

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP

Speaker of the House of Representatives
Federal Member for Wannon



10 September 2007

PUBLIC FORUM ON BUSHFIRE RESEARCH

Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker, is urging all Western Victorians to attend a public forum to find out more about bushfire research in Australia, including studies currently underway in Western Victoria.

Mr Hawker said the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) public forum later this month is an opportunity to meet bushfire researchers and find out more about how their work is having an impact on bushfire management.

“The forum will provide an overview of Bushfire CRC research, highlighting the work being done across Western Victoria that is making a difference to the future of fuel and fire management,” Mr Hawker said.

“Guest speakers include Dr Kevin Tolhurst (University of Melbourne), Dr Jim McLennan (Latrobe University), Mr David Nichols (CFA), and Dr Matt Plucinski (ENSIS) who will focus on lessons learnt from recent Victorian fires, recruiting and retaining volunteers, firefighter health and safety and the effectiveness of aerial fighting.

“There will also be an open panel discussion with the speakers.”

Mr Hawker said the Bushfire CRC combines the efforts of more than 30 research, fire and land management agencies in Australia and New Zealand in undertaking research on bushfires.

It is funded through the Australian Government’s CRC program and substantial partner resources for a seven year term from 2003 to address many of the key research issues raised by the major fires of the past decade.

The research program has more than 50 projects covering

- Safe Prevention, Preparation and Suppression
- Management of Fire in the Landscape
- Community Self-Sufficiency for Fire Safety
- Protection of People and Property

It is also providing an education program that is helping to develop the next generation of fire researchers and helps to inform the public and special interest groups on the latest developments in bushfire knowledge.

“I urge all residents and workers in the region including land owners, business owners, fire fighters, government and land management employees, tourism operators, the agricultural sector, students and the media to attend the this local forum,” Mr Hawker said.

The forum will take place at the Stawell Entertainment Centre on Tuesday, 28 August 2007 from 7.00-9.00pm.

For further information contact Mr Hawker’s office on 1300 131 692 or the Bushfire CRC on (03) 9412 9600 or email: info@bushfirecrc.com.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The Stawell Community Forum will provide an overview of Bushfire CRC research, highlighting the following projects:

AERIAL SUPPRESSION

This project is investigating the effectiveness of aerial fire fighting to help fire agencies better use these aircraft. The public has strongly identified aerial fire fighting as a major component of bushfire suppression but policy makers and fire agencies want to more fully understand their cost and effectiveness.

Bushfire CRC researchers collected data from 284 fires during the 2004/05 and 2005/06 fire seasons in Australia and New Zealand, including several fires in the Grampians.

FIRE BEHAVIOUR AND MODELLING

This project is providing a better understanding of the interactions between fire, fuel, weather and topography.

The researchers have conducted experimental burns including recent burns in the Ngarkat Conservation Park in South Australia, close to the Victorian border, and have collected information on fire behaviour from major wildfires including recent fires in western Victoria. They are looking at factors such as fire spread, flame height, intensity and spotting.

A related project is developing a risk management decision support system for fire agencies, communities living in the rural/urban interface, town planners, power supply companies, firefighters and land managers. It will be used to calculate the probability of ignition and spread of fires across a landscape under different weather and fire suppression scenarios.

FIREFIGHTER HEALTH AND SAFETY

Firefighter safety is a high priority for the community. Battling wildfires is at times unsafe and unhealthy. Firefighters are subject to stressful conditions where fatigue is affected by the erratic nature of work and rest cycles, effects on their physical condition, and the need for hydration and nutrition.

This project is studying the effects of fitness, stress, fatigue and crew management on the health, safety and wellbeing of firefighters. The researchers are identifying precisely what physiological factors cause a decline in decision making ability and are devising procedures to minimise this decline.

VOLUNTEERS

Australia has about 250,000 volunteer firefighters but membership is declining. The Bushfire CRC is carrying out joint research with fire agencies from around Australia looking at the issues in both recruiting and retaining volunteers.

The project is tracking the experiences of CFA volunteers as they move through recruitment, induction, training and initial deployments to fires and other incidents.

Almost 400 recent recruits from western Victoria are included in this survey and the researchers are starting to build a picture of why they volunteered, and what were the barriers they had to overcome.