

# From The Chief Officer.....



Number 112

*"Our mission is to protect lives and property"*

23rd March 2014

## In Gratitude...

We have had a busy fire season, starting in October with support to New South Wales, encompassing a multitude of lightning fires in early January, and responding to a number of significant fires after extreme fire weather across the whole State on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February. In amongst these major incidents, with below average rainfall, and periodic belts of lightning, there have been scores of fires on a daily basis that have been responded to in a timely and professional manner. As is usual, CFA members have worked magnificently with our counterparts from MFB, DEPI, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, SES, VicPol, Coast Guard and Ambulance Victoria. At Hazelwood, we have seen fire agencies from Queensland, New South Wales, the A.C.T., South Australia, Tasmania, The Australian Defence Force and Aviation Rescue and Firefighting Service. In Gippsland, we have seen interstate and New Zealand crews working shoulder to shoulder. I have met many of you on the fireground, at Air Bases, Staging Areas, Divisional Command and Operations Points, Incident Control Centres, Regional Control Centres and at the State Control Centre. Sadly, I have spoken to and met some who have lost their homes, their property and their stock. Some have been injured during operations. To those facing recovery, we wish you better fortune. I have seen the purposeful dedication in the eyes of men and women working together in conditions of stress, challenge and uncertainty. I have seen the satisfaction of success and achievement. I have seen the despair when goals haven't been met and when ground, hard won, has been lost in a capricious turn of weather. I have seen you, time and time again, head out the door to do your best, even when the odds have been stacked against you. I have seen the gritty optimism you have maintained when some around you may have been expressing doubt about our efforts. I have seen the hope that you have inspired in communities that have been threatened by fire and uncertainty. Never once did I detect a loss of resolve. Never once did I see any wavering from our mission to protect lives and the community. Never once did I see any sign of a loss of compassion for our fellow team members and for the community that we serve. Never once did I see anyone talking about giving up. **To each and every one of you, no matter how large or how small your involvement, I have three simple things to say: "Thank you! Thank you! And, thank you!"** I along with the Victorian community offer my deep and sincere gratitude for what you have done as individuals and as a team. The summer of 2014 will go down in history as one of great risk, significant activity, and great achievement. **Job well done!**

## The Hazelwood Mine Fire:

Today is Day 42 of the Hazelwood Mine fire that started on 9<sup>th</sup> February. It is fair to say that this has been one of the largest, longest running and most complex fires in the State's history. With the fire putting smoke over the Morwell community, creating health risks for firefighters, and with part of the State's critical infrastructure at risk, the consequences of failure were very high. I saw the fire soon after it had gained hold. It was an incredible sight of massive combustion and heat release. That the fire is almost completely extinguished, without any significant rainfall, is a grand accomplishment of individual and collective human behaviour. I thank all who have attended this challenging incident. There have been setbacks and days of extreme disappointment. But this has been overwhelmed by dogged determination, enthusiasm and innovation, optimism and sheer hard work. There will be many stories about this fire, but I want to highlight the fact that **the extinguishment of the Hazelwood Mine fire is one of the greatest achievements of human endeavour.** The effort of all will never be forgotten.

## The Judicial Inquiry:

On 11 March the Premier and Deputy Premier announced an independent Inquiry into the Hazelwood Mine Fire and the response to, and support of, the Morwell and affected communities. The inquiry will be headed by the Hon Bernard Teague AO. The Board of Inquiry have been asked to submit its report to Government by the end of August 2014. The Inquiry Terms of Reference were issued last Friday. Broadly, the Terms of Reference will examine the regulatory regime which applied to the Hazelwood mine; the adequacy and effectiveness of the emergency response; how the fire started and spread into the mine; and the adequacy of information to and support of the affected communities. A copy of the media release is available from [www.premier.vic.gov.au](http://www.premier.vic.gov.au).

*"...it is important that the views of the local community are heard"*

**Deputy Premier Peter Ryan**