



2009 Victorian Bushfires  
Royal Commission

Aerial view of a burnt forest, showing numerous charred tree trunks and skeletal remains of trees against a grey, ashy ground.

# INTERIM REPORT



The painting on the front cover, *Mountain Ash*, is by Kinglake artist Linda Haggar.

When the inferno swept through Kinglake on Black Saturday, Linda was at home with her husband Wayne. Her eldest daughter Kristin and husband, Heath, and their two children, 14-year old Shelby and 12-year old Oscar, were also with Linda.

While the adults successfully fought the blaze, Linda's grandchildren comforted the family's two pet dogs and a cat. All survived.

Linda was inspired to paint *Mountain Ash* when she flew over her property in a helicopter and viewed the devastated landscape below.

The Commission thanks Linda Haggar for making *Mountain Ash* available for reproduction throughout this report.

ISBN 978-0-646-51830-5  
Published August 2009

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# 2009 VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION

## INTERIM REPORT

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THE HON BERNARD TEAGUE AO – CHAIRPERSON

RONALD MCLEOD AM – COMMISSIONER

SUSAN PASCOE AM – COMMISSIONER

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ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

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August 2009

By Authority

Government Printer for the State of Victoria

No. 225 – Session 2006–09



Parliament of Victoria  
2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

ISBN 978-0-646-51830-5

Published August 2009



2009 Victorian Bushfires  
Royal Commission

The Honourable Chief Justice Marilyn Warren AC  
Lieutenant Governor of Victoria  
Government House  
Melbourne 3004

Dear Lieutenant Governor

In accordance with the Letters Patent dated 16 February 2009, we have the honour of presenting to you our interim report. The Commission's Terms of Reference require that we furnish by 17 August 2009 an interim report focusing on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the 2009–2010 fire season. This report presents our interim findings and recommendations.

Dated this 17th day of August 2009.

The Honourable Bernard Teague AO  
Chairperson

Ronald McLeod AM  
Commissioner

Susan Pascoe AM  
Commissioner



## PREFACE

Fire is a recurrent visitor in Australia's environmental history. The flora and topography in Victoria render it one of the most bushfire-prone parts of the planet. Even with this history, 7 February 2009 was a day of unprecedented tragedy in the State. One hundred and seventy-three people died in one of the worst bushfires in Australian history. About 430,000 hectares of land were burnt, along with 2000 properties and 61 businesses. Entire towns were destroyed and around 78 communities were affected. The impact of these fires is seared into the consciousness of those who lived through them.

Under such adversity many people responded with courage and compassion. The volunteers who fought the fires and the individuals that supported their neighbours should be commended for their actions. Since the fires, many others have helped support fire-affected individuals and communities in the recovery process.

On 16 February 2009 the Victorian Government established the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, with broad terms of reference, to investigate the causes of, preparation for, responses to, and the impact on infrastructure of the fires that occurred in late January and early February 2009. In approaching this investigation the Commission has been acutely aware that the events of 7 February highlight the deadly consequences of extreme bushfires. The need to give primacy to saving lives is, therefore, at the forefront of the Commission's intentions and has underpinned its inquiries and recommendations.

In making its recommendations, the Commission recognises that the responsibility for protecting life, property, and community and environmental assets rests with the collective efforts of the whole community. Governments have obligations to ensure that people have the information, support and infrastructure to enable them to live their lives in relative safety and wellbeing. They also have important operational responsibilities in emergencies. Individuals who choose to reside in bushfire prone areas need to ensure they are well informed about the nature of their environment. When bushfire threatens, they must take responsibility for their own safety and for those in their care. They need to be well prepared in advance and have a realistic appreciation of the risks involved.

The Commission appreciates the importance of linking its processes with affected communities. Not only are the views of affected individuals important to understanding the progress and impact of fire, but providing people with a forum to tell their stories to an independent Commission is an important part of the healing process. Around 2500 people have attended community consultations, made written submissions and/or appeared as lay witnesses before the Commission.

This report is an interim report. It is the result of the first part of the Commission's inquiries and focuses on recommending immediate actions that could be taken prior to the 2009–10 bushfire season. The final report is due on 31 July 2010 and will cover the full scope of the Commission's terms of reference. The Commission will monitor the progress of its interim recommendations and consider whether longer-term factors warrant their modification in its final report.

We commend this report to the people of Victoria as a partial account of the events of 7 February 2009, with the intent of providing recommendations to improve the preparation for and response to the 2009–10 bushfire season. We dedicate our work to the memory of those who died in the fires, to those they left behind, to those who were injured and to those who fought to protect fellow Victorians.

**The Hon Bernard Teague AO**  
Chairperson

**Ronald McLeod AM**  
Commissioner

**Susan Pascoe AM**  
Commissioner

**ELIZABETH THE SECOND BY THE GRACE OF GOD  
QUEEN OF AUSTRALIA AND HER OTHER REALMS AND TERRITORIES,  
QUEEN, HEAD OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

To The Honourable Bernard George Teague AO  
Ronald Neville McLeod AM  
Susan Mary Pascoe AM

**GREETINGS:**

**WHEREAS:**

- A. On Saturday 7 February 2009, the State of Victoria experienced the most devastating bushfires in its history, resulting in a catastrophic loss of life and public and private property.
- B. The State of Victoria is recognised as a region subject to a very high fire risk and has previously experienced extensive bushfires, most notably in 1939, 1944, 1969, 1977, 1983, 2003, 2005 and 2006.
- C. A range of inquiries conducted after those bushfires has led to the development of a coordinated State-wide approach to planning for, and responding to, bushfires and an extensive network of career and volunteer emergency services personnel.
- D. The weather conditions on 7 February were unprecedented in terms of high temperatures, low humidity and wind speeds, following years of drought. The conditions on that day also followed a heatwave and bushfires, including in Gippsland, in late January 2009.
- E. Over 4,000 fire service volunteers and career staff immediately responded to combat more than 300 fires across Victoria on 7 February and over 10,000 personnel were subsequently involved in the largest coordinated emergency response and community recovery operation in the State's history.
- F. The State acknowledges and commends the significant dedication and efforts of staff and volunteers in responding to this emergency in extremely difficult conditions.



- G. Notwithstanding the scale of these efforts, there was an unprecedented loss of life, extreme property damage, and major community trauma and displacement.
- H. The Governor of the State of Victoria, in the Commonwealth of Australia, by and with the advice of the Executive Council, has therefore deemed it to be expedient that a Commission should issue to you in the terms set out below.
- I. It is anticipated that in conducting Our Commission you will take into account the important role and functions of the Coroner, Victoria Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, and that you will consult with each of those persons or bodies to the extent that you consider appropriate in order to avoid the inquiries of Our Commission from interfering unnecessarily with the functions of those persons or bodies.

NOW THEREFORE the Governor of the State of Victoria, in the Commonwealth of Australia, by and with the advice of the Executive Council and acting pursuant to section 88B of the **Constitution Act 1975**, appoints and constitutes you

The Honourable Bernard George Teague AO  
Ronald Neville McLeod AM  
Susan Mary Pascoe AM

to be Our Commissioners

AND HEREBY APPOINTS The Honourable Bernard George Teague AO to be Chairperson of the Royal Commission.

FOR THE PURPOSE of inquiring into and reporting on the following matters:

- 1. The causes and circumstances of the bushfires which burned in various parts of Victoria in late January and in February 2009 (“2009 Bushfires”).
- 2. The preparation and planning by governments, emergency services, other entities, the community and households for bushfires in Victoria, including current laws, policies, practices, resources and strategies for the prevention,

identification, evaluation, management and communication of bushfire threats and risks.

3. All aspects of the response to the 2009 Bushfires, particularly measures taken to control the spread of the fires and measures taken to protect life and private and public property, including but not limited to:
  - (a) immediate management, response and recovery;
  - (b) resourcing, overall coordination and deployment; and
  - (c) equipment and communication systems.
4. The measures taken to prevent or minimise disruption to the supply of essential services such as power and water during the 2009 Bushfires.
5. Any other matters that you deem appropriate in relation to the 2009 Bushfires.

AND WE direct you to make such recommendations arising out of your inquiry as you consider appropriate, including recommendations for governments, emergency services, other entities and the community on:

6. The preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks, particularly the prevention of loss of life.
7. Land use planning and management, including urban and regional planning.
8. The fireproofing of housing and other buildings, including the materials used in construction.
9. The emergency response to bushfires.
10. Public communication and community advice systems and strategies.
11. Training, infrastructure, and overall resourcing needs.

AND WE do by these presents give and grant you full power and authority to call before you such person or persons as you shall judge likely to afford you any information upon the subject of this Our Commission, and to inquire of and concerning the premises by all other lawful ways and means whatsoever.

AND WE declare the powers of the Commission at the discretion of the Chairperson may, at any time, be exercised by one or more Commissioners.

AND WE will and command that this Our Commission shall continue in full force and virtue and that you shall and may from time to time and at every place or places proceed in the execution thereof, and of every matter and thing therein contained although the same be not continued from time to time by adjournment.

AND WE direct you to conduct your inquiry as expeditiously as possible and to furnish US with:

- (i) an interim report focusing on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the 2009-2010 fire season, by 17 August 2009; and
- (ii) a final report by 31 July 2010 or such later date as WE may be pleased to fix.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF WE have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent and the Seal of the State to be hereunder affixed.



WITNESS His Excellency Professor David de Kretser, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor of Victoria and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia at Melbourne this 16<sup>th</sup> day of February Two thousand and nine in the fifty-eighth year of Our reign.

*[Signature]*

By His Excellency's Command

*[Signature]*  
Premier of Victoria

Entered on the record by me in the Register of Patents Book No 44 Page No 111 on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of February 2009.

*[Signature]*  
Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABC</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>AEMC</b>	Australasian Emergency Management Committee
<b>AFAC</b>	Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council
<b>AGDCC</b>	Attorney-General's Department Coordination Centre (Commonwealth)
<b>AIIMS</b>	Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System
<b>AWS</b>	Automatic Weather Station
<b>BoM</b>	Bureau of Meteorology
<b>Bushfire CRC</b>	Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre
<b>CAD</b>	Computer Aided Dispatch
<b>CAP</b>	Common Alerting Protocol
<b>CFA</b>	Country Fire Authority
<b>CFS</b>	Country Fire Service (South Australia)
<b>CIWS</b>	Community Information and Warning System
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>COMDISPLAN</b>	Commonwealth Disaster Response Plan
<b>CSC</b>	Customer Service Centre
<b>CSIRO</b>	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
<b>DACC</b>	Defence Assistance to the Civil Community
<b>DECC</b>	Divisional Emergency Response Coordination Centre
<b>DEECD</b>	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
<b>DERC</b>	Divisional Emergency Response Coordinator
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Human Services
<b>DIGO</b>	Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation
<b>DPI</b>	Department of Primary Industries
<b>DSE</b>	Department of Sustainability and Environment
<b>EAS</b>	Emergency Alerting System
<b>EMA</b>	Emergency Management Australia
<b>ESTA</b>	Emergency Services Telecommunications Agency
<b>FAQs</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>FDI</b>	Fire Danger Index
<b>FFDI</b>	Forest Fire Danger Index
<b>GFDI</b>	Grassland Fire Danger Index
<b>ICC</b>	Incident Control Centre
<b>iECC</b>	Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre
<b>IFMPF</b>	Integrated Fire Management Planning Framework

<b>IMF</b>	Incident Management Facility
<b>IMS</b>	Incident Management System
<b>IMT</b>	Incident Management Team
<b>IPND</b>	Integrated Public Numbers Database
<b>MAV</b>	Municipal Association of Victoria
<b>MECC</b>	Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre
<b>MEMP</b>	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
<b>MERC</b>	Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator
<b>MFB</b>	Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NEO</b>	Networked Emergency Organisation
<b>NIBA</b>	National Insurance Brokers Association
<b>OASIS</b>	Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards
<b>OESC</b>	Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner
<b>RECC</b>	Regional Emergency Coordination Centre
<b>SECC</b>	State Emergency Coordination Centre
<b>SEOC</b>	State Emergency Operations Centre
<b>SERCC</b>	State Emergency Response Coordination Centre
<b>SERP</b>	State Emergency Response Plan
<b>SEST</b>	State Emergency Strategy Team
<b>SEWS</b>	Standard Emergency Warning Signal
<b>TFB</b>	Total Fire Ban
<b>The Manual</b>	Emergency Management Manual Victoria
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>VBIL</b>	Victorian Bushfire Information Line
<b>VEMC</b>	Victorian Emergency Management Council
<b>VFRR</b>	Victorian Fire Risk Register
<b>VICSES</b>	Victorian State Emergency Service

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