

Friday 30 October, 2009

BUSHFIRE UPDATE

FROM CHRISTINE NIXON

CHAIR

BUSHFIRE RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY AUTHORITY

DONATIONS BALLOT FOR STORE VOUCHERS

Due to the overwhelming demand for donated store vouchers, a new process for the distribution of David Jones and Ikea vouchers will begin next month.

Since the launch of the donations management points system in July approximately 1000 of these vouchers have been distributed to bushfire affected households through a needs-based system.

The Authority has staggered the release of store vouchers on a monthly basis to ensure people are able to access goods when they are ready.

While Donations Coordinators have been working hard to ensure the vouchers are allocated as fairly as possible. To ensure the remaining store vouchers are equitably distributed to households across Victoria, a ballot process will be introduced in November.

Individuals, or Case Managers on behalf of their clients, are encouraged to contact their Donations Coordinator to register for the ballot.

The David Jones and Ikea vouchers are targeted at those who lost material goods in the fires.

People will only be able to access either a David Jones or Ikea voucher, not both. If a person has previously accessed either voucher, they will not be eligible to be entered in the ballot.

To ensure people are given the opportunity to register, three ballots will be held between November 2009 and January 2010.

For more information visit www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

MORE SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Significant support for small business has been made available through a range of grants, mentoring and advice services, low interest loans and support for tourist marketing campaigns in fire-affected areas.

The *Rebuilding Together* Plan includes a Bushfire Investment Fund, which will help to kick-start business investment across the affected region.

The Fund will target investment opportunities, encouraging new jobs and economic growth in bushfire-affected communities.

The Plan also includes a \$600,000 Business Recovery Program which will assist small and medium-sized businesses to return to pre-fire operating levels through business recovery workshops, funding for business events, 'buy local' advertising campaigns and business mentoring services.

The Plan includes a range of other initiatives to stimulate economic recovery and generate employment with:

- \$7.7 million to restore and enhance tourist facilities in fire-affected areas and reopen National Parks
- \$9.2 million to rebuild Lake Mountain Alpine Resort
- \$2.4 million to establish an interim small business hub on the site of the Marysville Motor Museum
- \$1.7 million to provide additional support to agri-business and farming families

Thus far the State Government has provided support to small businesses and primary producers via:

- A \$51 million Business Support Package which includes grants of between \$5000 to \$25,000 to small businesses and primary producers, assistance payments worth \$5000 each to rural property owners, various special circumstances grants and low interest loans through the Rural Finance Corporation
- A \$10 million Tourism Industry Support Package (funded in conjunction with the Federal Government) supporting marketing campaigns to encourage visitors to return to fire-affected areas and establishing public land tourism infrastructure
- Free business counselling and mentoring services to affected businesses by the Small Business Mentoring Service and the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and advice and information through Small Business Victoria, Regional Development Victoria and the Rural Finance Corporation
- Income Recovery Subsidy to people who lost their incomes as a direct result of the bushfires. This Australian Government subsidy is available until 10 November 2009
- A \$7 million package from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund for grants of up to \$10,000 to primary producers and up to \$5000 for rural properties two hectares or more.

For more information on advice for fire-affected businesses, visit www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

SECOND BUSHIRE WOMEN'S RETREAT

The second *'Bush to Beach' Women's Leadership Retreat* will be held from November 13 to 15 at the Mantra Erskine Resort in Lorne.

Born from an idea of women affected by the February 2009 bushfires, the first Bush to Beach Women's Leadership Retreat saw nearly 400 bushfire affected women come together over a weekend in July in Lorne. The retreat was community driven, supported by the Authority and private donors, and focused on nurturing leadership in women and creating bonds between affected women to support one another through the bushfire recovery process.

The purpose of the second retreat is to once again provide women with a break, some time to relax and most importantly, an opportunity to create bonds with other women and share experiences about their recovery. The retreat is also full of other activities for women to let their hair down and have some fun; activities to be included are chocolate therapy, yoga, meditation, discussion groups, rebuilding information sessions and financial assistance sessions.

Women who missed out on the first Women's Leadership retreat are invited to attend, with 350 places available for those affected by the February 2009 Victorian Bushfires.

Registrations are online at www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

VBRRA is also currently in the process of organising a retreat for men.

Hundreds of roads and tracks across Victoria will be re-opened tomorrow part of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria's seasonal road closure program.

DSE RE-OPENS ROADS AND TRACKS AFTER FIRES

This weekend the Department of Sustainability and Environment will open many of the roads and tracks that have been closed since the bushfires.

Most roads closed since the fires in the Marysville and Murrindindi areas will re-open on Saturday, following significant on-ground works by DSE crews, including tracks in 'The Triangle'.

Significant further works are still required to re-open all tracks in all fire affected areas, particularly the removal of dangerous trees and replacement of bridges and river crossings.

For detailed information on which roads and tracks remain closed due to fires, please refer to: <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/nrenfor.nsf/LinkView/6D34AEF92FC3A5AECA257561000430CC444A3546C0C6BD394A2569AA00787FA4>

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR BUSHFIRE AFFECTED RESIDENTS

A range of partial and full scholarships are available from the ACPET Bushfire Education & Training Fund for residents affected by the February bushfires.

The scholarships are available in a variety of areas including multi-media, entertainment production and performance, IT, counseling and psychotherapy, business, hospitality, retail, hairdressing, fitness, bricklaying, healthcare and first aid.

A competitive selection process will be undertaken and scholarships offered to those applicants deemed by ACPET to be most suitable, on the basis of demonstrated interest and need.

Eligible applicants for this fund are primarily those who have received a Blue Referral Card from VBRRA. Eligibility of those who do not have a Blue Referral Card will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

For more information people can contact the ACPET Bushfire Education & Training Fund on 0408 881 917 or e-mail martin.broadhurst@acpet.edu.au

REBUILDING TOGETHER PLAN – NEXT STEPS

Work is underway to implement the projects and initiatives announced as part of the \$193 million Rebuilding Together Plan to rebuild and reconstruct towns and communities impacted by the fires.

The two-year plan sets out the rebuilding priorities identified by local communities in their Community Recovery Plans and the funds committed by the Federal and State governments, the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund and corporate and philanthropic donors.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund has provided support for 74 of the 123 projects identified by local communities in this phase of funding and will continue to work with the Authority in assisting with funding for remaining projects.

For full details of the *Rebuilding Together* plan visit www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au

TELSTRA UPGRADES URGE NEXT G COMPATIBILITY

Following recent upgrades to mobile phone infrastructure in bushfire-affected areas, Telstra is urging residents to ensure they have the appropriate mobiles that can take advantage of the new coverage.

Telstra has advised that investments in the region only provide improved coverage on the Next G™ mobile network not the old GSM mobile network, and therefore residents should be aware of the different mobile phones have different capabilities.

Given the terrain of the region, we encourage residents take a look at the Blue Tick range of Next G™ mobile phones.

Blue Tick phones are recommended for rural handheld coverage and provide maximised coverage in remote areas.

Telstra also advises that it is important people check that their Next G™ mobile has a Next G™ SIM card inserted.

Inserting old SIM cards into new phones will not provide the coverage performance people are expecting, so it is important people ensure they have move their phone number across to a new SIM card.

Telstra says coverage performance can also be enhanced in many instances by using an external antenna. More information on coverage extension can be found at <http://www.telstra.com.au/mobile/networks/coverage/maximise.html>.

COMMUNITY SERVICE HUBS

In line with the Victorian public holiday for Melbourne Cup next Tuesday 3 November, Community Service hubs will be **closed** for the day. For urgent matters, people can call the Victorian Bushfire Information hotline on 1800 240 667.

FLOWERDALE BUSH FIRE SOCIAL OUTREACH

Congratulations to the Flowerdale Recovery Committee for its win this week of the Forrester Research Award for Best Use of Social Media for Social Impact. At the awards ceremony, held in Chicago, Flowerdale received the accolade for its use of blogs and video sites, in a coordinated social effort to raise money to help rebuild the town. Social media has helped Flowerdale raise more than \$1.5 million, including donations of goods like cars. It has also been crucial in keeping residents informed, liaising with media and government and maintaining a historical record that the Australian National Library wants to put into the national archive.

ARTS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

An art auction will raise money for Victoria's bushfire affected communities at the Abbotsford Convent on 8 November.

The 'For Art's Sake' auction will showcase works donated by The Convent's resident artists and many other members of Melbourne's artistic community.

The proceeds of the auction will be administered by the Murrindindi Shire, with 100 per cent of the money raised going directly to bushfire victims.

The catalogue of the artwork will be available online on Monday 26th of October and bids may be registered on www.forartssake.com.au

As part of the Abbotsford Convent's Open Day, the auction will take place in the Convent's Linen and Community rooms.

A preview of the artwork will be held at The Abbotsford Convent on Saturday the 7th of November from 2 p.m.– 4p.m. The auction rooms will be opening from 10:00 am for previewing on Sunday the 8th of November, with all artworks going under the hammer between 2pm and 4pm.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- *Tues 3 Nov - Melb Cup Day at Marysville Big Screen
- *Wed 4 Nov - Circus Oz workshop at Flowerdale Primary School
- *Thur 5 Nov - Circus Oz workshop at Flowerdale Primary School
- *Fri 6 Nov - Family Pizza & Games Night, Redesdale Hall
- *Sat 7 Nov - Mudgegonga Carnival Picnic Lunch & Family Fun Afternoon
- *Sat 7 Nov - Shire of Yarra Ranges Community Safety Expo, Lillydale Lake Parklands
- * Sat 7 Nov - Circus Oz perform in Flowerdale
- *Sat 7 Nov - Next VBRRRA quarterly report released
- *Sun 8 Nov - Marysville Marathon
- *Sun 8 Nov - Narbethong Fire Read Community Meeting
- *Sunday 8 November - 11am - 12.30pm
- * Mon 9 Nov - MOCA meeting, Marysville
- *Tues 10 Nov - Marysville & Triangle CRC meeting
- *Tues 10 Nov - Iihan Charity Challenge Golf Day, Marysville
- *Fri 13 - 15 Nov - 2nd Women's Bush to Beach Retreat, Lorne
- *Wed 18 - 20 Nov - NAB working bee at Lake Mountain Resort