

The Hon Fran Bailey MP Federal Member for McEwen

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 28 2009

Reconstruction review pledge on day of national thanks

The Federal Government will review its approach to post-disaster reconstruction following calls for a new community-driven model by member for McEwen Fran Bailey.

Fran secured the commitment in Parliament today from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as communities struggle to recover from the Black Saturday fires.

Representatives of Marysville, the hardest hit of towns devastated on February 7, were present in the Gallery to hear the Prime Minister's response to Fran's question.

Fran had earlier organised a meeting between the Marysville group and the Prime Minister where a Wallangara gum was presented on behalf of the town to thank the Australian Parliament and the Australian people for their generosity and support since the fires.

The gum, symbolic of the tough and resilient character of the town's residents, will be planted at The Lodge.

Fran told Parliament that the highly centralised, inflexible current model of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority imposed on communities had denied local residents the ability to determine how their communities should be rebuilt.

"Current research of disaster recovery clearly says that top-down, inflexible and standardised approaches are ineffective and dysfunctional," Fran said.

"The Commonwealth has invested many hundreds of millions of dollars for the benefit of affected communities."

Fran called for a new model that would ensure flexibility and give priority to local knowledge and expertise when deciding how, when and where community infrastructure was rebuilt.

Replying to Fran's request, the Prime Minister said he would undertake a review of post-disaster reconstruction models.

The Prime Minister said the challenge was to develop an approach that moved from the command model used in the immediate period of disaster to a practical approach to reconstruction.

After meeting Mr Rudd, the Marysville residents also had talks with Opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull.

In both meetings, the need for assistance to part-residents who lost houses in the fire was raised with undertakings from both leaders to work towards finding a solution.

"Part-time residents have been excluded from any assistance but rebuilding their houses will be vital to regenerating the Marysville economy," Fran said.

"When not being used by owners, the houses were rented out to holidaymakers who spent several days or even weeks in the town, buying locally and supporting local jobs.

"Current tax laws have made it difficult for the town's part-time residents to access any assistance. Without their return, the economic recovery of Marysville will be more difficult."

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