and early February (including treatment of hotspots identified by Aerial Information Gathering and occasional burning trees near the line). Rehabilitation works progressed across internal tracks and control-line areas. The fire was transferred back to agency control, on the 30 January 2026.

By 19 February 2026, there had been no hotspots or smoke detected for several weeks, indicating sustained stability following containment and under-control phases. The fire was declared Safe on 23 February 2026.

There were no warnings issued for this event.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting was not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

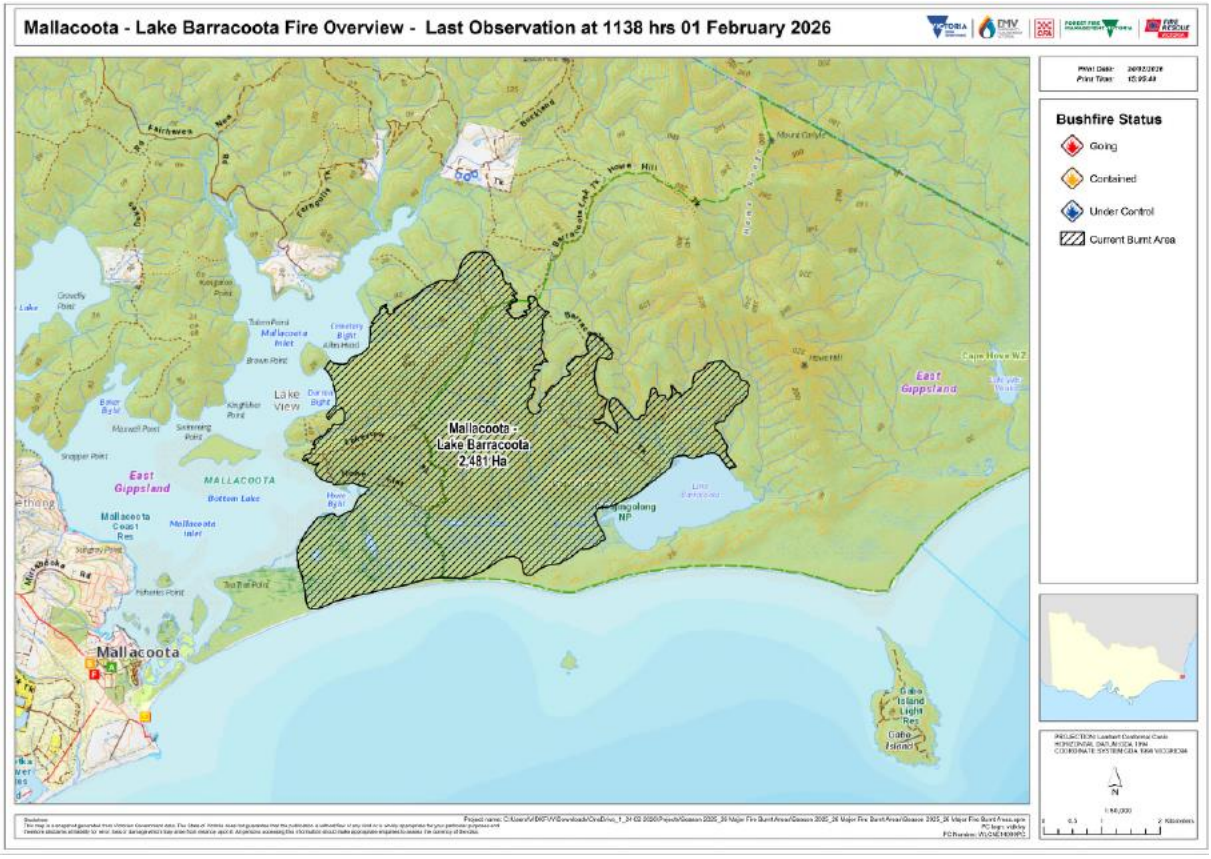
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota

Table 22: Summary of the Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota fire

Fire Name:	Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota	**Fire Start Date:**	8-Jan
Region:	Gippsland	**Fire Contained Date:**	25-Jan
ICC:	Orbost	**Duration:**	18 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	2,481ha

Figure 32: Overview of the Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota fire



The Mallacoota - Lake Barracoota fire was reported on 8 January 2026 after a lightning strike in the highly remote Cape Howe Wilderness Zone within Croajingolong National Park.

The fire became very active over 10-12 January 2026, with predictions indicating potential rapid runs to the north and spotting driven by strong southerly winds.

By 11 January 2026 the fire was assessed at 1,225 ha, with access constrained by terrain and protected natural and cultural values, limiting the effectiveness of aerial suppression and preventing ground access to large portions of the perimeter.

Control of the incident was transferred to Orbost ICC on 10 January.

From 12 January 2026, the fire continued to expand north and north-east, with periods of strong winds pushing fire toward the Mallacoota Inlet and placing private assets under threat. Protection works were undertaken by FFMVic crews, accessing areas by boat where required. Environmental impacts were identified early, including the Eastern Bristlebird habitat within the affected area.

As the fire progressed, containment strategy shifted to prioritise protection of critical assets and high-value environmental areas, including deployment of Large Air Tankers to lay multiple retardant lines around Brokewells Hut and along the south-western perimeter to reduce further spread into priority habitat.

Between 13 and 16 January 2026, the fire edge was managed through a combination of dozer-assisted asset protection and fallback works, including preparation of control options along Ferngully Track and David Creek Track. The Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) (Marshmead) was

identified as an asset potentially at risk, prompting dozer works and staged property protection along the southern boundary of the site.

From 16-19 January 2026, significant rainfall fell across the fireground, substantially moderating fire behaviour and enabling a transition toward stabilisation, recovery planning and perimeter consolidation supported by Aerial Information Gathering and linescan.

From 20 January 2026, FFMVic crews focused on identifying and treating residual hotspots close to the edge. Rappel crews established helicopter landing sites to support aerial insertion of ground crews, with MLC used as a base to support access to the north-east edge.

By 24 January 2026, approximately 45% of hotspots had been treated, increasing to 60% by 25 January 2026, and the fire was declared Contained on 25 January 2026.

The fire was declared Under Control 1 on 6 February 2026, following confirmation that AIG runs were no longer identifying hotspots of concern. The incident created some regional infrastructure pressures, including power interruptions affecting East Gippsland Water operations across the area, which resulted in the requirement of portable generator support.

The incident was transferred back to agency control on 30 January 2026. The fire was moved to Under Control 2 on 10 February 2026 and declared Safe on 23 February 2026.

There were 30 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment Summary: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting was not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

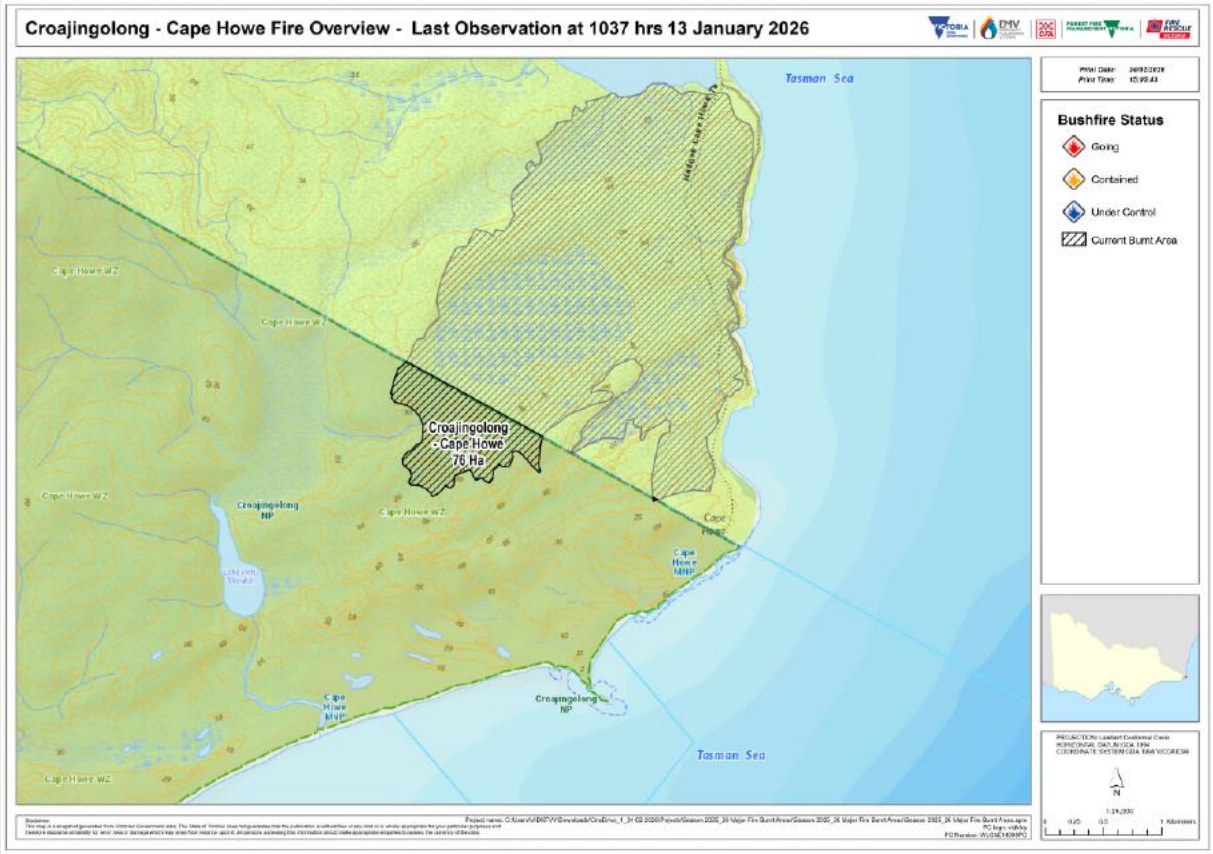
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Croajingolong - Cape Howe

Table 23: Summary of the Croajingolong - Cape Howe fire

Fire Name:	Croajingolong - Cape Howe	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Gippsland	**Fire Contained Date:**	14-Jan
ICC:	Orbost	**Duration:**	6 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	76ha

Figure 33: Overview of the Croajingolong - Cape Howe fire



The Croajingolong - Cape Howe fire started on 9 January 2026 as a result of lightning, during a period of widespread ignitions across East Gippsland and southern NSW. The fire formed part of the broader Snowy Complex and was primarily located within Nadgee Nature Reserve in NSW, with the southern edge extending into the Cape Howe Wilderness Area of Croajingolong National Park in Victoria.

Control was transferred to Orbost ICC on 10 January, with cross-border liaison embedded within the IMT given the fire's footprint across both jurisdictions.

Between 11 and 13 January 2026, FFMVic crews focused on suppression and aerial operations, with water sourced from Lake Barracoota, and coordinated efforts between Victorian and NSW agencies. At this stage, the entire fire area (including NSW) was reported at approximately 700 ha, with a perimeter of up to 18 km. The fire remained difficult to access due to the remote and rugged terrain, significant natural and cultural heritage values, and limited ground access within the Cape Howe Wilderness Area. There was also identified potential risk to hikers along the Wilderness Coast Walk, and the fire was expected to move further into Victoria under prevailing north and east winds. Seventeen NSW RAFT crews worked along the western and southern perimeters to strengthen control lines and prevent spread north of Nadgee Lake and toward the west and south.

On 14 January 2026, NSW advised that the fire status would be changed to Contained, with significant rainfall forecast over the fireground. By 15-18 January, sustained rainfall limited further operational deployment, with no crews or aircraft tasked due to wet conditions. NSW undertook planning for FLIR/AIG intelligence runs to confirm fire behaviour post-rainfall.

The fire was formally recorded as Contained on 14 January 2026, and on 21 January 2026 an Aerial Information Gathering run confirmed no hotspots within 80 metres of the fire boundary.

The fire was subsequently moved to Safe on 21 January 2026, in line with NSW status, and no further situation reports were issued. The fire was transferred back to agency control on 30 January 2026.

There were no warnings issued for this event.

Initial Impact Assessment summary: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

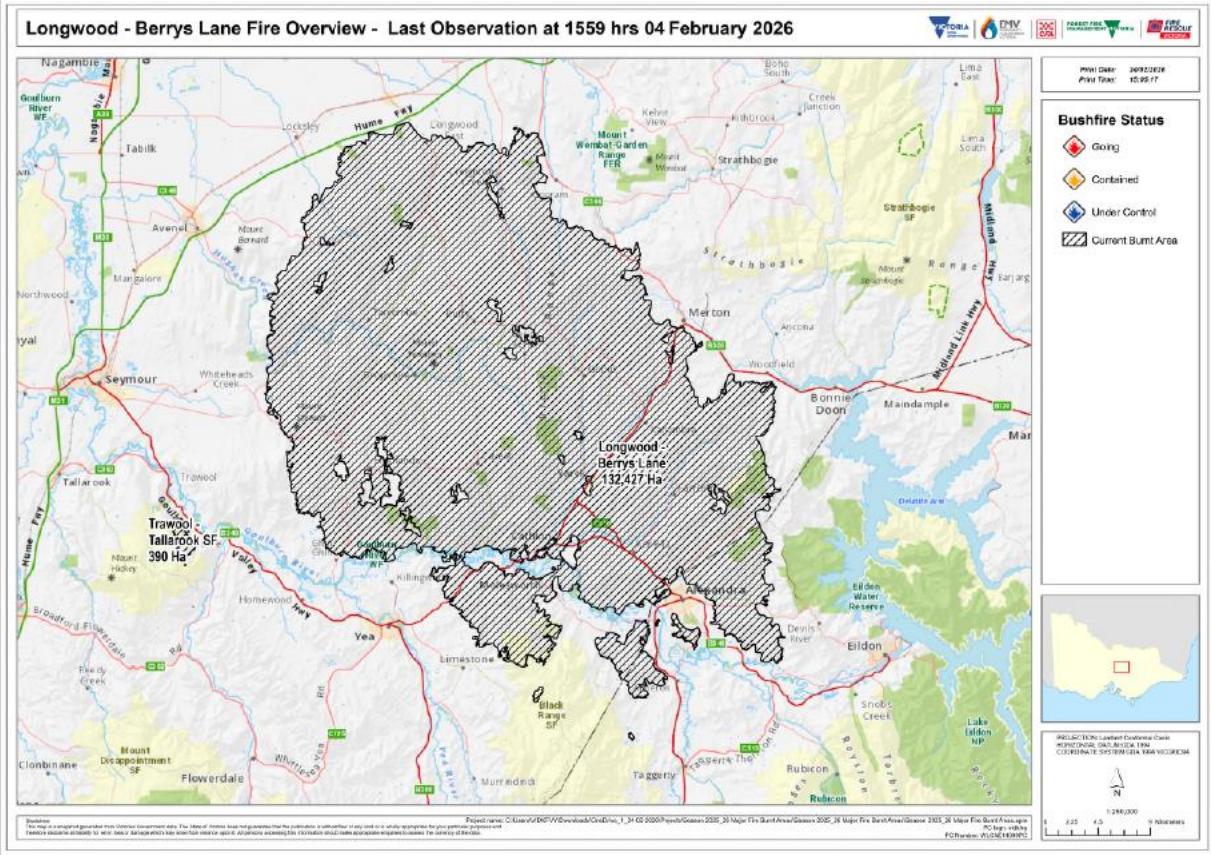
Hume

Longwood – Berrys Lane

Table 24: Summary of the Longwood - Berrys Lane fire

Fire Name:	Longwood - Berrys Lane	**Fire Start Date:**	7-Jan
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	21-Jan
ICC:	Seymour	**Duration:**	15 days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Ongoing Investigation	**Fire Size:**	132,427ha

Figure 34: Overview of the Longwood - Berrys Lane fire



The Longwood - Berrys Lane fire ignited on 7 January 2026 near the Hume Freeway in the Hume Region, cause being investigated. Two fires were reported in close proximity to major transport corridors, prompting an immediate escalation of resources.

The fire spread rapidly through dry grass and scrub fuels under elevated fire danger conditions, threatening properties, critical transport infrastructure and rail assets. Control of the incident was transferred to Alexandra ICC on 7 January 2026.

Given the proximity to the Hume Freeway and the Melbourne-Sydney rail corridor, traffic management and transport disruption became early priorities.

On 7 January 2026, significant aviation resources were actively engaged, including night-capable aviation support. Suppression operations continued with direct attack and containment line construction aimed at preventing further spread toward Longwood township and adjoining farming land. Additional strike teams were deployed to strengthen containment lines and undertake black-out operations, reflecting an escalation in suppression effort as fire behaviour intensified.

Due to concerns and the potential spread of the Longwood fire into Melbourne's water catchment area, FFMVic led planning works which commenced on the 10 January 2026 with the establishment of a division with a focus to strengthening contingency and strategic breaks for the protection of Melbourne's water supply.

On 10 January 2026, the Line of Control in Alexandra ICC was transferred to Seymour ICC on the basis that the Alexandra ICC was considered within the potential impact area of the fires. This transition was seamless and there was an Incident Controller in place for the duration of the fire response. There was also no interruption to communication at the Alexandra ICC and effective communication was maintained to the field at all times.

Relief arrangements were activated locally, with Emergency Relief Centres available to support affected residents and travellers impacted by road closures and emergency warnings.

Containment was achieved on 21 January, with patrol and monitoring operations continuing into February. The fire impacted structures and transport corridors, water and energy services, communication infrastructure, and resulted in significant livestock loss, as well as impacts to fodder and agriculture.

The fire was deemed Under Control 1 on 5 February, and control of the incident was returned to agency control on 13 February 2026.

There were 216 community warnings issued along with 22 Emergency Alert campaigns and 3 Potential Impact Zone (Red) maps.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: FRV commenced their impact assessment on 9 January 2026, 2 days after the event's commencement on 7 January 2026. FRV concluded IIA for the fire on 19 January 2026, completing 3466 assessments at 1986 unique addresses.

FRV completed 1198 structure-damage assessments, reporting 320 residences destroyed, 19 residences damaged, 859 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 1787 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (88), assessment required (15), affected property (385), assistance required (54) and inaccessible (0).

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: as of 10 March 2026, all councils (Mitchell Shire, Mansfield Shire, Murrindindi Shire and Strathbogie Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

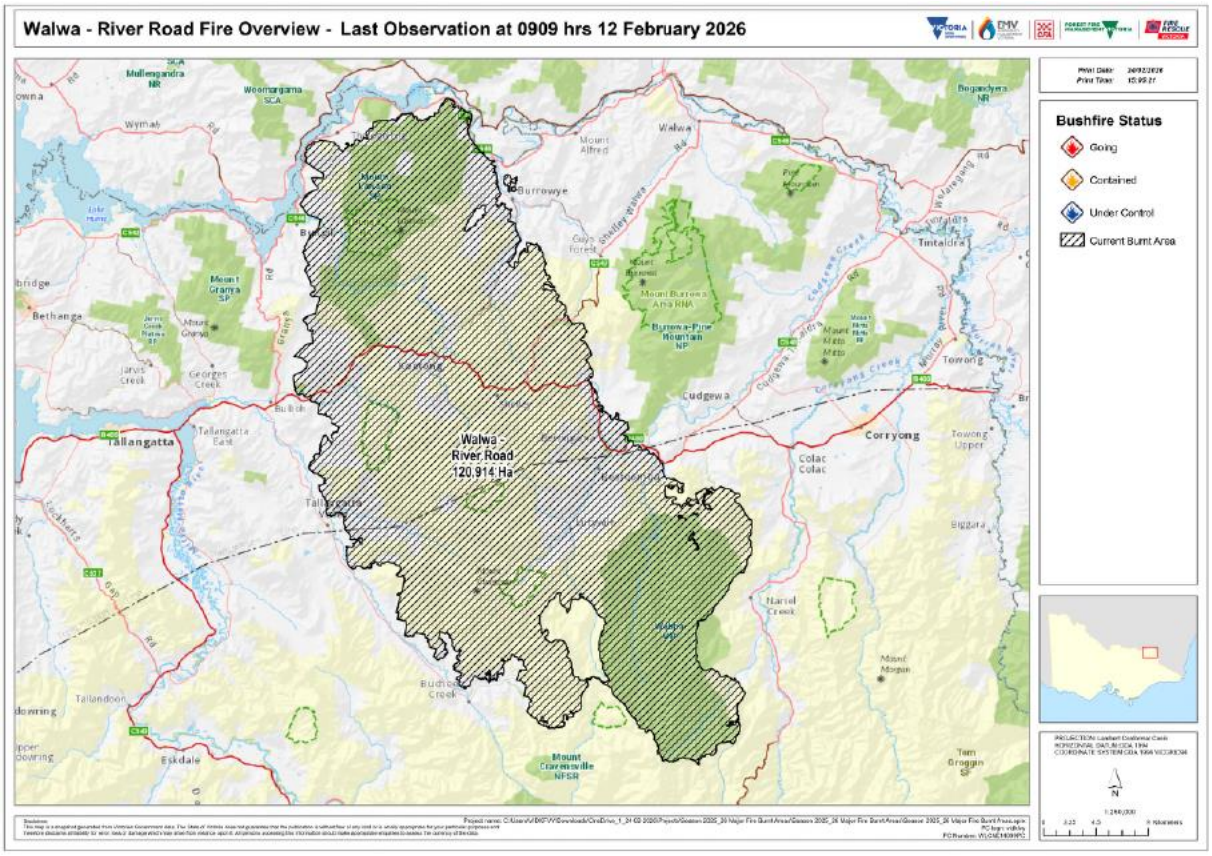
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Walwa - River Road

Table 25: Summary of the Walwa - River Road fire

Fire Name:	Walwa - River Road	**Fire Start Date:**	5-Jan
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	2-Feb
ICC:	Tallangatta	**Duration:**	29 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	120,914ha

Figure 35: Overview of the Walwa *- River Road fire*



The Walwa (River Road) fire ignited on 5 January 2026 from lightning in Mount Lawson National Park near Walwa, close to the New South Wales border.

Control of the incident was transferred to Tallangatta ICC at 1800 hrs on the same day.

The fire spread rapidly through steep forested terrain and dry grass fuels, moving north and north-east toward Murray River Road and adjoining rural properties. Initial response included the deployment of multiple CFA, FFMVic resources and interstate strike teams through cross border arrangement to undertake asset protection and establish containment lines.

Community engagement and community meetings were held keeping community members informed.

During the peak period between 8 and 11 January 2026, the fire expanded significantly, including spot overs into plantation areas. Firefighters were heavily supported by aircraft during periods of active fire behaviour. Backburning and planned ignition works were undertaken, including more than 12 kilometres of containment line construction in the early phase. As part of the containment strategy, the projected incident footprint was expected to reach approximately 150,000 ha, with suppression efforts focused on holding the fire within defined control lines and preventing further spread toward communities and critical infrastructure. A significant 40 km backburning operation was successfully conducted leading to the containment of the fire. Significant support was supplied from international and interstate crews over the duration of the fire.

The incident resulted in substantial impacts across multiple sectors. Road closures were implemented affecting cross-border travel and freight movements. Agriculture losses included grazing pasture, fodder, plantations and fencing. Energy and communications infrastructure were

threatened, requiring contingency planning to maintain essential connectivity. Water infrastructure resilience was monitored, including risk considerations to treatment and supply systems servicing nearby communities. Relief and recovery arrangements were activated with ERCs established to support displaced residents and travellers, and ongoing outreach undertaken to support affected communities.

By mid to late January 2026, containment lines were strengthened and fire activity moderated as conditions eased. Residential losses, the evacuation of multiple communities, prolonged road closures and disruption to telecommunications, transport and agricultural operations had consequences for local residents and businesses. Recovery planning commenced alongside suppression activities, with agencies supporting fencing replacement, agricultural recovery and community wellbeing in a region already impacted by previous fire seasons.

The fire was contained on 2 February 2026 and declared Under Control 1 on 13 February 2026, with control of the incident handed back to FFMVic agency control on the same day.

A total of 402 community warnings were issued along with 8 Emergency Alert campaigns and 2 Potential Impact Zone (Red) maps.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

There were 14 residences destroyed, 2 residences damaged, and 93 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, the council (Towong Shire) impacted by this fire was still progressing Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

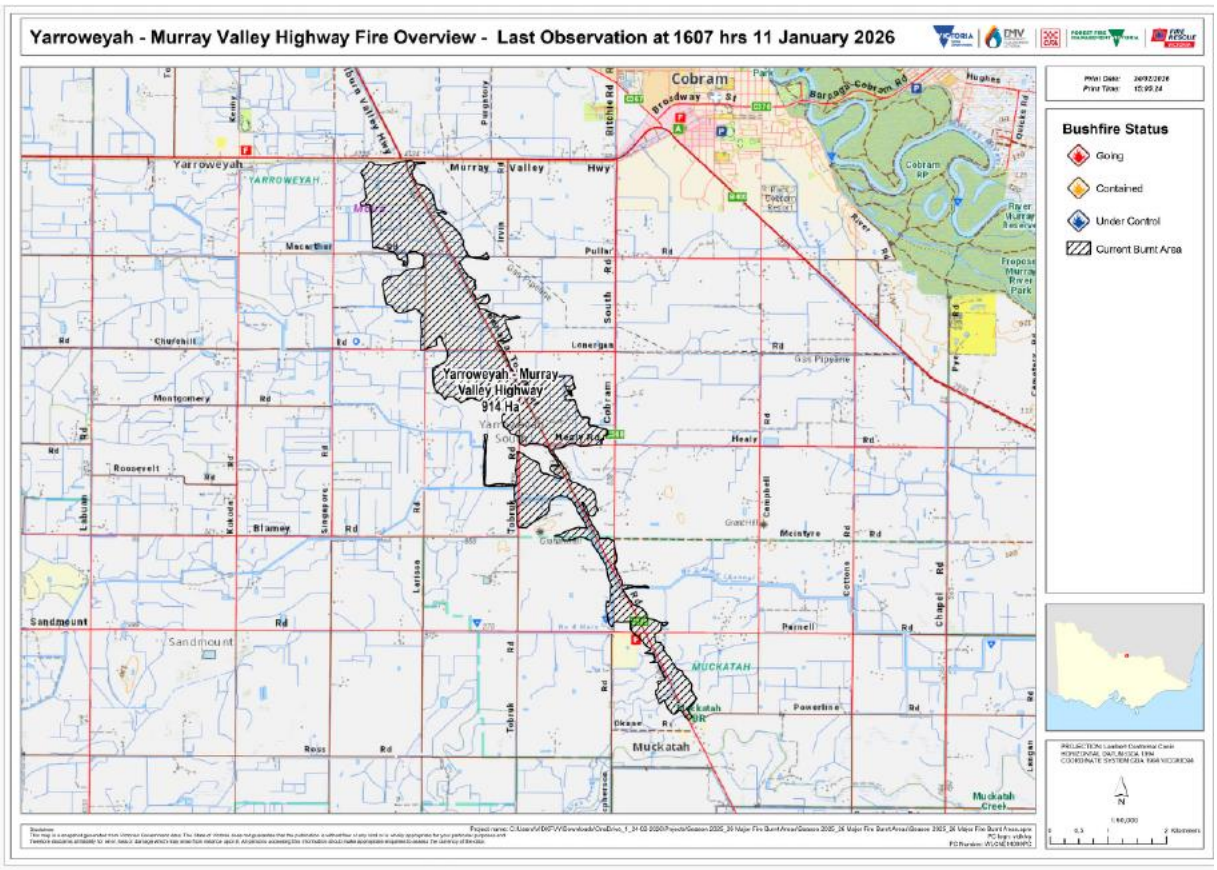
As of 06 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Yarroweyah - Murray Valley Highway

Table 26: Summary of the Yarroweyah - Murray Valley Highway fire

Fire Name:	Yarroweyah - Murray Valley Highway	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	9-Jan
ICC:	Shepparton	**Duration:**	1 Day
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Undetermined	**Fire Size:**	914ha

Figure 36: Overview of the Yarroweyah - Murray Valley Highway fire



The Yarroweyah (Murray Valley Highway) fire ignited on 9 January 2026. Line of control was transferred to Shepparton ICC that day. The fire impacted farmland and rural townships.

Firefighters faced challenging condition with temperatures exceeding 43 degree with wind gusts ups to 60km/hr. Crew undertook successful direct attack.

The fire was declared Contained on 9 January 2026.

On 10 January 2026, suppression efforts focused on holding the eastern flank ahead of forecast wind changes, with the fire halted at Cassidy's Road late in the day.

On 11 January 2026, CFA strike teams and tankers continued blacking out operations, while FFMVic crews managed plant and excavators to treat hazardous trees, particularly along Tocumwal–Benalla Road. Safety remained a key focus, with extensive briefings addressing hazardous trees, fallen powerlines and telecommunications, infrastructure, asbestos risks from burnt structures, and traffic management to prevent public entry into the fireground. Aerial Information Gathering flights updated perimeter mapping and supported impact assessments.

On 12 January 2026, hazardous tree assessments were completed on public land, with treatment continuing on private land in the immediate vicinity of homes, with the fire declared as Safe. Patrols and blacking out operations continued, including management of overnight flare-ups on the southern edge.

Control of the incident was transferred to CFA District 22 as the incident moved into recovery. Transport and utility restoration progressed, to enable reopening of roads, and power restoration works were scheduled across the affected area. Throughout the response and early recovery

phase, agency leads including Moira Shire, DTP and Powercor undertook coordinated impact assessments and infrastructure restoration planning. No major safety issues were reported during the transition phase, and suppression activities progressively reduced as the incident stabilised and recovery operations commenced. Agriculture impacts included loss and damage to agriculture infrastructure, machinery, fodder and horticulture.

There were 22 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

FRV commenced assessment on 16 January 2026, approximately 6 days after the event's commencement on 9 January 2026. FRV concluded IIA for the fire on 16 January 2026, completing 144 total assessments at 83 unique addresses.

FRV completed 144 structure-damage assessments, reporting 12 residences destroyed, 1 residence damaged, 16 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Additionally, 100 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (1), assessment required (0), affected property (14), assistance required (0) and inaccessible (0).

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, the council (Moira Shire) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

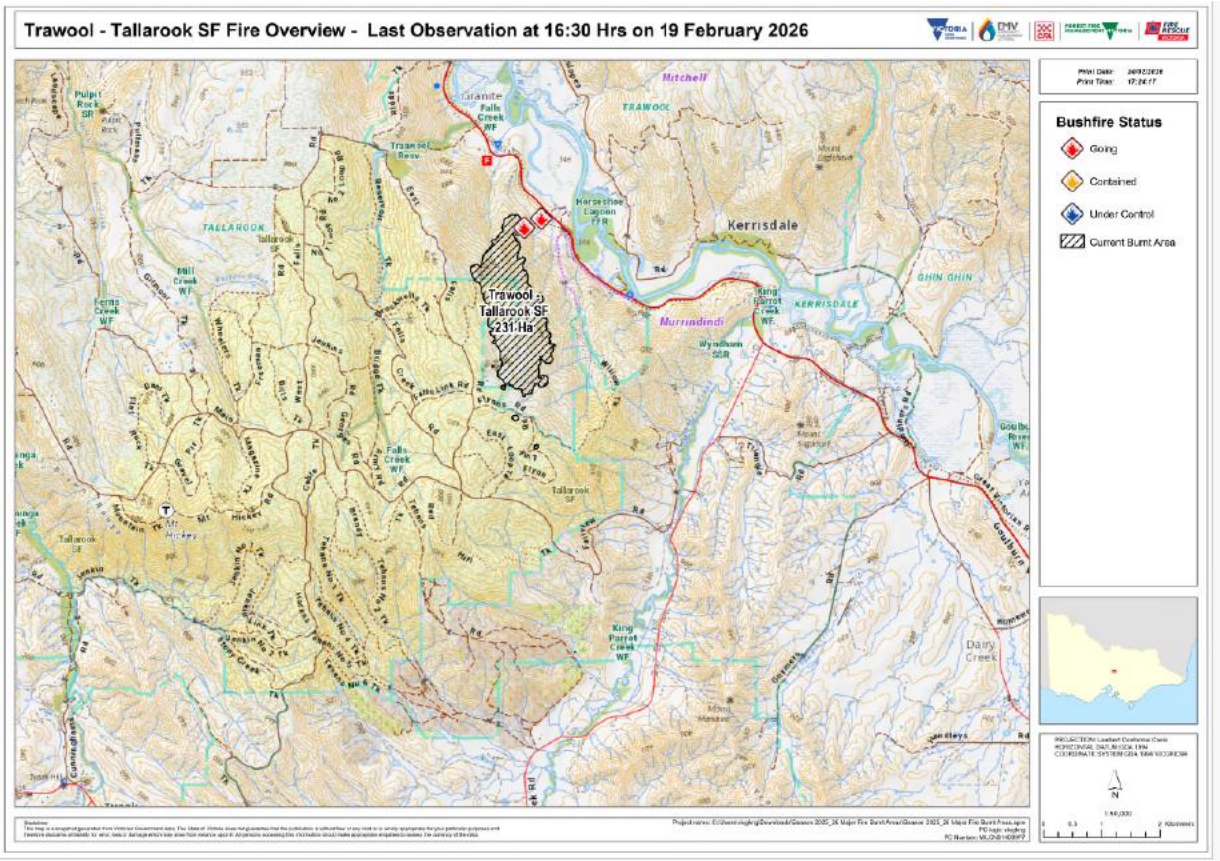
As of 06 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Trawool – Tallarook State Forest

Table 27: Summary of the Trawool - Tallarook State Forest fire

Fire Name:	Trawool - Tallarook State Forest	**Fire Start Date:**	17-Feb
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	23-Feb
ICC:	Alexandra	**Duration:**	7 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Ongoing Investigation	**Fire Size:**	390ha

Figure 37: Overview of the Trawool - Tallarook State Forest fire



The Trawool (Tallarook) bushfire ignited on 17 February 2026 on private property approximately 300 metres south of the Goulburn Highway between Trawool and Kerrisdale. Under northerly winds, high temperatures and low relative humidity, the fire travelled in a southerly direction into private land and the north-eastern corner of the Tallarook State Forest.

Aggressive first attack principles were applied, with significant ground resources deployed by CFA and FFMVic, including a large number of heavy plant assets and substantial aviation support.

Control of the incident transitioned to Alexandra ICC on 17 February 2026.

Early rainfall moderated some fire behaviour, however subsequent hot and dry conditions required strengthened containment lines. Crews constructed mineral earth control lines using dozers and hand trails, brushed up existing tracks and prepared fall-back containment lines. Operations were sectorised across the Goulburn Valley, King Parrot Creek and East Falls sectors. In the East Falls Sector, active fire and slop-overs were addressed through direct aerial attack and ground suppression. In the King Parrot Sector, machinery established a key containment line along Dams Spur Track, linking into Willow Track to support potential backburning operations.

By 19 February 2026, the fire had grown with a perimeter of approximately 10 km, with crews continuing direct attack on hotspots and slop-overs while maintaining defensive lines.

Community warnings were reduced as the threat eased, and the Emergency Relief Centre was stood down, with capacity to reactivate if required. The fire was declared Contained on 23 February 2026 and declared Under Control – 1 on 25 February 2026. The fire was transferred back to agency control on the 27 February 2026.

There were 45 community warnings issued along with 2 Emergency Alert campaigns.

Initial Impact Assessment summary: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting was not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, the status of Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

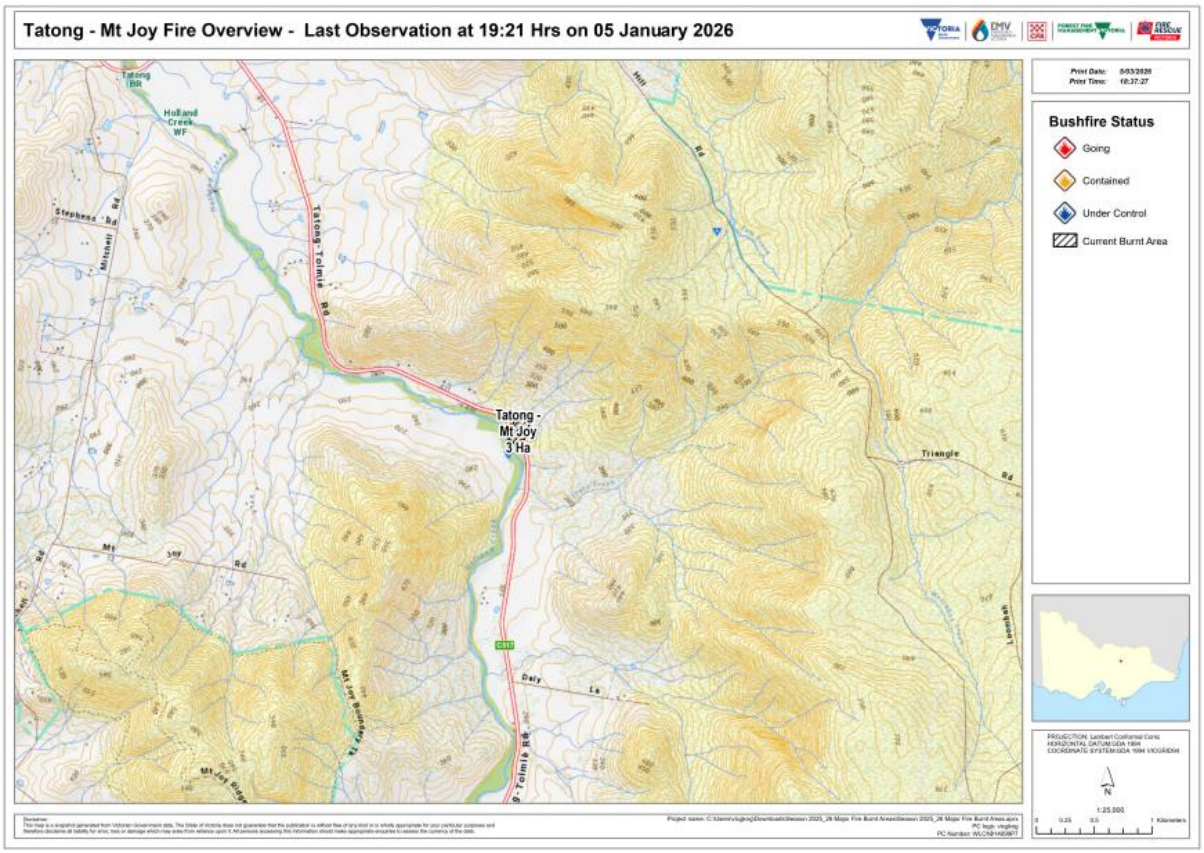
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Tatong - Mt Joy

Table 28: Summary of the Tatong – Mt Joy fire

Fire Name:	Tatong – Mt Joy	**Fire Start Date:**	5-Jan
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	5-Jan
ICC:	Wangaratta	**Duration:**	1 Day
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Undetermined	**Fire Size:**	3ha

Figure 38: Summary of the Tatong – Mt Joy fire



At 1725hrs on 5 January 2026, a call was received for a grass and scrub fire on Tatong Tolmie Road. The response was escalated with FFMVic and CFA crew deployed. Air support was requested including the deployment of large air tankers and the instigation of night bombing operations.

Control of the incident was transferred to Wangaratta ICC early evening. Two aircraft were deployed through the night to keep the containment lines secure. Later that evening the fire was successfully Contained and overnight crews completed a mineral earth control line around the perimeter of the fire.

On 6 January 2026, the fire was transferred back to agency control and hazardous tree assessment continued. The fire impacted forested private land to the east of Tatong – Tolmie Road. Crews continued to blacken out and consolidate the perimeter of the fire. On 6 January 2026, the fire was declared Under Control – 1. Overnight, crews continued to monitor and black out when needed, although there was no risk of fire escape or containment concerns. On 16 January 2026 the fire was deemed Safe.

There were 4 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

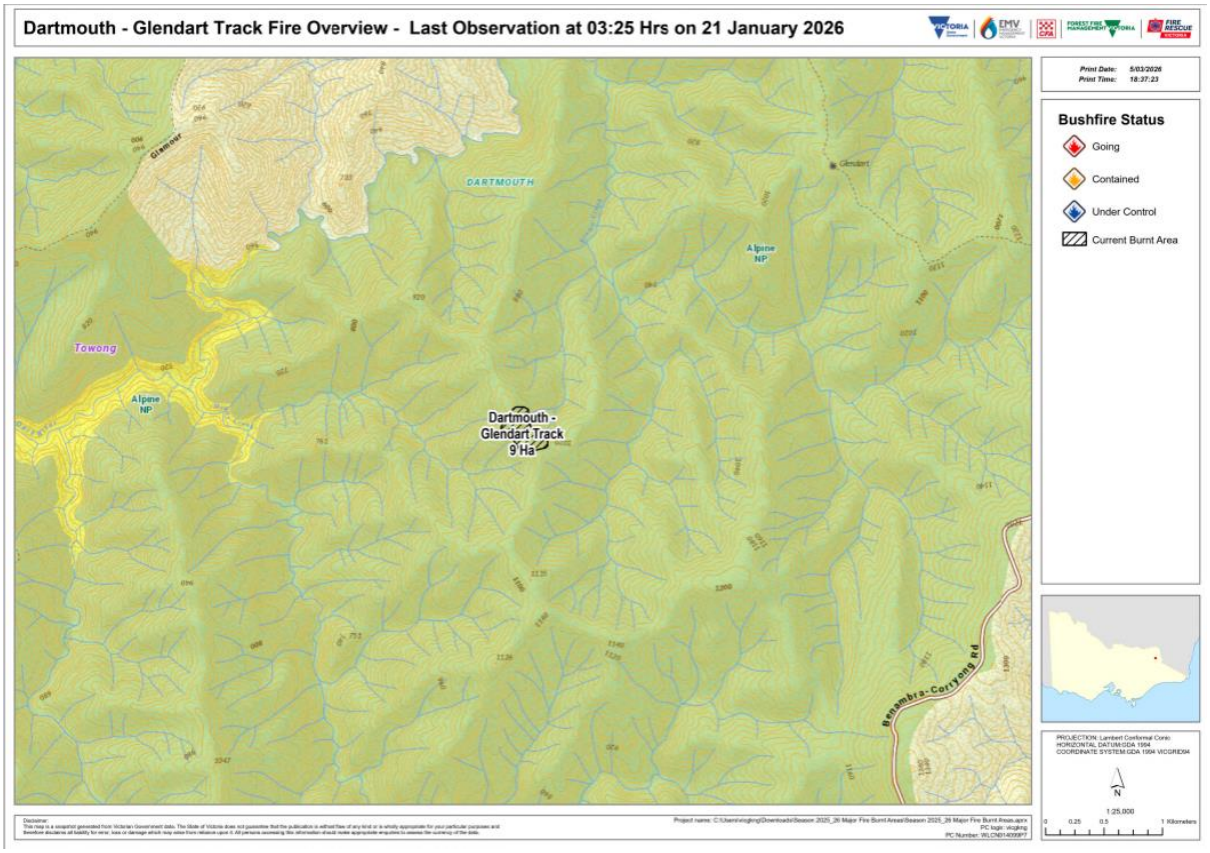
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Dartmouth – Glendart Track

Table 29: Summary of the Dartmouth – Glendart Track fire

Fire Name:	Dartmouth – Glendart Track	**Fire Start Date:**	20-Jan
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	22-Jan
ICC:	Tallangatta	**Duration:**	2 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	9ha

Figure 39: Overview of the Dartmouth – Glendart Track fire



On 20 January 2026, a fire was initially identified through remote sensing from local crew. It was caused by lightning and located in steep, difficult terrain. The fire was transferred to Tallangatta ICC. Due to the remoteness and difficult terrain, a number of aircraft responded to this fire. A rappel crew was deployed takes with initial attack and the establishment of a helipad to support crew insertion. The fire on the western side was slowed by previous burns.

On 20 January 2026, the Longwood Rec Reserve Goulburn Valley Water site was demobilised, with communication sent to the local community. On 21 January 2026, this fire was incorporated into the Walwa - River Rd fire as a separate division. Mineral earth breaks were created around the fire edge. Some trees were treated. The fire was Contained on 22 January 2026.

On 24 January 2026 the fire was monitored by aircraft and there was no fire activity reported. The fire was deemed Under Control 1 on 24 January 2026. The fire continued to be monitored from the air daily. On 02 February 2026, fire was deemed Under Control – 2. On 13 February 2026 the fire was transferred back to agency control. The fire was deemed Safe on 14 February 2026.

There were no warnings issued for this event.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

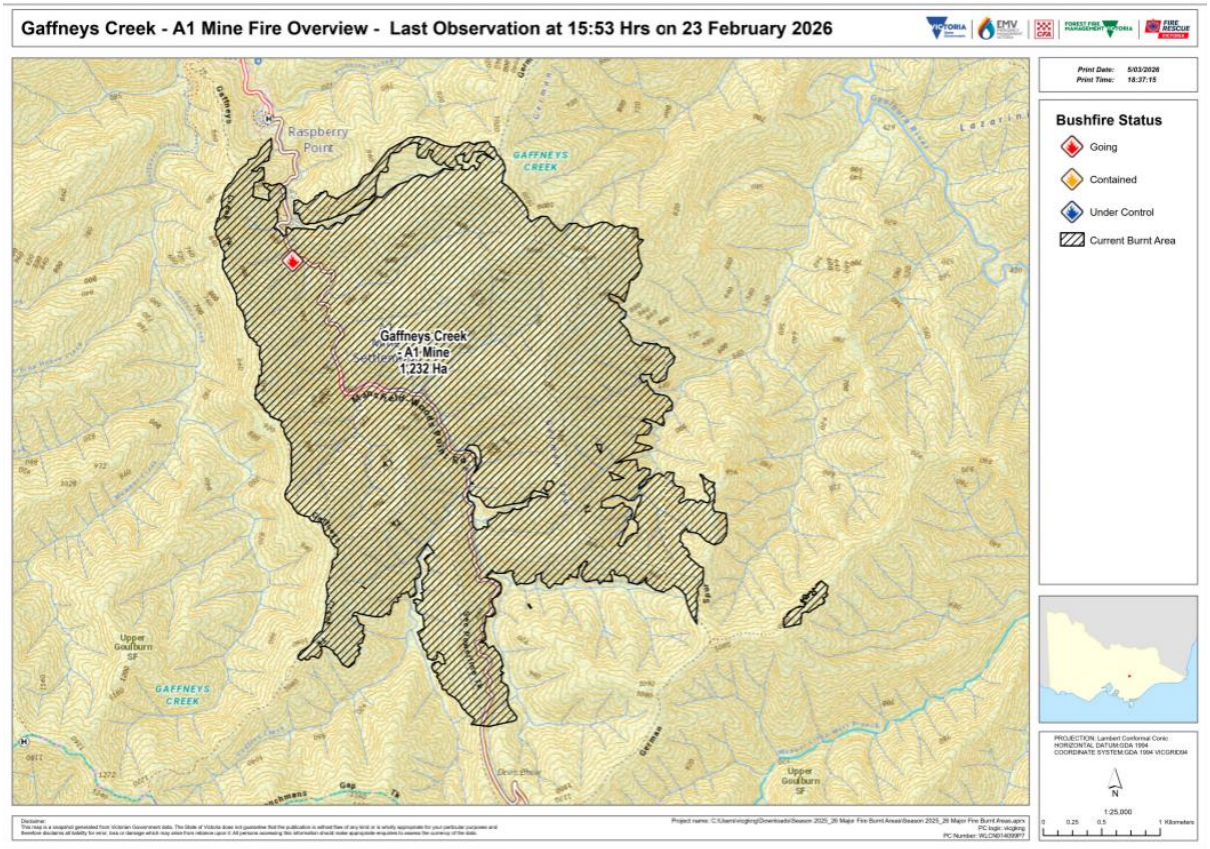
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Gaffneys Creek – A1 Mine

Table 30: Summary of the Gaffneys Creek - A1 Mine fire

Fire Name:	Gaffneys Creek - A1 Mine	**Fire Start Date:**	19-Feb
Region:	Hume	**Fire Contained Date:**	1-Mar
ICC:	Mansfield	**Duration:**	11 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Unknown	**Fire Size:**	1232ha

Figure 40: Overview of the Gaffneys Creek - A1 Mine fire



On 19 February 2026, the Gaffneys Creek fire started at A1 Mine Settlement on Mansfield-Woods Point Road in Gaffneys Creek. Shortly after arriving, crews reported that the fire had spread into difficult terrain and requested night time air support.

On 20 February 2026, further CFA and FFMVic crews from the Trawool fire were redeployed to Gaffney's Creek. Crews arrived on scene and confirmed there was a second ignition location approx. 300m off Gaffneys Creek Track, between that and Mansfield-Woods Point road. The fire was active but relatively benign due to weather conditions and was moving uphill towards Gaffneys Creek Track. It was reported that control was difficult due to complex and steep terrain.

On 20 February 2026, night shift crew from the night before had managed to extinguish the fire edge along the Mansfield-Woods Point Rd. Air support provided aerial intel on current fire extent

and potential spread issues. On 20 February 2026, control of the fire was transferred to Mansfield ICC.

Decreased relative humidity had seen an increase in fire behaviour, and the control line to the south had been crossed. Back burning commenced to manage an expected uphill run towards a control line to south west.

Heavy Plant was used to improve the existing tracks of Gaffneys Creek Track and the A1 Mine Settlement Road to use as control lines. Additional fallback lines were also identified.

On 20 February 2026 the fire had spread significantly to the south and east after crossing the Mansfield Woods Point Road. The decreasing relative humidity at the time was causing an increase in fire behaviour including spotting 2km ahead of front. Aircraft were used to consolidate control lines to the south and west. Night bombing operation was approved for that evening and Mansfield Woods Point Road was closed. Asset protection around A1 Mine settlement commenced with additional CFA resources.

On 25 February 2026, crews are undertaking emergency stabilisation of tracks internal to the fire in the Gaffneys Creek Sector. In the Lazarini Spur Sector, hazardous tree works were occurring on the German Spur Track. On 25 February 2026, fire spread toward the west had been contained along the Gaffneys Creek Track. The focus was to reopen the Mansfield-Woods Point Road and treat identified hotspots.

On 26 February 2026, there was suppressed fire conditions with reduced forward rates expected. Fire conditions remain low throughout the remainder of the week and the weekend.

On 27 February 2026, the Gaffneys Creek – A1 Mine fire formally transferred back to agency control.

By the 28 February 2026, Woods Point Road remained closed to public traffic between Frenchmans Gap, Knockwood and Woods point. Hazardous tree treatment was completed and Ausnet continued working to restore power.

On 01 March 2026, the fire was deemed Contained.

On 06 March 2026, the Fire was moved to Under Control - 1,

There were 60 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures: Formal Initial Impact Assessment activities and data reporting were not completed for this fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary: As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

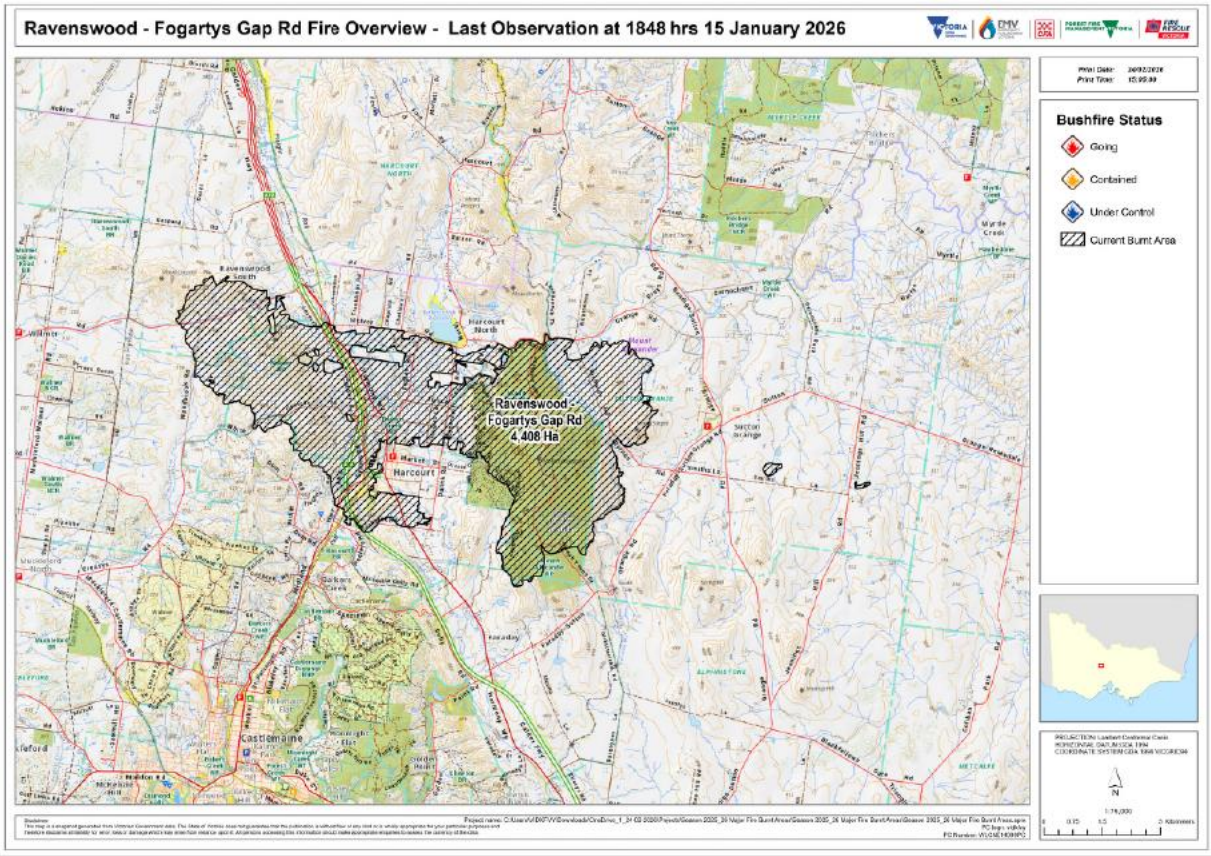
Loddon Mallee

Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap Road

Table 31: Summary of the Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap Road fire

Fire Name:	Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Loddon Mallee	**Fire Contained Date:**	16-Jan
ICC:	Bendigo	**Duration:**	8 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Ongoing investigation	**Fire Size:**	4408ha

Figure 41: Summary of the Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap Road fire



The Ravenswood - Fogartys Gap fire ignited on 9 January 2026 due to an unknown source, travelling rapidly south toward the Midland Highway under extreme fire behaviour conditions.

FFMVic and CFA crew undertook direct attack. The fire moved quickly across steep terrain, spotting more than 1 km ahead and crossing the Calder Highway before burning into Mount Alexander Regional Park, impacting Fire Tower and communications infrastructure.

On 9 January 2026, control of the fire was transferred to Epsom ICC.

By the evening of 9 January 2026, structures had been impacted, and there were potential impacts to the Melbourne-Bendigo rail line.

Between 10 and 15 January 2026, suppression focused on strengthening control lines within Mount Alexander Regional Park and protecting Harcourt township. Burn-out operations were undertaken to secure the southern edge ahead of forecast wind changes, supported by retardant drops and hazardous tree treatment.

The fire was declared Contained on 16 January 2026. Mount Alexander Regional Park remained closed for emergency stabilisation works. Control of the incident was transferred back to agency control on 21 January 2026, with patrol and hotspot treatment continuing into early February as occasional flare-ups occurred within the fire area.

The fire caused significant infrastructure impacts including impacts to water supply, with alternative water supply arrangements in place until potable water testing confirmed safe supply later in January. Customers were without power at peak impact, and telecommunications services required on-site restoration works. Transport disruptions included closures of the Midland Highway, impacts to the Bendigo rail corridor and temporary service suspensions. Agriculture impacts included livestock losses, pasture, fencing and horticulture crop losses.

The fire was declared Under Control - 1 on 17 January 2026, Under Control – 2 on 27 February 2026 and declared Safe on 05 March 2026.

There were 76 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign and 1 Potential Impact Zone (Red) map.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

There were 54 residences destroyed, 0 residence damaged, 23 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, 1 council (City of Greater Bendigo) had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities and 1 council (Mount Alexander Shire) was still progressing Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

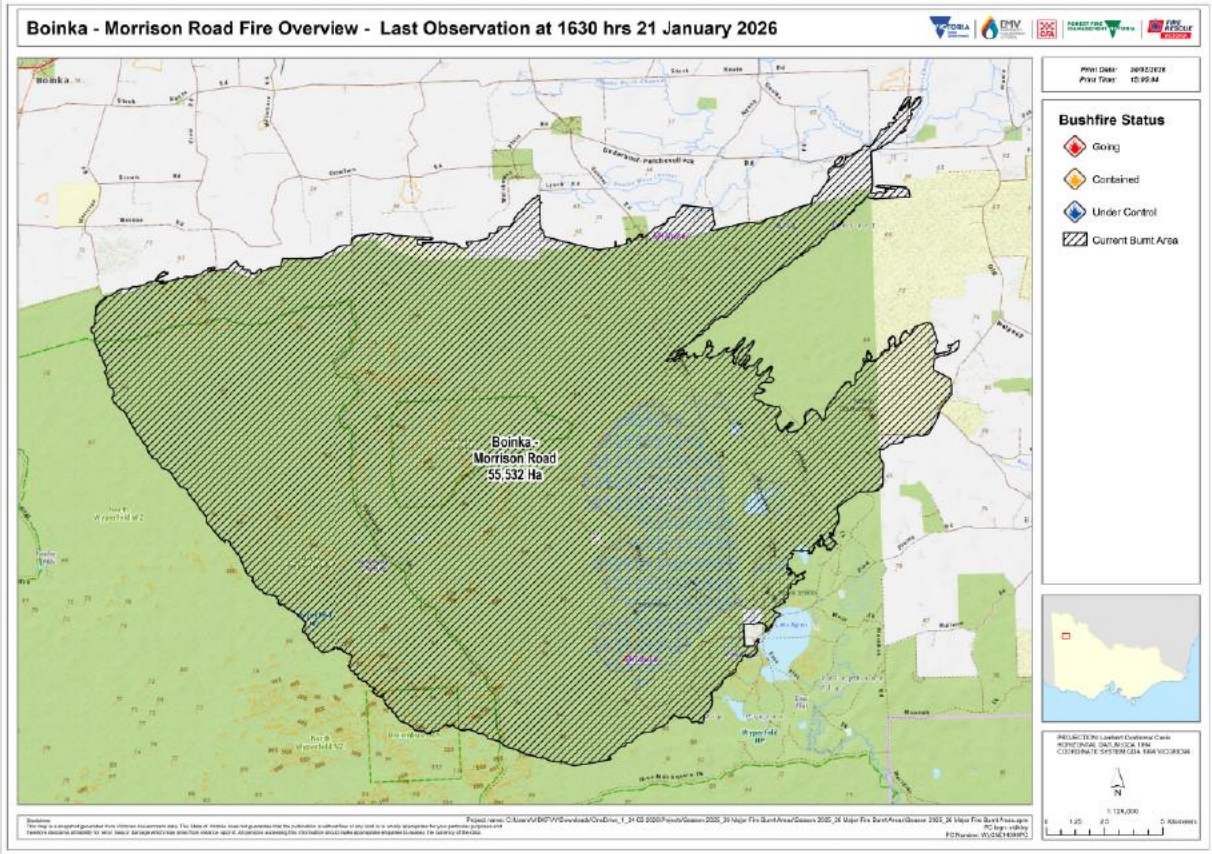
Mallee Complex

Bonika - Morrison Road

Table 32: Summary of the Boinka - Morrison Road fire

Fire Name:	Boinka - Morrison Road	**Fire Start Date:**	8-Jan
Region:	Loddon Mallee	**Fire Contained Date:**	16-Jan
ICC:	Mildura	**Duration:**	9 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	55523ha

Figure 42: Overview of the Boinka - Morrison Road fire



The Boinka (Morrison Road) fire ignited on 8 January 2026, approximately 10 km south of Boinka, with control transferred to Mildura ICC on 9 January 2026. Under strong north-westerly winds, the fire exhibited extreme behaviour, turning pyrocumulonimbus, generating lightning and making a significant run to the north-east into Wyperfeld National Park and onto private land following a wind change on 9 January 2026. For crew safety and due to the ineffectiveness of control options during peak fire behaviour, resources were temporarily withdrawn from public land prior to the change.

From 10-12 January 2026, suppression focused on protecting the public–private land interface near Linga, Gunners Bushland Reserve and Pine Plains, with graders, dozers and disc breaks constructed to limit spread. Aerial Information Gathering identified isolated hotspots, and machinery and hand crews undertook blacking-out operations, including works to protect priority Pink Cockatoo habitat. By 15 January 2026, all primary control lines had been constructed, and the fire was deemed Contained on 16 January 2026.

The fire was declared Under Control 1 on 20 January 2026, and control was transferred back to agency control on the same day. Throughout late January, crews continued patrol, hazardous tree treatment and hotspot monitoring, supported by aerial reconnaissance. Wyperfeld National Park remained closed during recovery works. Wildlife assessment teams were deployed in early February, with no ongoing fire activity detected.

The fire was declared Under Control 2 on 6 February 2026, following confirmation from reconnaissance flights that no active fire remained, however this was then reverted to Under Control 1 on 11 February due to several small flare ups reported inside the fire area.

There were 30 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

No Initial Impact Assessments were undertaken for this event.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, the council (Mildura Rural City) impacted by this fire had completed Secondary Impact Assessment field activities.

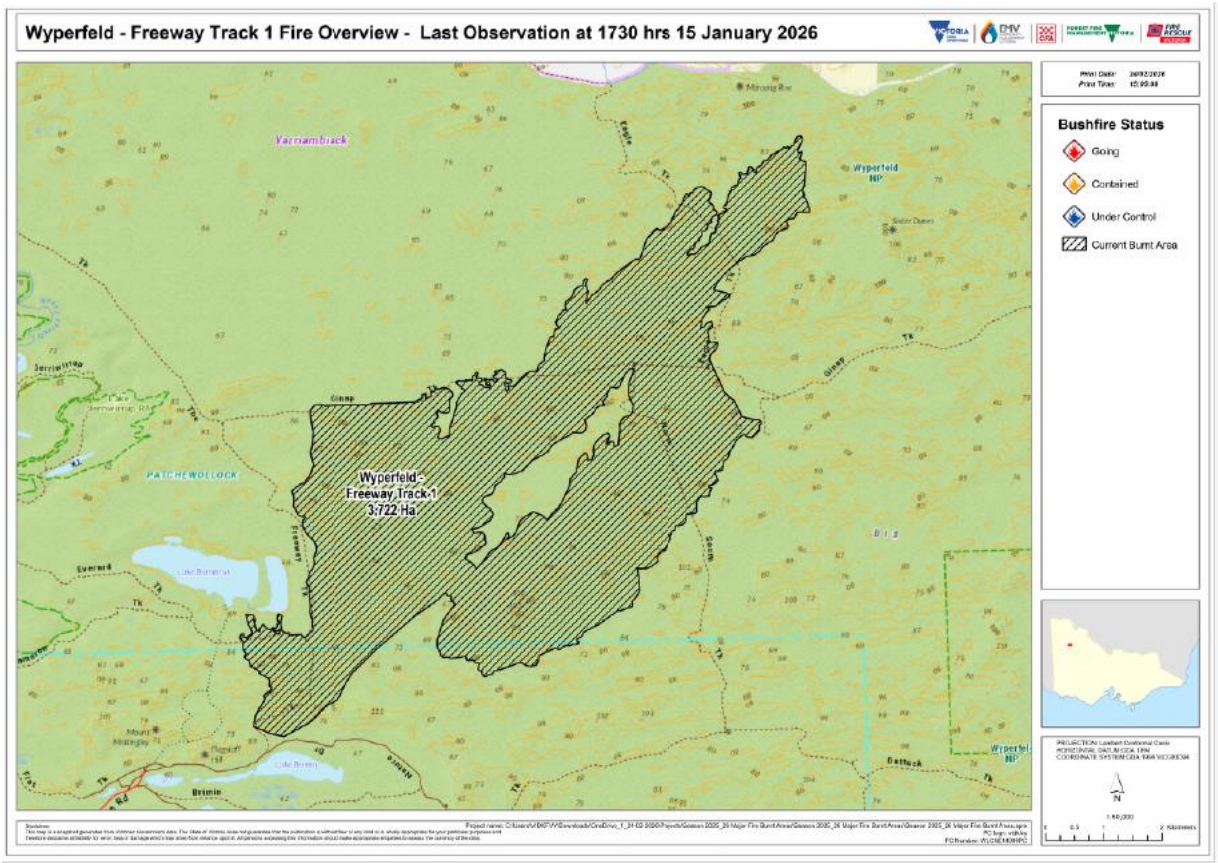
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control 1.

Wyperfeld National Park - Freeway Track 1

Table 33: Summary of the Wyperfeld - Freeway Track 1 fire

Fire Name:	Wyperfeld - Freeway Track 1	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Loddon Mallee	**Fire Contained Date:**	16-Jan
ICC:	Mildura	**Duration:**	8 Days
Control Agency:	DEECA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	3722ha

Figure 43: Overview of the Wyperfeld - Freeway Track 1 fire



The Wyperfeld National Park - Freeway Track 1 fire ignited from lightning on 9 January 2026 within the park, burning in a north-easterly direction under the influence of a strong south-westerly change. Control of the Track 1 and Track 2 fires was transferred to Mildura ICC on 9 January 2026, with the two fires merging on 12 January 2026.

Early operations focused on construction and reinforcement of mineral earth control lines along the southern and north-eastern flanks, supported by aerial bombing to manage flare-ups and hotspots identified through line scan intelligence. Access was complicated by dune systems, hazardous trees and resource limitations across the district.

FFMVic crews undertook patrol, blacking out and strengthening of containment lines, with ongoing concern for the south-western and north-western flanks under southerly wind conditions. The fire was declared Contained on 16 January 2026, aided by previously conducted planned burning operations (2009 and 2023). Ground crews continuing blacking out to a depth of 20 metres into the fire edge and dozers reinforcing control lines as required.

The incident was declared Under Control 1 on 20 January 2026 and transferred back to agency control, with no overnight resources required thereafter.

The fire was declared Under Control – 2 on 30 January 2026, however this was then reverted to Under Control - 1 on 06 February due to requirements for active blacking out.

The fire was declared Under Control - 2 on 12 February 2026.

There were 24 community warnings issued.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

There was no data collected on this specific fire.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by the relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

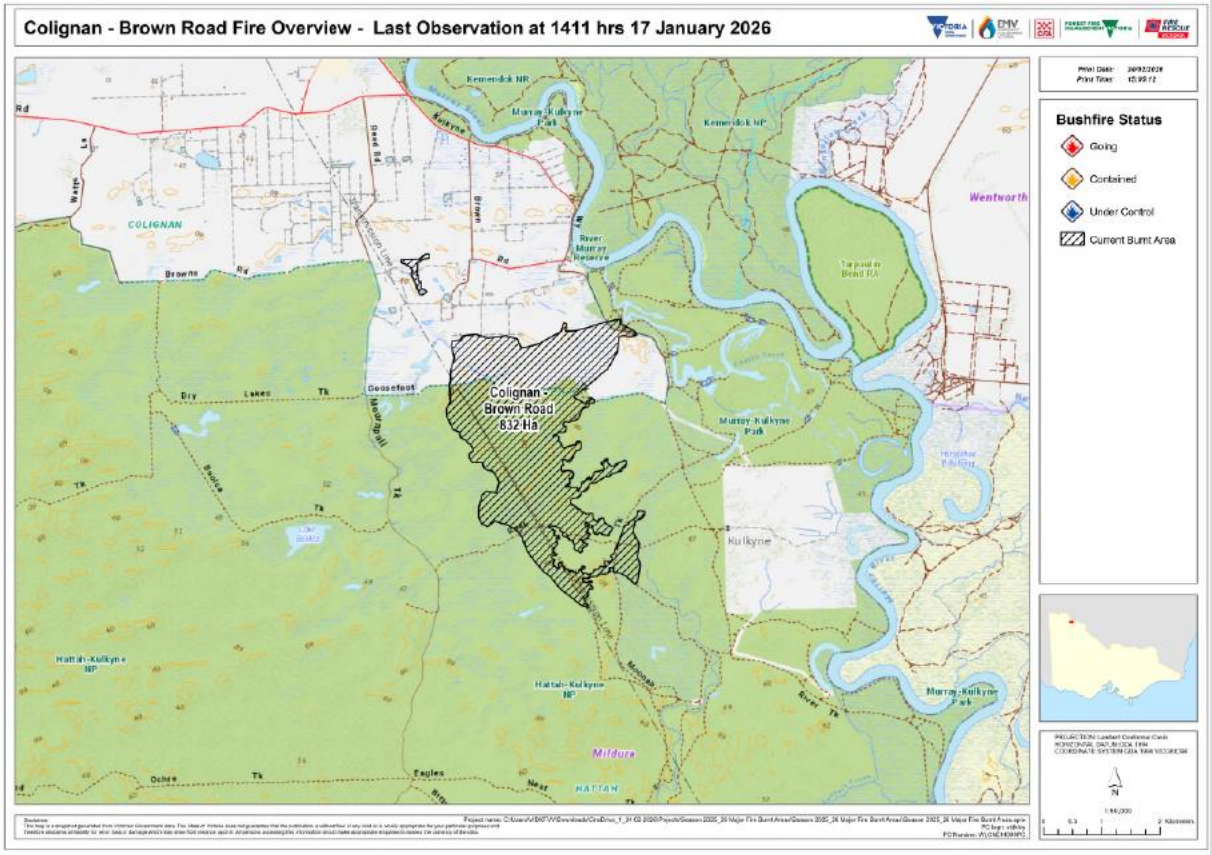
As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Under Control – 2.

Colignan - Brown Road

Table 34: Summary of the Colignan - Brown Road fire

Fire Name:	Colignan - Brown Road	**Fire Start Date:**	9-Jan
Region:	Loddon Mallee	**Fire Contained Date:**	11-Jan
ICC:	Mildura	**Duration:**	3 Days
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Undetermined	**Fire Size:**	832ha

Figure 44: Overview of the Colignan - Brown Road fire



The Colignan (Brown Road) fire ignited on 9 January 2026 following reports of a grass and scrub fire spreading across farmland. Line of control was transferred to Mildura ICC later that day as the fire spread into Hattah–Kulkyne National Park, travelling in a south-easterly direction towards Raak Track. The fire burned approximately 4.5 km into the park across Mallee-heath, Black Box Woodland and River Red Gum Forest, proving difficult to contain due to terrain and vegetation complexity. FFMVic and CFA crews undertook direct suppression activities, progressively tracking the western, northern and north-eastern flanks while working to secure the eastern and southern edges, where active fire behaviour persisted on the floodplain.

By 11 January 2026, the entire perimeter had been tracked and there was no active running edge. Crews identified numerous hotspots along the control line, particularly between Goosefoot and Raak Tracks and within Red Gum and Black Box woodland areas. The fire was declared Contained on 11 January 2026, with ongoing blacking out and hotspot treatment continuing over subsequent days. Crews worked to black out up to 20 metres into the fire edge, subject to hazardous trees and cultural heritage considerations.

The incident was declared Under Control 1 on 15 January 2026, with patrols and hotspot treatment continuing, particularly in the south-eastern corner where heavier fuels supported residual heat.

Between 17 and 21 January 2026, suppression activity reduced, with patrols confirming progressive containment of hotspots and hazardous tree works continuing across the fireground. Community information was refined to focus on the closed park footprint. The fire was transferred back to agency control on the 20 January 2026.

By late January, repeated patrols identified minimal to no hotspots, hazardous tree treatment was completed, and access tracks, including River Track, were progressively reopened.

The fire was moved to Under Control 2 on 30 January 2026. In early February 2026, no fire activity was reported. Rehabilitation planning progressed, agriculture assessments identified apiary and crop impacts, and wildlife assessments were undertaken with no ongoing fire impacts identified.

By 6 February 2026, there was no active fire behaviour, with rehabilitation works continuing as part of post-incident recovery.

As of 24 February 2026, the fire was deemed Safe.

There were 27 community warnings issued along with 2 Emergency Alert campaigns.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

No assessments were undertaken for this event.

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 10 March 2026, Secondary Impact Assessment activities or reporting by the relevant land manager and/or affected council was unavailable.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains Safe.

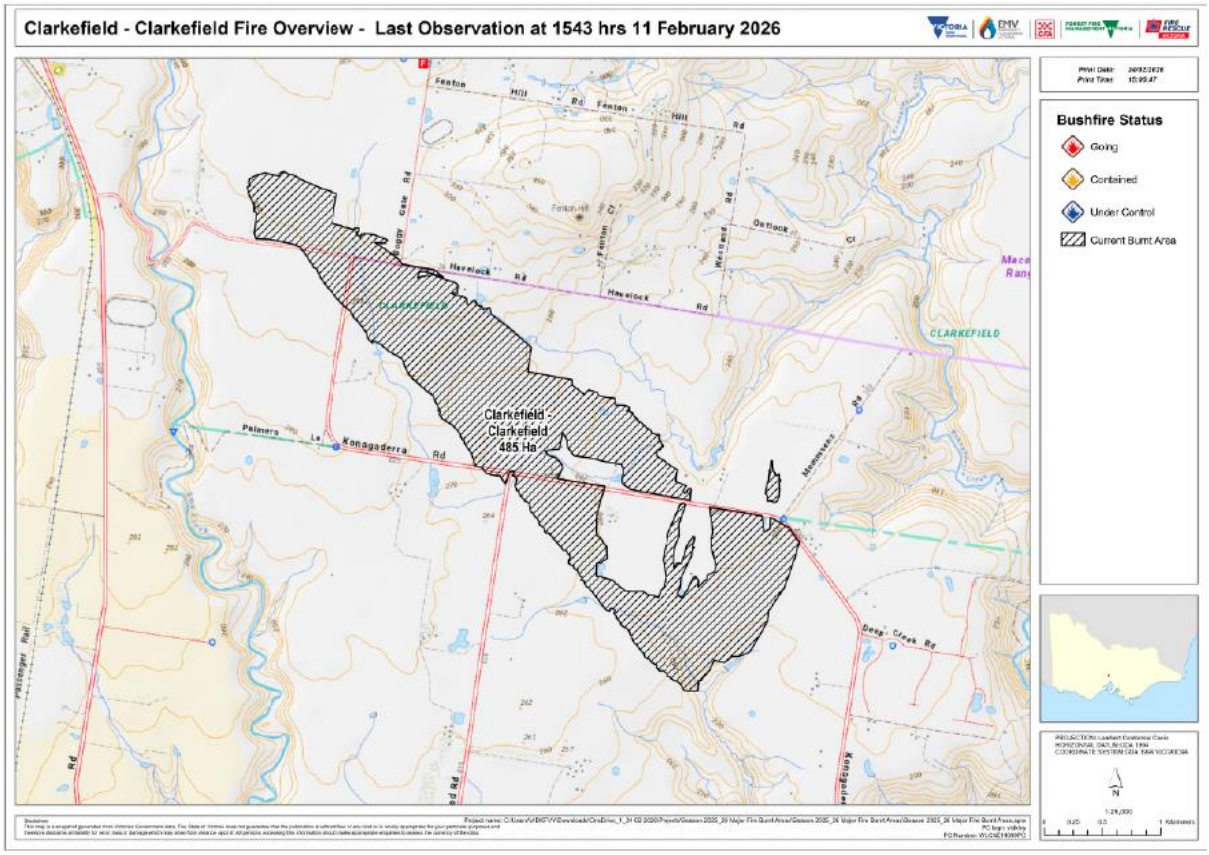
North-West Metro

Clarkefield

Table 35: Summary of the Clarkefield - Konagaderra fire

Fire Name:	Clarkefield - Konagaderra	**Fire Start Date:**	11-Feb
Region:	NW Metro	**Fire Contained Date:**	11-Feb
ICC:	Gisborne	**Duration:**	1 day
Control Agency:	CFA	**Line of Control:**	Yes
Cause:	Lightning	**Fire Size:**	485ha

Figure 45: Overview of the Clarkefield - Konagaderra fire



The Clarkefield (Konagaderra Road) grass fire ignited on 11 February 2026 from lightning, spreading from Konagaderra Road toward Boggy Gate Road under dry grassland conditions.

Control of the incident was transferred to Gisborne ICC on 11 February 2026. The fire spread through rocky grasslands, creating challenges for plant access and control line construction.

Direct attack strategies were implemented, supported by aircraft, before fire behaviour eased later that day. Rainfall of approximately 3-5mm assisted suppression efforts, and the fire was Contained on 11 February 2026.

Overnight and into 12 February 2026, crews focused on blacking out heavy fuels along Konagaderra Road and consolidating the control line. Rocky terrain limited the ability to fully track the perimeter, requiring continued ground-based treatment of hotspots within close proximity to the edge. Hazardous tree assessments were completed, and further reviews of road safety and electricity infrastructure impacts were undertaken. Agriculture impacts included losses of grazing pasture, fencing, and a small number of livestock.

The fire was declared Under Control 1 on 12 February 2026, with control returned to local CFA.

By the end of 12 February 2026, the IMT had demobilised, with local brigades continuing patrol and monitoring under milder weather conditions.

There were 18 community warnings issued along with 1 Emergency Alert campaign.

Initial Impact Assessment summary of impacted structures

FRV commenced assessment on 12 February 2026, 1 day after the event's commencement on 11 February. FRV concluded assessment for the fire on 12 February 2026, completing 133 total assessments at 31 unique addresses.

FRV completed 38 structure-damage assessments, reporting 4 caravans destroyed, 31 caravans damaged, 1 boat and jet-ski damaged and 2 other structures (sheds and outbuildings) damaged or destroyed.

Additionally, 76 structures (residential and other structures) were reported as having no damage.

Other FRV impact assessment data metric reports were: hazards (1), assessment required (0), affected property (14), assistance required (4) and inaccessible (0).

Secondary Impact Assessment summary

As of 20 February 2026, council progress towards completion of secondary impact assessment of impacted structures : Macedon Ranges Shire Council and Hume City Council status is still to be confirmed.

As of 6 March 2026, the fire remains at Safe.

Appendix H – Agency response activities

CFA

Case Study 1 - Difficult Decisions in Catastrophic Conditions - Grass Flats Rd, Mitre - 09 January 2026

Natimuk endured catastrophic fire weather on 9 January 2026. Temperatures nearing 43°C, relative humidity plummeting below 15% and fierce north-westerly winds averaging 50-70km/h (gusting over 90km/h). These were the worst fire conditions in Victoria since 2019-20. CFA and the Natimuk Fire Brigade was alerted to a new fire reported on Grass Flats Rd, Mitre at ~1243hrs on the 9 January 2026.

Natimuk Captain led his brigade's response in their Tanker heading out a few minutes later at ~1247hrs. Whilst enroute Captain Sudholz applied his knowledge and experience to recognise the fire was building rapidly in the catastrophic conditions. Gale-force winds were driving the fire front through bone dry fuels; there was not time to contain the fire, and it appeared likely that the fire would impact the township of Natimuk.

Captain Sudholz ordered his tanker to turn around and head back into Natimuk; before they could arrive, the fire front passed the vehicle and begun impacting several houses on the western outskirts of town. The fire had raced across the ~12km of parched landscape in less than an hour. With limited resources immediately at hand, embers falling all around and an entire township to protect, Natimuk Captain applied the command intent issued by CFA's Chief Officer prior to the season and headed directly to protect the Natimuk Aged Care facility, home to ~40 vulnerable residents; there was no time for evacuations.

Figure 46: Grass Flats Rd, Mitre fire

The efforts of the Natimuk brigade ensured the lives of those staff and residents of the Natimuk Aged Care facility were protected. The fire burnt right up to the edge of the nursing home, embers lit fires in the gardens outside bedrooms; it destroyed nearby homes. As soon as the fire front

passed and the risk to the Age Care facility reduced, the crew quickly moved on to protect the many other lives and properties at risk in the town.

Unfortunately, there were losses. The ~8000ha fire ultimately destroyed several homes in Natimuk and surrounding areas, with many properties, farms and livestock lost. Importantly, no lives were lost in this fire, thanks to timely emergency warnings, heroic efforts by responding crews and sound decision making by CFA leaders such as Captain Sudholz.

Case Study 2 – Seymour Community Meeting – Longwood Fire - 8 January 2026

During the response to major emergencies such as the Longwood fire, community meetings have been shown to be an extremely useful and effective method of disseminating information. They are organised to:

- provide face-to-face tailored, timely and specific information during and/or after an incident,
- provide an opportunity for affected community members to engage directly with agency representatives and members of the IMT, and
- help people make informed decisions of what to do if they are under possible or actual threat and where they can seek relief.

With support from Mitchell and Strathbogie Shire Councils, a decision was made to hold and live stream a community meeting at 6pm on Thursday, 8 January 2026, from the Seymour Sports and Aquatic Centre where it was filled with locals, firefighters and emergency services personnel, with hundreds more online, all in an effort to ensure that residents in emergency zones acted before it was too late.

It is well established that the use of trusted voices during emergency events is highly effective and fosters cooperation and confidence during a crisis. CFA brigades are present in communities throughout Victoria, their membership inherently drawn from and connected with the communities they serve. This case study demonstrates how local CFA volunteer leaders can leverage this trust, confidence and local knowledge to effectively communicate with to their local communities informing of the dangers and spurring communities to act.

The Captain of the Kilmore fire brigade Greg Murphy was in the position of Deputy Incident Controller during the initial days of the Longwood fire. Leading the meeting on the evening of 8 January, Greg warned that conditions on Friday, 9 January 2026 may mean that there's "no chance of controlling (the Longwood) fire".

"I normally say, when I'm giving briefings, that this is to make you alert but not alarmed — tomorrow is a different day. A really different day," Mr Murphy said.

"Despite our best efforts today, we were not able to control this fire. Tomorrow, we've got no chance".

"Our job is to help people. Tomorrow, we might not be able to".

"Catastrophic conditions, to us, means that the fire is uncontrollable, it is unpredictable, and it will move. And that's tomorrow's conditions."

The importance of staying up to date with emergency warnings was emphasised throughout the meeting, with community members urged to make decisions while they still had time.

"Tomorrow we will find ourselves in a place where firefighters cannot operate safely and access fire grounds."

The advice on Thursday, 8 January 2026 was to leave by 7am the following morning if you are within the emergency zone.

"I can't stress strongly enough the difficulty of tomorrow. Mother Nature has a go sometimes, tomorrow she's having a go.

"So, please, that shared responsibility is critical. We'll do what we can for you, please make your own decisions and make good ones."

His words and warning were heeded – people left. Community meetings such as these and the use of trusted community leaders like Greg are critical tools when seeking to engage communities at risk in times of crisis. The meeting at Seymour the night prior to the catastrophic conditions is undoubtedly one of the reasons that we did not lose more lives.

References:

- transcript of Seymour community meeting as provided by Mitchell shire council
- Locals warned Longwood fire may be 'uncontrollable', Seymour telegraph, 9/1/26 By Billie Davern

Case Study 3 – Connected with communities – CFA assist relief outreach program in Longwood

As part of the relief and recovery requirements, the EMC with the SERC identified that there was a need to ensure each land holder, particularly those who had lost primary residences had received face to face contact and were aware of relief and support available.

It was identified that 34 properties within the Longwood fire footprint may not have had any connection to relief services and focused efforts were required to reach the owners.

The required outreach services were unable to be provided through the normal channels; it was critical that outreach crews had a strong understanding of the fire situation and dangers in the area whilst searching the various locations. Across February 8 and 9, the outreach crews consisting of a CFA member and member from VCC - EM utilised local networks and connections to track down and contact the various property owners.

This saw two crews each of two members and a CFA vehicle traverse the fire footprint to visit each of the 34 locations. Were there were no signs of owners / occupiers, the team made further enquiries within the community to establish contact details and the whereabouts of the owners.

In the two days, crews were able to meet face to face with the majority and confirm the status of the owners, provide advice on vital relief services and relay critical contact detail to the relief and recovery agencies. Where physical contact was unsuccessful, contact via phone was arranged. The use of local CFA members within this task utilised their inherent connections across the community, local knowledge and reinforced the trusted network though CFA for VCC -EM to reach those in need.

Case Study 4 – Applying Control Priorities - Streatham- Yalla-Y-Pora Fire – 9 January 2026

The Beaufort Group Officer had responded early to the Streatham fire, that was well outside his group boundary. Understanding it was burning straight towards his area, in catastrophic fire conditions, he provided updates to Fire-Com on the rapidly building column. Weather conditions can significantly affect the performance and effectiveness of fire aircraft, particularly during periods of high winds and strong gusts such as those experienced on 9 January 2026. Agency personnel were reminded that in such conditions aircraft may be unable to take off or land safely, and that suppression drops can lose effectiveness due to dispersal in strong winds. With safety as the overriding consideration in all aviation allocation decisions, the cyclonic wind conditions impacting the district meant it was unsafe for aircraft to operate. As a result, additional ground appliances were requested, and plans were implemented to compensate for the temporary loss of aviation support.

Assisting his neighbouring Westmere Group Officers in coordinating the response to this extremely fast-moving grassfire, the impact of direct firefighting efforts were limited as crews witnessed the destructive nature of the fire as it ran through the township of Carranballac, destroying several houses and community facilities.

Recognising that the fire was streaking through the landscape, out running the trucks trying to extinguish it, Group Officer Heywood sized up the situation and realised that the township of Skipton was in direct path of the inferno. His experience and knowledge told him that the fireground strategy needed to adapt to the situation and made the decision to stop chasing the fire through the paddocks and instead redirected several tankers away from the fire to the township of Skipton. He requested the response of a reserve force of Tanker's from the local Beaufort Group of brigades and a strike team from further away; all to assemble on the western side of Skipton. It is here Group Officer Heywood organised and deployed the multiple crews in the direct path of the fast-moving fire, to protect those who remained in town, local critical infrastructure, and streets full of homes and building.

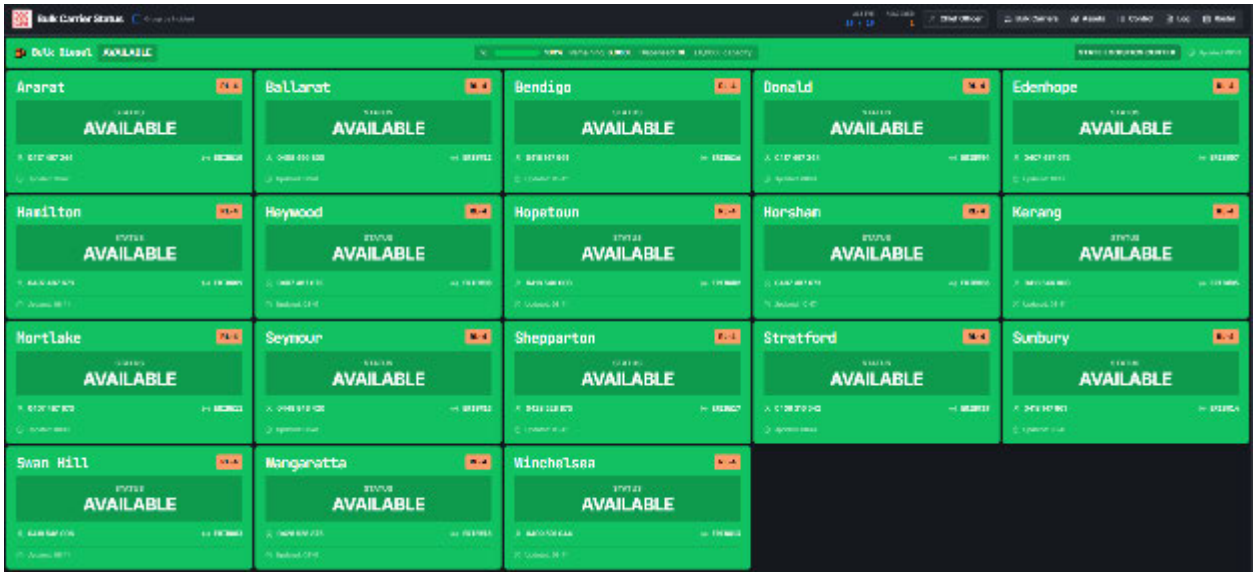
The decision that sacrificed hundreds of acres of land, fencing and livestock paid dividends when the fires impact on Skipton was imminent and Group Officer Heywood had the resources he needed to impede the progress of flames, protecting Skipton from devastation, saving countless of homes and assets.

Case Study 5 – CFA elevated seasonal response initiative

The elevated seasonal response initiative (ESRI) is in full swing which now includes the availability of bulk water carriers, a bulk diesel transport vehicle and open top bulk water modules. Bulk water carriers have been used to support firefighting effort in both grass and scrub and structural fires.

In order to monitor, track and record deployments an ESRI desk has been established, and a dashboard (see below example) has been created to show visibility of the available appliances and noting deployments where they have occurred. This dashboard provides real time availability to the field to allow for immediate dispatch.

Figure 47: ESRI Dashboard



To support the deployment of bulk water resources, all resources were fitted with a CFA bag radio to allow tracking across CFA systems and Telstra tracking devices providing great enhancement with safety, journey mapping and situational awareness for CFA senior leaders. This tracking assists with the validation of invoice information and ensure timely payment. ESRI

desk officers regularly monitor any movements, particularly for those vehicles who have been deployed.

Bulk Water Carriers – Usage

As of 27 January 2026, a total of 1,068.17 hours of operational use has been recorded, with a cost of approx. $2.1 million GST inclusive. The majority of the bulk water carriers have been deployed throughout the season to date.

The bulk diesel carrier, which includes AdBlue became operational on 13 January 2026.

Four open-top 25,000-litre container tanks, along with the associated pumping equipment, and two 16,000-litre closed-tank water modules (incorporating built-in pumps) have also been purchased to increase mobile water availability.

A video has also been developed regarding the initiative with testimonials from CFA crews regarding the initiative and the support it provides to firefighters on the ground during operational activity.

Case Study - Carlisle River

The evacuation of the Carlisle River area was driven by a convergence of fire behaviour modelling, operational intelligence and expert judgement within the IMT. The team relied heavily on detailed fire behaviour modelling and Bureau of Meteorology weather inputs to assess the likelihood of containing the fire and the potential consequences of failure under the predicted conditions for Tuesday, 26 January 2026. Modelling indicated that approximately 1,000 properties were located within the projected impact footprint for that day.

Once the decision to evacuate was made, the IMT worked closely with Victoria Police to initiate the evacuation. Polygons were developed to sequence emergency warnings and establish TMPs, enabling a safe and orderly movement of the community.

Despite the pessimistic early outlook, several unexpected operational advantages emerged that contributed to a better-than-anticipated outcome. A key factor was the success of the overnight backburning operation on the evening prior to Tuesday. Although initially considered challenging to achieve under forecast conditions, crews completed the work due to unexpectedly favourable weather. Overnight relative humidity rose above 80%, significantly higher than the predicted peak of 60%, which had only been expected for a brief period. This additional moisture slowed the morning drying phase, moderating fire behaviour and creating suppression opportunities that had not been forecast.

On the day of expected impact, winds also remained lighter in the morning than predicted. Had the fire breached containment earlier in the day, the consequences for the community would likely have been far more severe. These favourable variances in weather, along with rapid first-attack on breakaways by FFMVic and CFA crews, played a significant role in reducing fire spread and easing pressure on control strategies.

While formal measurement of compliance was not undertaken, anecdotal evidence suggests that evacuation participation was higher than expected—particularly among residents closest to the fire threat. Relief Centre 2 in Colac reached full capacity at the showgrounds, while the second centre accommodated fewer people, and a small number of evacuees travelled to Geelong. In Forrest, observations suggested that as few as eight people remained in the community during the highest risk period.

The road network and traffic management systems performed effectively throughout the evacuation. Victoria Police played a critical role in managing traffic flow and ensuring safe passage out of the area. Their efforts were supported by approximately 100 SES volunteers who undertook extensive doorknocking to ensure residents received timely and accurate information.

TMPs were implemented as planned, contributing to an orderly evacuation with minimal reported issues.

An important consideration during the Carlisle River evacuation was the need to maintain essential economic activity where safe and feasible. Emergency services worked closely with industry to keep dairy operations functioning, recognising the importance of ensuring milk tankers could continue to access farms for collection. This required coordinated escorts for tankers moving through road closures and careful facilitation through TMPs. Similarly, efforts were made to support farmers relocating livestock to safer green paddocks or moving stock out of the area altogether. These measures not only reduced agricultural losses but also helped stabilise the local economy during a period of significant disruption.

This case study highlights the importance of evidence-based decision-making, strong interagency coordination and the ability to adapt operational strategies in response to changing conditions. It also demonstrates the value of proactive evacuation planning in safeguarding communities when forecast conditions indicate that fire impact may be unavoidable.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact that the evacuation had on the Carlisle River and surrounding communities. Being asked to leave one's home—particularly under the uncertainty of an approaching fire—is deeply distressing and disruptive. The willingness of residents to act on warnings, relocate early, and support one another played a critical role in ensuring a safe outcome. We extend our sincere thanks to the community for their cooperation, resilience and trust during a challenging and fastmoving situation. While the decision to evacuate was not taken lightly, it was both necessary and grounded in the best available evidence to safeguard lives. The community's response was exemplary and contributed directly to preventing loss of life.

FRV

In preparation for the high-risk weather season, FRV delivered a comprehensive pre-season briefing program tailored to both station staff and corporate personnel. A dedicated video presentation was provided to all FRV stations, outlining the heightened likelihood of increased fire starts, rapid fire growth, and the broader seasonal risk profile using the latest Bureau of Meteorology outlook and fire behaviour analyst insights. Safety remained a central theme throughout the briefing, with clear guidance provided on critical hazard areas including tree risks, working safely around aircraft, fatigue management, staying informed on weather conditions, recognising dangerous fire behaviour, and preventing smoke exposure, slips, trips and falls. The video also reinforced key safety frameworks such as LACES (Lookouts, Awareness, Communications, Escape routes, Safety zones), and corporate staff were encouraged to ensure their IMT qualifications were current. This briefing package was also made available on the FRV intranet for all operational staff to review during their shifts.

Between 6 October 2025 and 10 October 2025, operational command staff received a more detailed, four session briefing series designed to connect seasonal intelligence with operational decision making:

- Session one introduced the seasonal outlook, focusing on statewide weather patterns, fire risk implications, and the interpretation of conditions of a Fire Behaviour Analyst.
- Session two brought together senior sector leadership, including the Emergency Management Commissioner, National Emergency Management Agency representatives, and CFA Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), to provide updates on state and national emergency management priorities and collaborative arrangements.

- Session three outlined recent Joint Standard Operating Procedures changes, strike team deployment processes, State Operation Centre (SOC) deployment arrangements, IMT role expectations, and a detailed overview of the Regional Agency Controller (RAC) function.
- Session four highlighted the critical role of aviation in bushfire operations, alongside a detailed presentation from FFMVic on lessons from the Los Angeles fires and broader updates on state systems including EM COP, AIIMS, FireWeb, EM Incidents and decision support tools.

To support preparedness, FRV's Emergency Management Liaison (EML) team planned and facilitated two multi agency IMT exercise scenarios held at the Sunshine and Dandenong Incident Control Centres (ICCs). These exercises focused on bushfire response and provided staff across functional and support roles the opportunity to practice skills, apply updated doctrine, and refresh their understanding of policies, procedures, and digital tools. FRV Command staff also participated in CFA led district and regional briefings to maintain situational awareness of local resources and seasonal readiness.

Ongoing operational capability was strengthened through monthly skills maintenance drills delivered to station staff, with bushfire specific modules scheduled ahead of the fire season. These covered bushfire behaviour, strike team deployment processes, Personal Protective Equipment requirements, equipment checks, and fireground safety. The EML team, together with the bushfire team, also developed an interactive FRV Bushfire Dashboard—an intranet based tool that consolidates doctrine, guidance and operational resources required before, during and after bushfire response or deployment.

Finally, FRV delivered a Regional Agency Commander (RAC) awareness package to Commanders and ACFOs to assist them while performing RAC duties within Regional Control Centres (RCCs). This included an in-depth overview of RAC responsibilities, expectations, and coordination arrangements, supported by a dedicated RAC dashboard linking all relevant doctrine, policy and reference material. Collectively, these pre-season initiatives ensured FRV staff across all levels entered the season informed, aligned and prepared for the heightened operational environment.

Overall deployment statistics

Between 1 January and 10 February 2026, FRV deployed multiple people and equipment in direct response to the ongoing bushfire emergency in Victoria. The total number of FRV staff contributing to deployments was about 557. Many of these people deployed on multiple days, so that the total number of deployed person-days was in the order of 1,800 (approximately). On the busiest day, 9 January 2026, 152 FRV staff were deployed across operational, IMT, and support roles. This number relates specifically to the bushfire emergency and was in addition to FRV maintaining business as usual. These figures do not reflect FRV staff on secondment with the CFA.

Role distribution (role-days)

Across the 1,800 deployed person-days, activity breaks down as follows:

- IMT roles (Including State Control Centre (SCC), SOC, RCC and ICC) for approximately 750 person-days and 40% of total deployed person-days, including:
    - ICC roles (Operations, Planning, Safety, Logistics, Public Information Officer, Incident Controller / Deputy IC), SCC intelligence, resources, and coordination, SOC executive officer, operations, and administration, and RCC command and executive functions.
- Operational roles for approximately 655 person-days, approximately 35% of total deployed person-days. including:

  - Ground Intelligence / Ground Observers
  - Rapid Impact Assessment Teams (RIAT)
  - Air Operations and Aircraft Officer roles
  - Strike Teams and field command support
- Ground Intelligence / Ground Observation (GINTL)
  - 3 x personnel per team
  - 44 shifts across 26 days
  - This equates to approximately 120 individual shifts completed (number of personnel x the number of shifts each person completed)
- Rapid Impact Assessment Teams (RIAT)
  - 2 x personnel per team
  - A number of RIAT members also work as liaison and administration within ICC's
  - 94 shifts across 24 days
  - This equates to approximately 220 individual shifts completed (number of personnel x the number of shifts each person completed)
- Strike Teams (also supported by Workshop crews)
  - Approximately 24 personnel per Strike Team, per shift
  - Approximately. 258 individual personnel were deployed on a strike team
  - 15 shifts across 7 days/nights (10 x day shifts, 5 x night shifts)
- Support and specialist roles, for approximately 470 person-days and ~25% of total deployed person-days, including:
  - Peer and psychological support
  - Workshops and mechanical support
  - Community liaison and specialist advisory roles

IMT roles accounted for the largest share of deployed effort (~40%), with operational field roles representing over one-third of activity.

Daily deployment peak

9 January 2026 was the peak deployment day with a total of 152 deployed person-days

Role mixes on 9 January 2026:

- IMT roles: ~68 person-days (~45%)
- Operational roles: ~46 person-days (~30%)
- SCC / SOC / support roles: ~38 person-days (~25%)

FRV's response on 9 January 2026 involved a full IMT activation across multiple Incident Control Centres, supported by significant operational and aviation deployments.

Aviation

FRV provided personnel to support fire aviation operations during the bushfire emergency. Specific roles filled were as follows:

Air Attack Supervisor (AAS): FRV had 11 members rostered (15.3% of the State numbers). The rostered AAS locations across Victoria (excluding Night Fire Aviation Program and Air Desk) totalled 372 rostered shifts. Of the FRV members rostered over January, FRV covered 57 shifts. This provided 16% of the rostered AAS shifts.

FRV have 4 members trained for Aerial Intelligence Gathering (AIG). 2 aircraft were rostered across January creating 124 shifts: FRV members covered 15 of these shifts which equates to 12% of the crewing.

There were 16 days when Air Operations Managers were activated. FRV contributed to 7 shifts which equates to 43.7% of the requirement. FRV has 4 Aircraft Officers that provided 18 shifts across Albury, Ararat, Colac, Streatham, Longwood and Mt. Mercer fires.

FRV has 8 Air Base Managers (ABM). ABMs are only rostered for Avalon Large Air Tanker base and ad hoc where required. 14 shifts were provided by FRV across Avalon and Colac.

Case study – Strike Team deployment

In line with the principle of Complementary Fire Services, FRV firefighters are trained and equipped to deploy strike teams of firefighting appliances at short notice anywhere in the state, to provide firefighting capacity and specifically asset protection, using FRV's fleet of pumper tankers.

A strike team consists of five pumper tankers with wildfire burnover protection systems installed, crewed by FRV firefighters, all of whom are trained in both bushfire and structure fire firefighting techniques. Pumper Tankers allocated for the Strike Team are taken from multiple FRV Districts to ensure resources are not removed disproportionately from a single District. The strike team is led by an FRV Commander supported by a driver, another Commander acts as liaison officer, and an administration officer is also deployed.

On 9 January 2026, one strike team was deployed on the day shift to Teesdale, and two strike teams were deployed on night shift to Alexandra. On 10 January 2026 two day shift strike teams and one night shift strike team were deployed to the Ravenswood fire, and on 11 January 2026 two day shift strike teams deployed to Longwood.

On 27 January 2026 FRV strike teams were in action again, with a day shift and a night shift strike team deployed to both the Lismore and the Otways fires. On 11 February 2026, an FRV strike team was deployed to the Clarkfield fire.

The majority of the work undertaken by the strike teams involved providing water for CFA appliances, asset protection protecting houses and other infrastructure, and providing specialist advice for other crews relating to structure fire management.

In addition to the deployments described above, there were nine days on which FRV had strike teams on standby for deployment although they were not required. This readiness posture supported other firefighting agencies, who did not have to resource these standbys and could focus their efforts on fire response.

An example of the effectiveness of FRV strike teams was during the Carlisle River - Pipeline Road fire on 27 January 2026. An FRV strike team was deployed to the township of Gellibrand for asset protection. From late afternoon, FRV firefighters worked actively to protect a Blueberry Farm (a locally significant economic asset) from ember attack, working alongside FFMVic and CFA resources to hold the fire to a roadside. Later that same day, the FRV strike team deployed to a farming property and successfully defended the property during an intense ember attack. In addition to the active firefighting, FRV strike team crews worked within the township to provide reassurance and contemporary advice to members of the community of the current situation and potential contingencies that the community may need to consider. FRV firefighters are all trained in EMR which provides an added service to these communities, particularly where access by other services may be restricted due to the bushfire.

Agriculture Victoria

During January 2026, Agriculture Victoria supported agricultural communities in relation to 14 bushfires across the state including fires at Longwood, Walwa River Road, Streatham, Grass Flat, Lismore, Walmer, Mt Mercer, Boinka, Carlisle River, Cobram, Colignan, Dargo, Rocklands and Kennedy River.

Agriculture Victoria's bushfire response focused on animal welfare assessments (including the humane destruction of livestock), provision of livestock disposal guidance and advice, supporting the provision of emergency fodder, collection of agricultural loss and damage impact data, and prioritising assistance and recovery services to affected landholders.

Throughout the response, Agriculture Victoria prioritised urgent animal welfare assessments. Agriculture Victoria accessed fire grounds as soon as it was safe to do so during the response. Timeliness of access to fire grounds was raised by stakeholders and communities. In response, Agriculture Victoria continued to work with Control Agency IMTs to see if safe access could be granted earlier in the response. In parallel, Agriculture Victoria delivered a large-scale phone and SMS outreach to landholders, with more than 4,000 phone calls made, to help identify urgent animal welfare needs and assess agricultural impacts.

Across these fires, there were almost 1,400 identified cases of potential agricultural impacts. Agricultural loss and damage information provided by landholders to Agriculture Victoria indicates that approximately 45,600 livestock were lost, and approximately 150,500 hectares of farm area was affected, including timber plantations, with damage also sustained to horticulture, pasture, fencing, fodder, and farm infrastructure.

Agriculture Victoria began monitoring the Walwa River Road fire and the Longwood fire upon ignition to assess agricultural impacts. An Agriculture Victoria IMT was activated on 7 January 2026 at Benalla to lead the agriculture responses for these fires.

The Catastrophic Fire Danger Day on 9 January 2026 led to multiple new fires across the state. Utilising the Benalla IMT, Agriculture Victoria monitored statewide fire conditions and began mapping and planning for agricultural impacts on 9 January 2026. Upon safe access being provided to a number of fire grounds in the west of the state, a second Agriculture Victoria IMT was established at Ballarat which was responsible for fires on in Western Victoria (Streatham, Grass Flat, Lismore, Walmer, Mt Mercer, Carlisle River, Kennedy Creek, Boinka, Rocklands and Colignan). Fires in the north-east (Longwood, Walwa River Road, Cobram and Dargo) continued to be managed from the Agriculture Victoria IMT at Benalla.

These two IMTs coordinated Agriculture Victoria's response efforts until the Ballarat IMT was consolidated into the IMT at Benalla which became a statewide IMT.

Agriculture Victoria worked closely with local government, Control Agency IMTs and recovery organisations to ensure consistent information flow and timely assistance. Agriculture Victoria Emergency Management Liaison Officers were positioned within the Control Agency IMTs and the State Control Centre, ensuring a sustained presence throughout the response to support coordination.

A range of supports were implemented to support impacted landholders and key stakeholders during the response, informed by ongoing communication and engagement with affected landholders, feedback from key stakeholders, information from Control Agency IMTs and fireground visits undertaken by the Rural Assistance Commissioner and senior Agriculture Victoria executives.

Supports included the establishment of a Livestock Disposal Advisory Service to support livestock owners with carcass disposal, activation of the Emergency Fodder Distribution Agreement with the Victorian Farmers Federation, and close engagement with a range of stakeholders including local

government. As of 10 March 2026, the emergency fodder agreement has supported the delivery of 15,845 hay bales in response to 458 requests.

Wellbeing support for agricultural communities was an issue highlighted by a number of stakeholders. In response, the Look Over the Farm Gate program delivered by the National Centre for Farmer Health was announced to open earlier than scheduled to provide grants of up to $5,000 for events and activities that support mental health and wellbeing across the state with a focus on fire impacted regions.

Financial assistance was announced on 14 January 2026, providing Primary Producer Bushfire Recovery Grants of up to $75,000 and Concessional Loans of up to $250,000 for eligible primary producers, funded under joint Commonwealth- State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

On 30 January 2026, a further $160 million in support for families, businesses and primary producers was announced by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. This included a financial capability officer at the VFF to help farmers with navigating the supports available and signpost to financial counselling services.

To increase field assessment capacity, Agriculture Victoria activated surge workforce arrangements early in the response. Additional personnel from South Australia and New South Wales government agencies were received in addition to private veterinarians and RSPCA Victoria staff.

To deliver Agriculture Victoria's response, over 380 Agriculture Victoria staff worked on the response through either the IMT or their business-as-usual roles. The Agriculture Victoria statewide IMT remained in place until 13 February 2026 to ensure the continued provision of animal welfare support, livestock disposal advice, emergency fodder provision, urgent landholder referrals, as well as continued collection of reported agricultural loss and damage information, which was shared with local government. At this point, Agriculture Victoria's focus moved to ongoing farmer and stakeholder support through recovery arrangements. On 30 January 2026, a further $160 million in support for families, businesses and primary producers was announced by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. This included a financial capability officer at the VFF to help farmers with navigating the supports available and signpost to financial counselling services.

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Appendix I – Relief and recovery

A range of supports have been established to ensure those impacted by the fires have their relief needs immediately met while also supporting longer-term recovery needs. Figures in this appendix are as at 2 March 2026 unless otherwise specified. Figures may also be subject to change pending the outcome of further impact assessments, investment decisions of government and program uptake.

Immediate relief payments

Relief payments were made available immediately after the fires began in order to support urgent relief needs under the Personal Hardship Assistance Program, including to allow people to meet immediate food, clothing and medication needs.

The relief payment is a one-off payment of $680 per adult and $340 per child, up to a maximum of $2,380 per family. To date, over 10,000 relief payments have been made, totalling over $12 million.

Housing

Emergency and temporary accommodation

Displaced people have been supported with emergency accommodation to date.

Displaced households have been referred for rent relief and other temporary accommodation supports to date.

The government is continuing to work with recovery support providers, Councils and households to provide medium to longer term accommodation options best suited to the recovery needs of individuals, families and communities.

Re-establishment of assistance payments

For households with lower incomes whose primary place of residence was uninsured, the Personal Hardship Assistance Program provides access to payments of up to $52,250 to help them re-establish their home. So far this program has helped over 30 households, with total payments over $1 million.

Clean-up

Clean-up ($122 million)

The Clean-up Program is supporting uninsured and underinsured residential homes and structures such as sheds or garages, and business and community assets where clean-up is not covered by other programs. This program is removing dangerous and hazardous bushfire waste and has received 474 registrations to date.

Waste levies ($5 million)

Waste levies in eligible LGAs are being waived between 13 January and 12 May 2026. Gate fee rebates are also in place to cover the gap between the levy amount and the total gate fee, ensuring bushfire waste can be disposed of free of charge.

Personalised recovery support

Recovery hotline

To help individuals access the right supports, the government stood up the 1800 Recovery Hotline and Emergency Recovery Support Program. The hotline has so far received over 3000

calls and is open for impacted individuals to access general information and navigate recovery services.

Emergency Recovery Support Program ($25 million)

Individuals needing more support can access the Emergency Recovery Support Program which provides a single-entry point to navigate recovery supports with housing, health and wellbeing, finances, legal matters and practical assistance such as filling in forms and accessing payments and grants. So far, the program has received over 1400 intake calls

Mental health and psychological supports ($7.9 million)

To support mental health and wellbeing recovery the department provided and promoted accessible, targeted and culturally safe mental health and wellbeing supports and this continues throughout the recovery.

Existing Mental Health services, including the Statewide Intake Hotline and Wellbeing Support Program, Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs have played crucial roles in responding to the needs of bushfire affected communities quickly.

The Statewide Hotline has played a critical role in providing access to psychosocial support and system navigation support immediately. Existing Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and Hubs, including Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals in Whittlesea, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Benalla, Mansfield, Bendigo and Greater Geelong, were also able to rapidly mobilise to support a surge in demand in their impacted communities. For example, the Shepparton Mental Health and Wellbeing Local, which services Greater Shepparton, Strathbogie and Moira shires offers walk-in support and attended the Euroa relief centre weekly to work with the Strathbogie Shire Council to provide support.

On 30 January 2026, $4.9 million for mental health and wellbeing disaster recovery Initiatives was announced to expand existing Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals into bushfire affected Local Government Areas that do not currently have access to a Mental Health and Wellbeing Local, Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub, or Medicare Mental Health clinic. A further $2 million for school-based mental health support is being made available for students in identified government schools.

DH has established recovery governance arrangements to:

- Provide a structured forum to plan, coordinate, monitor, and adjust recovery strategies as the emergency response evolves.
- Maintain a shared, up-to-date situational awareness of recovery impacts, priorities, risks, and interdependencies across the organisation.
- Support the transition from response to recovery, as communities commence recovery activities and when response activities scale down
- Enable timely identification and escalation of recovery issues, constraints, and emerging risks requiring executive or strategic intervention.
- Support consistent decision making, based on recovery principles, priorities, and available evidence.
- Track progress against recovery activities, ensuring accountability and transparency. Targeted meetings have been held including the Psychosocial and Mental Health Coordination meeting with the health services supporting communities within the Longwood Fire catchment (Murrindindi and Mitchell Local Government Areas) to support service system coordination.

$1 million in additional psychosocial support is being provided to expand existing mental health and wellbeing support for primary producers and farming communities. This is being delivered by:

- DFFH, which continues to deploy its Emergency Management Psychosocial Services Panel, comprising qualified and experienced psychologists and other professionals, providing trauma-informed services and emergency psychosocial support to affected communities.
- The Australian Red Cross and Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry which continues to provide for psychological support in communities.

Financial Counselling (more than $4 million)

Financial counselling is providing communities impacted by bushfires with access to emergency assistance in navigating recovery systems and stabilising their finances so they can rebuild and recover.

Specialist counsellors are helping individuals and families access recovery grants, manage insurance claims, replace essential items and deal with debts through payment plans and fee waivers. They will also provide advocacy with insurers and creditors and connect people with legal support.

To date, there have been 18 clients supported since services commenced and this is expected to increase over the coming months

Local councils and their communities

Council support fund ($12 million)

A $12 million Council Support Fund is providing individual councils up to $750,000 (depending on the scale of impacts) to support them in leading community recovery. This funding will help kickstart clean-up and repairs to local public spaces like parks, footy ovals, community centres, playgrounds and sporting fields, helping communities reconnect.

Community Recovery Officers and Hubs ($15 million)

Locally based Recovery Hubs will shortly provide a location for residents to access services and information from government and community organisations.

These Recovery Hubs are being supplemented by dedicated Community Recovery Officers that will work within councils to identify community needs, develop tailored programs, and provide on-the-ground support to help locals recover.

Public land and state roads

Public land and waterway recovery ($16.1 million)

Funding is being provided to support immediate repair works to public land and waterways. This includes making roads and bridges safe so they can open as quickly as possible, land management works, as well as pest control and critical mitigation of immediate risks to threatened species and biodiversity.

It also includes catchment and waterway restoration activities undertaken with CMAs, such as riparian fencing support for landholders, and immediate works to address water quality risks and remediate riparian areas.

Reinstating the state transport network (more than $81 million)

This investment will restore and repair state roads and public transport infrastructure damaged by the January 2026 Victorian bushfires, ensuring critical transport links are restored for regional communities.

Works include the repairing wire rope and guard rails, cleaning up trees and debris, making sure signage remains intact and undertaking road repairs.

Rural fencing repairs

Under the SEMP, DEECA is the Relief Coordinating Agency for agriculture and the Relief Lead Agency responsible for assisting rural landholders to repair and restore fences damaged by suppression activities or bushfire along the public–private land boundary, working with CFA and supported by Fire Rescue Victoria. Support is provided to repair or replace fencing across public and adjoining private land, covering agricultural land, national parks, State parks and State forests, and stabilising land used as fire control lines. Further assessments and repairs will determine overall costs.

Business and farmers

Primary producer bushfire recovery grants ($40 million)

Grants of up to $75,000 are available to eligible primary producers to help cover the costs of clean-up and reinstating their enterprises.

Funding can be used for essential recovery activities including debris removal, equipment hire, repairs to damaged infrastructure and other costs required to resume operations quickly.

As of 10 March 2026, there have been 171 primary producer bushfire recovery grants approved.

Primary Producers bushfire recovery concessional loans ($10 million)

Loans of up to $250,000 are available for eligible producers who have suffered significant damage to assets, while loans of up to $100,000 will support those experiencing a major loss of income.

The loans are helping to cover essential costs such as repairing or replacing damaged equipment, rebuilding infrastructure, purchasing livestock and meeting working capital expenses like wages, rent and fodder.

Applications opened 21 January 2026 and will continue to be received until 21 October 2026.

Business Recovery Advisory Service and Small Business Financial Counselling ($1.7 million)

Victorian businesses are being supported with immediate relief and recovery services though Victoria's Business Recovery Advisory Service where Business Recovery Advisers are helping business owners to navigate the available supports and plan for long-term recovery. Businesses can access this service by registering on the Business Victoria website.

Small Business Financial Counselling is providing access to specialist financial counsellors help businesses who are in, or at risk of, financial hardship as a result of the bushfires. Businesses can visit the Business Victoria website for information about how to contact their local Rural Financial Counselling Service (the providers of this service).

Harcourt Cooperative Cool Store rebuild ($0.5 million)

An investment of $0.5 million will support the rebuild of the Harcourt Cooperative Cool Store facility. With more than 95 businesses in Harcourt and the surrounding region relying on the facility to keep apples, pears, seed potatoes, wine, craft beer and beehives at temperature, this investment will help restore this facility and support recovery of the businesses that rely on it.

Emergency fodder ($10 million)

With significant agriculture land and animal fodder destroyed by the fires, emergency fodder is being made available for farmers in fire-affected areas via Agriculture Victoria and the Victorian Farmers Federation.

As of 10 March 2026, 15,845 bales have been delivered in response to 458 requests.

Prolonged Power Outage Payments for businesses ($1.4 million)

Prolonged Power Outage Payments are available to businesses where they have been without power for seven or more days within a two-week period.

Payments of $3,088 per week will be available for up to three weeks.

Household water and power

Recovery Water Tank Rebates

Financial assistance is available for rural households not connected to mains water supply, with a rebate of up to $1,500 for cleaning and decontaminating rainwater tanks, roofs and gutters that are impacted by the fires.

Residents who have already paid for cleaning are also eligible for reimbursement.

Prolonged Power Outage Payments for households ($16 million)

Eligible households without power for seven or more days within a two-week period will receive $2,380 per week for up to three weeks, helping families manage during this challenging time.

Applications can be made through electricity distribution businesses.

As of 3 March 2026, 1,140 applications have been received and 1,521 applications paid, totalling $3,618,308.

Donations

2026 Victorian Bushfire Appeal

The government has launched the 2026 Victorian Bushfire Appeal, with donations open online.

The appeal is administered by the Victorian Emergency Recovery and Relief Foundation (VERRF), an independent charitable trust established by the Victorian Government.

The VERRF Board is regularly meeting to determine where VERRF funds can add the most value to impacted communities, including immediate relief support to individuals and their communities and community identified projects and programs.

As of 16 February 2026, $666,540 has been raised.

GIVIT

The Government continues to engage with GIVIT in relation to coordination of goods donations, with over 3,000 goods received by those in need.

Water relief and recovery

Drinking water relief

DEECA is the Relief Coordinating Agency and Relief Lead Agency for providing drinking water in non-reticulated areas, ensuring support for communities returning after the fires. Eligible households that rely on rainwater tanks can receive up to 20,000 litres of relief drinking water. DEECA activated the program on 14 January and, by 11 March, had processed over 550

applications, coordinating deliveries with Water Corporations and local councils. Multiple councils and Water Corporations across affected regions are assisting in supplying this relief water.

Other water relief

Across the state, Water Corporations delivered tailored assistance including deploying standpipes and tankers, offering financial relief, repairing infrastructure, conducting water quality testing, supporting firefighting operations, and maintaining strong engagement with affected communities.

Essential water replacement for firefighting

CFA and FFMVic have legislative authority to take water from any public or private source for firefighting purposes under the CFA Act. When water is taken from domestic tanks or dams, landholders can request essential water replacement through DEECA Recover, which is coordinated once the IMT verifies the volume used.

Water Corporations act as the Recovery Support Agency under the State Emergency Management Plan, making essential agricultural and domestic water available for replacement, although they do not manage or supply the water directly. DEECA and CFA prioritise the use of raw water for firefighting rather than potable supplies.

DEECA's Water and Catchments Group is working with CMAs and Water Corporations to understand early environmental and asset impacts. Recovery efforts will incorporate short-term actions—such as impact assessments, stabilisation, waterway remediation, debris removal, revegetation, and wildlife support—alongside longer-term works including repairs to crossings and visitor assets, and ongoing waterway rehabilitation.