

Joint Media Release

From the Department of Sustainability and Environment and CFA

Tuesday January 28 2003 6am (Day 21) **Statewide Alpine Fires Update**

Cooler Conditions Aid Fire Crews in Asset Protection

1. CURRENT SUMMARY

- Cooler conditions were experienced throughout the fire areas yesterday and these allowed crews to further consolidate containment lines around threatened communities. This milder weather should continue through today, although warming later with light westerly winds.
- The **Bogong Complex** of fires (Mt Feathertop, Bogong and Razorback) has reached the Mt Benambra Rd and is spotting into the State forest north of Mitta Mitta. It is currently threatening the communities of Tallangatta Valley, Mitta Mitta and Eskdale. Last night an alert was issued for these communities due to significant fire behaviour. This alert remains in force.
- The Eldorado and Stanley fires, near Beechworth were contained yesterday, having burnt over 15,000 hectares.
- The current Alpine fires have now burnt more than 400, 000 hectares of parks and forests.

2. CURRENT GOING FIRES

- The **'Pinnibar'** complex of fires (south of Corryong) has now burnt over 74,000 hectares of Victorian park and forest. A spot over in the Tallangatta Valley has burnt 80 hectares and the fire has also reached the Wabba Wilderness Park. A focus of the Pinnabar fire continues to be the protection of assets in the Nariel Valley. In the Dartmouth sector, work commenced on a western control line to link the Cravensville fire and the Mitta Mitta River.
- The **Bogong Complex** of fires (Mt Feathertop, Bogong and Razorback) was late yesterday threatening the communities in the upper Tallangatta Valley, and at Mitta Mitta and Eskdale. The Bogong fires have burnt around 270,000 hectares of park and forest. Asset protection today will again focus Mt Beauty, Harrietville, and Bright in the north and Omeo, Benambra, Swift's Creek and other smaller communities in the south.
- The fire in the **Mt Buffalo** National Park has burnt in excess of 35, 000 hectares. Fire south of Bright and north of Wandiligong burnt through the day and last night. Containment lines being constructed focus on asset protection from Smoko to Wandiligong.

3. WEATHER IN THE ALPINE AREA

Today: Warm (mid 30s) to hot. Winds easing to the north east during the day. Initially west (15-20kph).

Wednesday: Hot with northerly winds freshening ahead of a south west change. Fire danger extreme.

Thursday: The front will move through N/E Victoria during the morning. Hot gusty northerly winds will precede the change. Fire danger extreme.

4. RESOURCES ON THE ALPINE FIRES

- Around 1770 personnel from the Government agencies, around 1,500 CFA personnel from outside the Region (supporting local volunteer brigades), 157 Army personnel, 115 South Australian personnel, 33 New Zealand alpine fire specialists, 2 personnel from NSW and 1 from QLD Rural Fire Service, 1 NSW State Forests, 1 USA, 25 aircraft, over 200 specialised vehicles and 83 bulldozers.
- Major strategies and tactics continue to be reviewed in the light of Wednesday's and Thursday's predicted weather forecasts.

5. AGENCIES INVOLVED

The Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, Parks Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, local plantation company brigades, forest industry crews and equipment, Victoria Police, Red Cross, St John Ambulance, the Army Reserve, State Emergency Service, local municipalities, New Zealand fire and conservation agencies, South Australian Country Fire Service and Parks Service, NSW Rural Fire Service, QLD Rural Fire Service and NSW State Forests.

6. THREATS TO PRIVATE PROPERTY AND ROAD CLOSURES

- The CFA have confirmed that three houses were lost north of Benambra, six houses have been lost near Cobungra and some sheds and stock losses have occurred around Benambra, Omeo, Cobungra and Jubilee Bridge. **For further details please call CFA media on (03) 9262 8228.**
- See description of individual fires for details on threats to private property. For information on significant fires on private land in rural Victoria, please call the CFA on **13 15 99**.
- For information regarding public road closures and threats to private property, please call the Victoria Police Emergency Information Line on **1 800 444 343**.
- For information regarding fires in the Gippsland region, please phone the Traralgon Information Line on **1800 668 066** (between 6am and midnight).
- Alpine Shires are maintaining community information phone lines.

7. COMMUNITY INFORMATION

- During the last week, a number of community meetings have been held. More than 3,000 people have now attended these. Last night a community meeting was held at Berringama (west of Corryong). The meetings are designed to assist local residents and visitors to the area with the current fire situation, and to put in place on-going community networks. Further community meetings will occur as necessary.
- Liaison between local shires/DSE/DPI/CFA/PV and Victoria Police continues on a regular basis, as does liaison with NSW fire agencies. Local Community Updates continue to be circulated on a regular basis.
- The DSE website (www.nre.vic.gov.au) is being regularly updated with fire information, including community newsletters.

8. FIRE STATISTICS

Victoria has around 7.7 million hectares of parks and forests. In an average summer around 620 wildfires occur and these burn around 110, 000 hectares. To date this season 660 fires have occurred. These have burnt around 640,000 hectares. The 20-year average for this time of year is 344 fires, having burnt around 43, 000 hectares.