



Financial support still available for bushfire-affected people

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund is encouraging people directly impacted by the 2009 bushfires who have not applied for any or some of the available payments to do so within the next few weeks.

More than \$388 million, including interest, was donated by people from across Australia and the world to the Appeal Fund to support individuals, families and communities in the wake of this country's worst natural disaster.

The Chair of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, Mr Pat McNamara, said there had been more than 20,000 payments to individuals during the last nine months and to date in excess of \$228 million spent.

The balance of the remaining money has been allocated. Of the \$126 million unspent allocation there is funding for long-term projects such as Psychological Support, Bereaved Children, Scholarships and School Holiday programs where money will be spent when required over a number of years.

"The generous donations allowed the Fund to develop a broad range of gifts to ensure the fairest outcome for as many people in need as possible," Mr McNamara said.

Applications for most of the Appeal Fund's 26 financial support packages for individuals close on 31 December, 2009. People who are unable to apply by that date, or who require additional time, will have their applications considered on compassionate grounds on a case-by-case basis.

Applications for the *Compassionate Financial Support* and *Safe Removal of Hazardous Trees* will remain open until February 28, 2010. Applications for the scholarship program for Year 12 students close on January 22, 2010, although scholarships will continue to be available in the future for students currently in Years 10 and 11.

"We know there are a small number of people who are still in need and are eligible for these support payments who are yet to apply," Mr McNamara said.

"There could be many reasons for this, including that many eligible recipients are still in distress and are unable to apply for payments at this time or they feel they have not suffered as much as others affected by the bushfires and don't think they are worthy of financial support.

"But if you, or someone you know, were directly impacted by the 2009 bushfires and are still in need, then you may be eligible for support - the Appeal Fund is there to help you get your life back on track," Mr McNamara said.

There are payments for destroyed and damaged homes, household repairs, rural properties, home dislocation, lost tools of trade and support for renters and boarders. Anyone severely injured in the bushfires, or who lost family members, can also receive financial assistance.

The Appeal Fund is also providing support for a range of community projects identified as priorities as part of the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority's Community Recovery Plans, with almost \$95 million allocated for these initiatives.

All potential projects must meet the Appeal Fund's guidelines for allocating donor money. The projects must align with the expectations of affected individuals and communities and not necessarily duplicate other funding and not be a core responsibility of government.

Potential projects to receive support from the Appeal Fund include rebuilding community halls and multipurpose centres, building new community facilities, restoring recreational facilities, and repairing or building walking and cycling paths.

Other funding has been set aside for projects aimed at strengthening and supporting communities through their recovery.

"Each person who donated to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund can be confident every cent of their money is directly benefitting those who need it the most," Mr McNamara said.

"The overwhelming generosity of donors has given people and communities devastated by the fires a chance to rebuild. Money can't change what happened, but through the Fund, all donors can help in some small way.

"That's something we can all be proud of."

All bushfire-affected individuals still in need of support and wishing to apply for gifts can call the Appeal Fund information line 1800 180 213, where they can also seek access to a case manager who will assess their needs, put them in touch with support networks and services and advise them of their eligibility.

People can also visit the Department of Human Services website www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal. All available payments and application forms are listed on the website.

** See attached for further details about Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Allocations and Expenditure*

Media contact: Elisabeth Tuckey, 0438 106 789

Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund facts

Current as at 9/12/09

Background

- The Advisory Panel has **endorsed** gifts worth an estimated \$357m (current allocations);
- \$31m remains for future allocation, but has been in principal allocated to community projects;
- The Fund has made announcements valued at \$354m (91 per cent of Fund);
- \$228m (58 per cent of Fund) has been disbursed; and,
- \$126m of announced gifts are yet to be disbursed these include:
 - \$48m of the Fund's \$56m contribution to *State Wide Plan*;
 - \$28m for long term gifts, such as Scholarships, Psychological Support, Bereaved Children and School Holiday programs;
 - \$20m for relatively recently announced gifts, including Compassionate Financial support, Hazardous trees and Primary Producers;
 - \$30m gifts where gift allocations are expected to be close to or fully paid out; and,
 - If any money remains unspent in the allocation, it will be redirected towards individual gifts or community projects.
- Not one cent of donated money has been used to cover the Fund's administrative costs – these costs have been covered by the State Government.

Total donations

\$388 million (including interest)

Total funds allocated

\$357 million

Total funds disbursed

\$228 million

Total of announced money that is unclaimed

\$126 million

This includes money for long-term support projects such as Psychological Support, Bereaved Children, Scholarships and School Holiday programs. Because these are long-term programs, money will be spent when required over a number of years.

Total payments

20,534