

From The Chief Officer.....



Number 70

“Our mission is to protect lives and property” 21st February 2013

A Very Busy Fire Season So Far:

The delay since my last “From The Chief Officer” exemplifies the extent and intensity of our ongoing commitment to major bushfires in the state. As this is written, we have major fires burning in the southern Grampians, backburning continues on the Aberfeldy – Donnelly fire and the Harrierville Alpine North and South fire. Recent lightning caused fires continue to burn north of Dargo and in remote alpine country near Mount Buller. In addition, we have seen hundreds of small and medium fires in the last week from severe lightning storms across most of the state. In the days since we have turned out to many new fires that have been sleeping since lightning came to ground. Almost every afternoon during January, we have experienced a spate of new fire starts in the mid to late afternoon. For many, it seems as if we haven’t really stopped since the start of 2013.

Until We Have Rain – We Will Continue To Be Busy With Fires:

During the months of January we have experienced extremely dry conditions. If you check the Bureau of Meteorology’s 3 month rainfall map, the rainfall decile map tells a very clear story. Almost all of Victoria has experienced below average rainfall in the last 3 months. Many locations have experienced very much below or lowest on record. Many locals are telling me that it is drier than during the drought – although perhaps a different type of “rapid onset” dryness. This is supported by observations of leaf drop and wilting or dying plants in the bush and in our gardens. In a discussion I had yesterday with **Tarini Cassinder, Regional Director of the Weather Bureau**, she said that there is no rain in sight. We need to prepare for further dry conditions and more fires. This is mid-February, we are not through this fire season yet. Do not be complacent. Be wary of the sting in the tail end of summer.

Keep On Working Together As One Integrated Team:

Whilst I have had a busy time in the State Control Centre working with the Fire Services Commissioner, Chiefs of the fire agencies, Police and Human Services, I have been able to visit Regional Control Centres at Traralgon and Benalla and Incident Control Centres at Heyfield, Swifts Creek and Ovens. As always, my greatest enjoyment though, is to visit our front-line firefighters in the field. In my visits to the fireground at **Seaton, Licola, Harrierville, Mount Hotham and Dinner Plain**, and at the various Control Centres, **DSE Chief Alan Goodwin** and I have been very impressed with the very high degree of teamwork between **CFA, DSE, Parks Victoria, MFB, DPI, Victoria Police, Dept of Human Services** and local government (to name a few). Has it all been perfect? No. But when it goes wrong, I see highly committed and professional people – who put great value on the relationships they have with their counterparts – work hard to get it fixed and make it right.

Thank You For Your Work - Tough, Gritty, & Challenging: Focus On The Mission:

The most impressive thing that strikes me is the determination of our firefighters in the field. Consistent with our strategy of “**hit it hard and hit it fast**” I have seen many, many examples of fast, aggressive initial attack, using well-chosen tactics that bring a concentration of effort to great effect. In doing so, **keep safety foremost**. We work in an inherently dangerous workplace. We have witnessed the tragic deaths of two fine **DSE firefighters, Katie Peters and Steve Kadar**. This should reinforce our commitment to safety. We owe it to them to **keep our focus on bringing everyone home safe – every day**. Remember to implement LACES on every fireground. Do your best, take care of your people and stay positive. Thank you and keep up the outstanding work.

“Just when things looked their worst, they changed for the best. I have marvelled often at the thin line that divides success from failure and the sudden turn that leads from apparently certain disaster to comparative safety.”

- Sir Ernest Shackleton