



FIRE SERVICES  
COMMISSIONER  
VICTORIA

# Operational Review

**Loch Sport Coastal Area Fire  
27 September 2012**

Prepared by IRS Services

July 2013

LEADERSHIP  
INTEGRATION  
ACCOUNTABILITY

WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH



**Extract from Wellington Shire Fire Prevention Plan**

Effectively reducing community vulnerability to fire requires more than interagency effort alone. It requires the facilitation of a more self-reliant and self-aware community who have the knowledge, motivation and capacity to manage the risks in their own communities as an active partner with fire management agencies.

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## **Authorisation**

This review was undertaken at the request of the Fire Services Commissioner.

A significant un-planned fire occurred in the Coastal Park area to the south west of the town of Loch Sport in late September 2012. The fire provided an opportunity to review the efficacy of fuel management regimes with regard to their influence on:-

- fire behaviour
- selection and success of control / suppression strategies
- the containment and extinguishment of the fire
- the public perceptions of Fuel Reduction Burning (FRB).

The fire also provided an opportunity to consult members of the Loch Sport community about their experiences and perceptions during and following the event with particular reference to:-

- the risk to the town
- the information available to the community
- their personal safety
- the value / benefit of Fuel Reduction Burning to the safety of Loch Sport

## **Background**

The Gippsland town of Loch Sport is located within an extensive area of coastal park that extends along the peninsula between Lake Victoria and Lake Reeve in the Wellington Shire. There is a single access road to the town running roughly along the centre of the peninsula. (see maps at Appendix A).

Fires that occur to the south west of the town will almost certainly pose a threat to the single access road and any south westerly wind change would push a fire towards the township.

The prevailing weather during the summer months is north to north westerly winds followed by south westerly changes. South easterly coastal breezes are also a regular afternoon feature of the area.

The vegetation in the park area is predominantly coastal heathland. The peninsula is broken up into compartments by a number of established access tracks that facilitate the conduct of FRBs to manage fuel quantities within each compartment. A comprehensive fuel management program has been in place for several years. Recent FRB areas were used to advantage to achieve the control and containment of this fire.

The ESSO pipeline with its ground level valve station compounds, runs through the area. The pipelines carry unrefined product from the offshore platforms to the Longford plant. One of the valve station compounds was considered to be under threat during the fire and this was one of the triggers for escalating the level of public warning and the classification of this fire as a level 3 incident.

The fire originated in a section of the coastal park that is reserved for use by apiarists. Fuel levels in this block were significantly higher than in the adjoining block to the east, where a recent FRB had been undertaken.

Fire Investigators have concluded the fire was deliberately lit.

## Observations

### Planning Documentation

Each of the following was reviewed: the Municipal Fire Management Plan (MFMP), the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP), the Department of Sustainability and Environment (now Department of Environment and Primary Industries – DEPI) Fire Operations Plan (FOP), the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Community Information Guide (CIG).

The Shire is in the process of developing a Loch Sport Community Emergency Plan and this was also examined.

It was noted from the maps accompanying the Plans and from observations made during field visits that the properties at the western end of the township are principally municipal properties, being the Golf Course, Recreation Reserve and Caravan Park.

The Primary School and Police Station are also in this vicinity. This offers a real opportunity to create a comprehensive buffer zone that would enhance the safety of the town.



### Fire Management Planning

The Municipal Fire Management Plan and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan were examined to see if any special mentions were included with regard to Loch Sport.

Whilst the community was identified as being at extreme risk of bushfire there were no specific treatments identified in either Plan that could be considered as specific actions to mitigate the risk.

Mitigation appeared to rely on the fuel management treatments identified in the DEPI FOP. The justification for the burns in the FOP shows that conservation and species diversity needs are the principal objectives of the FRBs.

The ESSO pipeline and valve compounds are not identified as presenting any special risk or requiring any special attention in the event of bushfire. The compounds are in cleared areas, are fenced, have security surveillance by CCTV and are well maintained. Fire safety equipment consists of hand appliances only.

The pipeline easement itself is a wide, well maintained slashed strip that includes an access track along its entire length. It serves as another established fuel break.

### **Fuel Reduction Burning**

Regular FRB activity has been conducted throughout the Park area to the west of the township and this will continue. The fire actually occurred in a section of the coastal park located between two recent burns. A map showing the burn history and planned future burns is located at Appendix A.

There is general community support for use of fuel reduction burning as a fire mitigation strategy. DEPI personnel involved in the fire suppression activity reported that control efforts on established tracks and control lines benefited from the reduced fire intensity in those sections that had been previously burned.

The network of tracks throughout the coastal park is maintained to facilitate the FRB program. As a consequence there was minimal need for use of machines to create or enhance control lines. The network of tracks also enhances firefighter safety by providing alternate means of access and retreat should that be needed.

Information provided by the Incident Management Team clearly indicated that the control lines and strategies were determined with the object of capitalising on the established access tracks and the adjoining fuel reduced areas. The Overview map in Appendix A shows the relationship of the fire area to the tracks and previously burned areas.

Aerial photographs taken during the fire show only moderate fire behaviour in the FRB areas. Crowning activity was observed in the unburned area but not in the fuel reduced areas.

CFA personnel interviewed were less inclined than were DEPI personnel to report a noticeable difference in fire behaviour between the actual fire and the slop over into the FRB areas. However, they did acknowledge that FRB activities assisted their fire suppression efforts. They also pointed out that the tracks and control lines required for the safe conduct of FRBs provide improved access and subdivide the area into more manageable plots.

### **Other Fuel Management Issues**

Loch Sport has been identified as being one of the communities at 'extreme' risk of bushfire. Residents rely on the power for the operation of their domestic water supply systems to deal with ember attack or incipient fire. Given that when the road is not open the community rely on food supplies and fuel being available in the town, the integrity of the power supply is a vital factor in maintaining the safety and welfare of the community.

Power to the township was lost during the fire due to damage to poles and cross arms on the main feed line along the Peninsula. Repair work and restoration of power was not possible until it was deemed safe to enter the fire area.

The provision of concrete poles along the supply line would be a sensible and logical initiative that would reduce the vulnerability of the power supply and enhance the resilience of the community.

## **Community Attitudes, Concerns and Comment**

### **Fuel Reduction Burning**

The comments from members of the community were supportive of the need for and the objectives of FRBs. There seemed to be an acceptance that the planned burning program was developed to balance the needs of community safety and environmental conservation.

Long term residents who said they chose to live at Loch Sport because of its environmental attributes appreciate that FRB is a necessary strategy to enhance the safety of the town by reducing fire intensities.

A number of community members commented that they thought there should be more regular burning of the area immediately adjacent to the edge of the town to establish a more substantial 'last line of defence' given that road access/egress is likely to be unsafe.

### **Fuel Reduction within the Town**

In Loch Sport a high percentage of properties are either vacant lots or unoccupied structures. The permanent population is around 600. The peak holiday population could be up to 5000. Residents interviewed expressed concern about fuel levels within the township. Well maintained properties are often at risk because of poorly maintained neighbouring properties. Observations during an inspection visit confirmed the views expressed by the residents.

Ember attack could quite easily result in multiple fires within the town area. Residents rely on household pressure systems and tank supplies for water and these will not operate when the power supply to the town fails because of fire.

Discussion with the Municipal Fire Prevention Officer (MFPO) for the Shire of Wellington elicited the following concerns:

- the desire for clearer direction / guidance about his authority to direct fuel modification works on occupied properties within at risk communities such as Loch Sport. This relates to the interpretation of the requirement that an MFPO must form an opinion that a hazard or "threat to neighbouring properties" exists.
- the limitations and practicality of an MFPO being able to influence the creation and implementation of appropriate fuel management plans on areas managed by their employer.
- If a Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee (MFMP) were to develop a specific plan for an at risk community there are currently no legislative provisions that would require a Municipality to implement that plan.

Both the MFMP and the MEMP need to be framed and contain actions that recognise and address the special needs of Loch Sport.

## **Community Information**

The information provided to the public through a range of methods on the first day led to a degree of confusion and concern particularly in the minds of some older residents. Some were seen leaving town in vehicles loaded up with possessions along the very route that was being threatened and subsequently cut by the fire.

One business owner, who was in Traralgon at the time of the fire, heard the Watch and Act warning broadcast on radio. He rang his staff and was told by them that they were unaware of any fire. They were able to tell him that the power in the shop had just failed.

The same businessman decided to return to Loch Sport despite broadcast information saying the road had been closed. He found no Traffic Management Point (TMP) at the intersection with the Longford Rd and was able to drive to Loch Sport without being challenged at any point.

Other comments by community members indicated that the content of the broadcast official warning messages on the first day of the fire was inconsistent with the locally available information obtained from residents that had travelled along the road.

The upgrade of the official warning to a Watch and Act was the trigger that caused several older residents to decide to leave town. This was perhaps a counter productive response. Those leaving in response to the warning were actually driving towards the fire area. This highlights that use of generic warning messages is inappropriate in those situations where special geographic constraints such as single road access exist.

The on-site Community Information Service established at the Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP) by CFA personnel on 28 September improved the quality and timeliness of the information able to be provided to members of the community. In addition, information bulletins were produced and distributed to local businesses and community facilities to keep residents informed.

Community members expressed a desire that such a service should have been in place on day 1 (27 September 2012) when the situation was far more volatile and the need for timely, accurate information was greatest.

A copy of the notes prepared by those who provided the information service is attached at Appendix B.

## **Community Concerns**

The principal concerns of the community are catalogued below.

A debrief of community members and emergency service representatives was conducted on 2 October 2012 by Shire of Wellington staff to identify 'what worked well' and 'what did not work well'. A copy of the report of that gathering is attached at Appendix C.

The issues mentioned during discussions with members of the community for this review was generally found to be consistent with those contained in the summary notes of the community debrief.

### **Road Access and Evacuation**

The single road access in and out generates the greatest concern. The 25km distance to the intersection along the Peninsula reinforces the sense of isolation and exposure in the event of any significant fire.



Although there were reports of a TMP at the intersection with the Longford Rd there was no traffic management established at the point of exit from the town. This would seem to be an important consideration for the safety of those who might choose to try and leave Loch Sport. The Police Station is located adjacent to the edge of town and this might assist the establishment of a TMP at that point.

Mass evacuation of the community using boats or helicopter would be the only alternative methods available if the road was impassable due to fire and evacuation was the only safest option. Each of these options would take some time to arrange the required resources and there is no evidence of any planning for the potential evacuation of Loch Sport.

Severe fire weather generally involves elevated wind speeds that would generate rough conditions on the lake and create safety issues associated with the use of boats for evacuation. Helicopters have been used in flood situations where relatively small groups of people needed to be rescued or evacuated.

Considering the number of people that may need to be evacuated during the holiday periods a mass evacuation would require a significant period of time to achieve. Without any planning it is unknown whether this would, in any event, be feasible.

### **Power Supply**

The loss of power to this community affects:

- domestic water supplies because they rely on pressure pumps for their operation
- refrigeration of food supplies
- fuel supplies
- telephones, internet access and other methods of gaining information that rely on rechargeable batteries

Advice to the community needs to emphasise the importance of having a battery powered broadcast radio available as part of their emergency kit, as an important means of being self reliant for the first 48 hours of an emergency event.

### **Internet & Phone Coverage**

Not all providers service the area so there are reception, capacity and bandwidth issues particularly during periods of peak occupancy.

Internet access and the use of phone apps for obtaining information via official websites is therefore also limited as would be the effectiveness of Emergency Alerts sent by SMS. This suggests that public broadcast radio remains the most reliable means of transmitting a warning message and that listening to a local radio station is likely to be the most reliable way of receiving information for those living in towns with questionable performance of mobile phone networks.

Those with laptops and mobile phones had to consider when and how to use them in order to preserve battery life because of the loss of power. The identification of points equipped with generators where people could re-charge batteries may be a worthwhile consideration for inclusion in Community Emergency Response Plans developed by municipalities.

### **Alerting System**

At the time of the fire and given the poor mobile coverage there was no effective alerting system for the Loch Sport community. The loss of power was reported as the first inkling of a problem. This was reinforced by a community member who stated - "By the time we know there is a fire our only road out is probably cut or threatened and it is not safe to leave."

Subsequently, Loch Sport has been provided with a community alerting siren as part of the pilot program to test the use of sirens as a method of alerting communities.

### **Information**

The information available to the public on the first day caused confusion. The official Advice Warning on the website and in the media seemed inconsistent with the locally available information.

There was no official location(s) within the community where accurate, more detailed and timely information could be obtained about the fire situation. In the absence of any official agency presence residents were asking for information at their usual trusted contact points in the community such as shops, the health and community centre and the post office.

The effort to establish a Community Information Service within the community on 28 September was appreciated, however it was rightly pointed out that the real need for this service had been on the day when the fire started on 27 September, when the situation was far more volatile and the need for timely, accurate information was greatest.

### **Other Comments of Note about the Event**

Two community members expressed concern that limited resources were sent when the fire was first reported just after midnight on 27 September. This reflected comments also made by the Loch Sport CFA expressing the view that the fire could have been contained to a relatively small area (20-30ha) had a small dozer been on site prior to the arrival of the strong winds during the early hours of the morning. The fire had reached and crossed the Loch Sport Road by first light in the morning when the DEPI resources arrived as planned.

The official forecast for the period had predicted that the stronger winds would not arrive until later in the morning and this no doubt influenced the decision to dispatch the DEPI resources so they would arrive at first light. It should be noted that this fire occurred prior to the period when heavy equipment is fitted with lights to enable safe night time operations during the Fire Danger Period.

The responses generally indicated a degree of acceptance that fires will occur in the coastal park area and that emergency services would extinguish them. A view reinforced by a history of good outcomes at past events. Consequently, the public did not feel their lives were in danger.

Reports that the fire had been deliberately lit created concerns that Loch Sport could be exposed to other fire events during the summer. A check with media outlets found no real public comment on this aspect. There was little public comment at all regarding this fire, even during the period of the fire. The Gippsland Times included two small news story mentions about the fire but each was of a factual nature only.

The ABC radio station in Sale reported that they had received minimal listener comment about the fire suggesting that the level of concern was low.

### **Discussion**

Observations and discussions with local people and the content of the MFMP and CIG for Loch Sport suggest that each has been heavily influenced by the accepted generic guidelines applied to such planning rather than by logical consideration of the special needs of this particular community.

The location of Loch Sport at the eastern end of a long section of coastal park with single road access presents some special fire management issues that require location/community specific treatments.

Potentially dangerous fires will occur to the south west of the township. They will generally originate under the influence of a northerly wind and so the smoke column will be blown out over Bass Strait. The threat to the access road and, in time, to the township will not be immediately apparent to those in the town. By the time the community does become aware of any fire, the only exit road is likely to be fire affected and unsafe.

Evacuation by road will not be a feasible strategy once a fire has started.

Therefore, the focus for emergency management planners needs to be on strategies that address these special circumstances and enhance and facilitate the safety of all township occupants.

Such strategies might be as simple as emphasizing that the 'Leave Early' message means early in the morning of any day of predicted extreme fire danger. However, history tells us that most people will take no action until they are aware of a fire in the area. Leaving after a fire starts will be too late so it might be necessary to prevent people from leaving the town once a fire has started by implementation of some form of TMP at the edge of town.

It follows that if this approach were adopted then there would be a need for establishment of places within the town where occupants can assemble and be relatively safe. It would also require strengthening of the fuel reduced buffer zone immediately to the west of the town.

The reviewer met with the Shire of Wellington's Coordinator Municipal Emergency and the consultant working with the Shire to develop a Community Emergency Planning Guide. This project is supported by a Natural Disaster Resilience Grant. The Shire has used the Loch Sport community to pilot the model as they develop the concept and content of the guidebook.

Their consultations with the community prior to the fire and the work done by them probably helped to increase the community response to the fire event. The community debrief report (Appendix C) is an output from their efforts to engage the community in improving planning for future emergencies and particularly the development of appropriate community response strategies.

## **Findings**

### **Fire Management**

The CIG for Loch Sport identifies the town as having an 'Extreme' bushfire risk. The FRB program in the coastal park area is designed to reduce fire intensities and the potential of fires that may occur to the south west of the town.

Despite the difficulties of access / egress caused by the single road, neither the fire management planning documents or the CIG contain any specific comments about the difficulties this might create or any specific activities that are directed at treating those difficulties, e.g. additional works to consolidate the effectiveness of the buffer zone to the immediate west of the township.

The current land use (golf course, caravan park, sports complex, school) at the western edge of the town includes substantial areas of modified fuels on public land that could be further treated to significantly reduce the likelihood of a fire burning into the populated area. This would also enhance the survivability of key community infrastructure, such as the Primary School and Police Station.

Leaving the town after a significant fire has started is a questionable course of action. Strategies and treatments that would enable residents to remain in the town at points of relative safety also need to be determined and implemented.

## **Fuel Reduction Burning**

The burning program across most of the peninsula has been undertaken for ecological purposes according to the notes accompanying the plans. The areas closer to the township are within an asset protection zone and are specifically for fuel reduction purposes to provide added safety to the community.

The planned burning is generally accepted within the community as a necessary strategy for maintaining a degree of safety for the Loch Sport community given the single road access/egress situation.

The outcome of this fire has helped to demonstrate the benefits that can be gained from an effective Prescribed Burning program. Community members could see that the areas that had been subject to recent FRB assisted the agencies to control and manage the fire.

A number of people spoken to expressed the desire for more regular fuel management in the areas close to the western edge of the town in order to provide a more substantial buffer zone and provide a greater sense of security and safety within the community.

## **Community Information Guide**

The content of the CIG does not seem to adequately address the fact that Loch Sport is effectively cut off whenever a serious fire develops west of the town.

This community need to clearly understand that 'leave early' means leaving before any fire occurs so that safe use of the road is not an issue. The CIG must emphasise this point and provide information and guidance about what actions are appropriate once the only access/egress road is not safe to use.

## **Community Warnings**

The warnings issued during the fire were timely, tailored, relevant and appropriate considering the available information at the time of issue.

The location information in official advice warning messages is usually locality based rather than providing specific detail. However, those who live in or near the specified locality are immediately prompted to seek more detail about the actual location, size and direction of travel of the fire. Existing systems fail to provide this detail.

Understandably 'locals' become frustrated when they cannot get more detailed information and also when they obtain information through trusted local sources that differs from the official version.

## **Information Points**

The need for a source of accurate and timely information within the community, perhaps from the normal points of community focus was identified as a strategy that needs further consideration. In the absence of any official emergency service presence residents sought information at their usual contact points e.g. shops, community centres, post office.

The concept of the Information Point used on day 2 of this fire might provide a possible model for future emergencies. A consideration needs to be whether provision of improved information services might result in criticism when it is not practical or possible to provide the service in all situations.

## **Community Emergency Response Planning**

The work being done by the Shire of Wellington on a Community Emergency Response Guide may identify ways of achieving locally available information using existing community resources to provide information.

### **For consideration by Agencies / Utilities**

Power pole and line maintenance requires special attention. Provision of concrete poles, steel cross arms and the application of weedicide around the base of wooden poles on the critical main supply line could greatly reduce the potential for loss of power to the whole community as occurred in this fire.

The identification of points equipped with generators where people could re-charge batteries may be a worthwhile consideration for inclusion in Community Emergency Response Plans developed by municipalities.

The single access road into and out of Loch Sport could be permanently identified as being potentially closed during a fire through the use of appropriate signs. In addition the location of the appropriate sites for TMPs can be identified and incorporated into agency response plans, rather than determining these when and if a fire cuts the road.

## **Conclusion**

The area involved in this fire had been reserved for use by apiarists. It had relatively high fuel levels and had not been burned for several years.

This review has found that the Prescribed Burning regime undertaken over the last 8 to 10 years on the Loch Sport Peninsula was a significant factor in the selection of control strategies and tactics and that it contributed to the control of this fire despite the unfavourable weather conditions that prevailed at the time.

The perimeter control lines were constructed on the established tracks that ran between the fire area and the recently burnt compartments. The reduced fuel levels in those compartments allowed personnel to work from the tracks with minimal threat to their safety.

The permanent population appear to understand and appreciate the need for FRB and appreciate that it is necessary to provide the added degree of safety needed because evacuation from the town is not a viable option considering that the single road access will come under threat from any fire on the western end of the Peninsula.

Community members recognise their vulnerability to fire and were quite strongly advocating the need for a substantial buffer zone on the western border of the town.

Despite the changes implemented over recent years to improve the availability of information to the public and in particular warnings, the feedback indicated that there is still a significant gap between community expectations and the standard/content of warnings and information.

Locals need and seek more detailed, accurate and meaningful information in order to base their actions and decisions. Community based strategies that complement the existing broader organisational strategies have the greatest potential for satisfying these needs and expectations. The Wellington Shire's project may well provide a useful model to improve dissemination of information at a community level.

The content of the CIG for Loch Sport has been based on a generic format that may not be appropriate considering the special parameters and constraints associated with its single access road, isolated location and its extreme fire risk rating. Alternative strategies may need to be considered and the CIG amended accordingly.

## **Appendices**

- A. Maps of general area, the fire area and FRB history and future FRBs
- B Community Information Notes
- C Debrief Notes from Community Reference Group by Wellington Shire
- D Images of Fire Area showing fuel levels

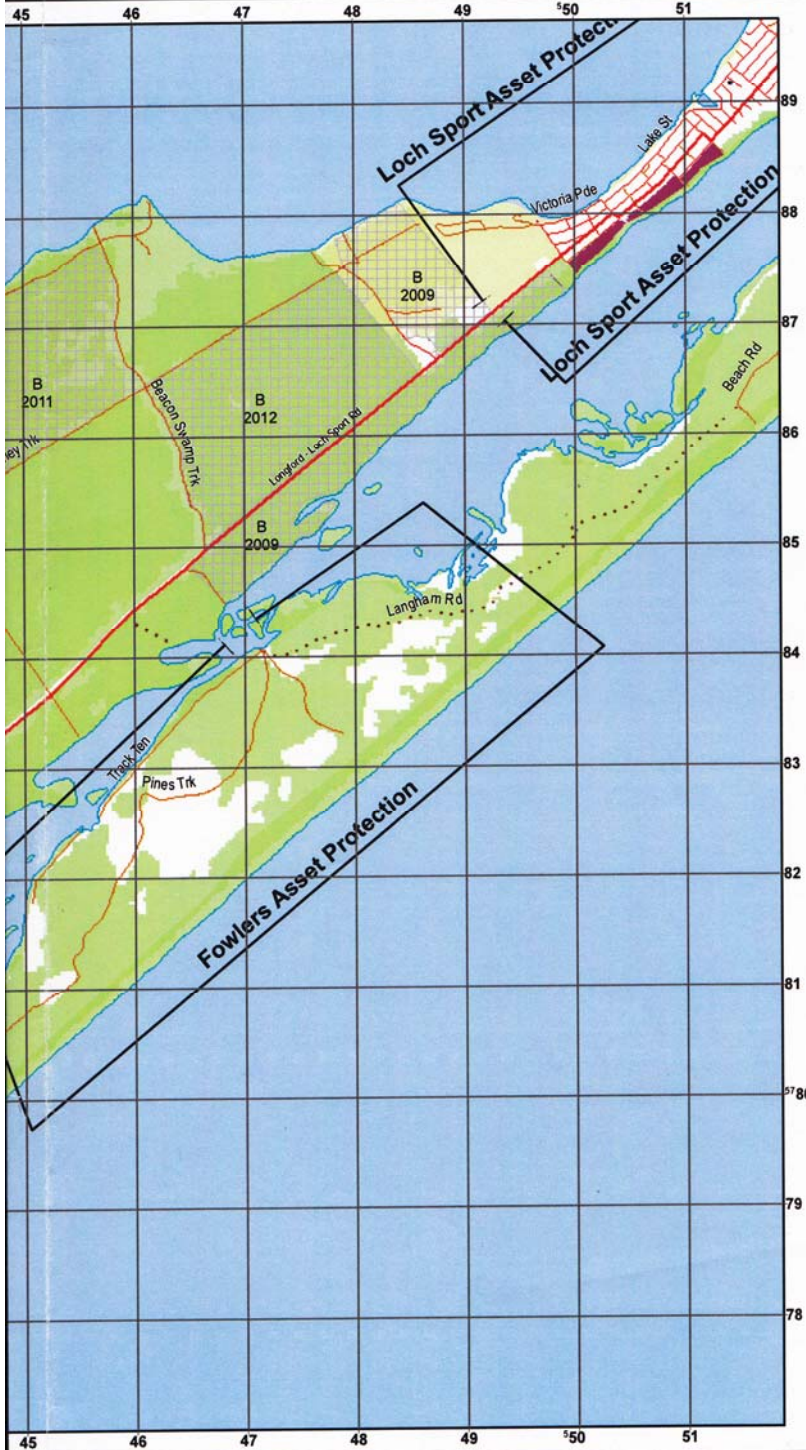
**Appendix A - Maps of Fire Area**



Map Produced: 1000hr 28 Sep 2012

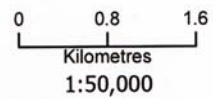


Department of Sustainability and Environment



Linescan: xxxhr xx/xx/xxxx  
 Field Obs: xxxhr xx/xx/xxxx  
 Sat. Hotspots: xxxhr xx/xx/xxxx

- Fire Edge - Going; Estimated
- Fire Edge-Contained; Controlled
- Predicted Fire Edge
- Fire Area
- Previous Burnt
- Aerial Ignition
- Proposed Backburn Line
- Proposed Backburn Area
- Completed Backburn Line
- Completed Backburn Area
- Sectors ; Divisions
- Control Line - Proposed
- Control Line- Constructed
- Contingency Line
- Fire History Last 5 yrs
- Fire Spread; Escape Route
- Fire Tower; Helipad; Fire Origin
- Air Strip; Retardant Air Base
- ICC ; Operations Point
- Staging Area; Base Camp
- Water Point; WP - Vehicle
- Hot Spot; Spot Fire
- Satellite Hot Spot - 0-12hrs; 12-24hrs; 24-72hrs



Map Grid of Australia - Zone 55



not guarantee  
 licence upon it.

(c) The State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment 2009

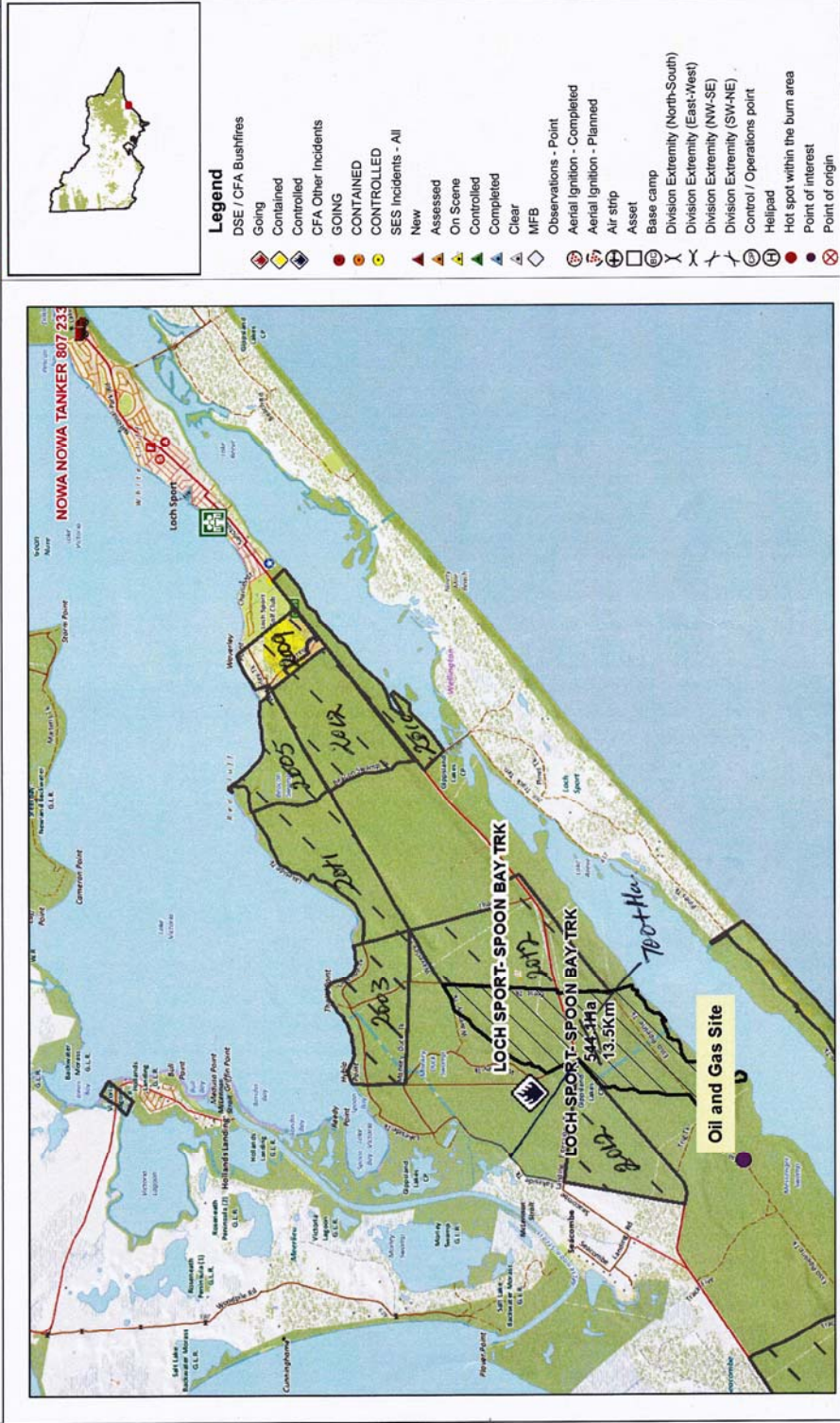


"A"

# Loch Sport





### Legend

- DSE / CFA Bushfires
- Going
- Contained
- Controlled
- CFA Other Incidents
- GOING
- CONTAINED
- CONTROLLED
- SES Incidents - All
- New
- Assessed
- On Scene
- Controlled
- Completed
- Clear
- MFB
- Observations - Point
- Aerial Ignition - Completed
- Aerial Ignition - Planned
- Air strip
- Asset
- Base camp
- Division Extremity (North-South)
- Division Extremity (East-West)
- Division Extremity (NW-SE)
- Division Extremity (SW-NE)
- Control / Operations point
- Helipad
- Hot spot within the burn area
- Point of interest
- Point of origin

Disclaimer: This map is a snapshot generated from Victorian Government data. This material may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purpose and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss or damage which may arise from reliance upon it. All persons accessing this information should make appropriate enquiries to assess the currency of the data.  
 Produced on: December 4, 2012 12:00:07 PM







## Appendix B - Community Information Notes

### Loch Sport – SPOON BAY TRK

Community Information - Friday 28 September 2012

- Day commenced at 4.50am
- Arrived at HQ at 5.00am to pick up newsletters, posters and bushfire publications
- Arrived at Loch Sport at 6.00am
- Reported to [REDACTED] (Incident Controller) via phone
- [REDACTED] was not aware that we were in Loch Sport nor why
- Town was quiet – shops did not open until 8.00am
- Visited [REDACTED] Loch Sport Fire Station at 7.20am
- When General Store opened at 8.00am we commenced talking with community members and giving current information about the fire
- Day concluded at 5.30pm

Throughout the day we made regular contact with the ICC ([REDACTED]) and fed back comments from the community as well as getting up to date information about the fire.

On several occasions messages were left and we waited for up to 30 minutes for a response from the ICC

Over-all feedback from the community was that they didn't feel informed and were confused with what information they were receiving from CFA website, ABC radio, T.V and general chatter around town.

Community members questioned and speculated about whether the fire was deliberately lit.

Several residents/ business owners commented that the information was too late.

Elderly residents frequented the Post Office, Health Centre, and Supermarket for information on Thursday. Business owners didn't feel informed and weren't able to relay current information back to the community.

#### Information Distribution

##### Loch Sport

Bakery	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	Media Release
Pub	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	Media Release
General Store	Newsletter		Media Release
Café	Newsletter		Media Release
Real Estate Agents x3	Newsletter		Media Release
Fuel and Fishing	Newsletter		
Health Centre	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
General Store – Post Office	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	Media Release
Pizza Shop	Newsletter		Media Release
Loch Sport Caravan Park	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
90 Mile Beach Holiday Retreat	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
Community Notice Board	Newsletter		Media Release

### Golden Beach / Paradise Beach

Golden Beach Cabins	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
Robyn Toogood Real Estate	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
Olivers Kitchen	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	
Blue Water Foodarama	Newsletter	VBIL Magnets	

Feedback from the community:

### Loch Sport

#### Bus Shelter Boys

- Was it deliberate
- Lack of information
- Concerns about growth around power poles – issue raised with SP Ausnet 2 ½ years ago (nothing done)
- Power outage from 7.15am on Thursday 27 September
- Power came back on approx. 13.00pm
- Confusing messaging – road closures
- NSP requires more trees cleared

#### Health Centre

- Elderly community members didn't feel informed / came to health centre for information
- Lack of media coverage
- Concerns about burn offs in local area

#### General Store / Post Office

- Elderly residents very concerned
- Confusing information – website, ABC radio
- Lack of up to date information
- Controlled / Contained – explanations?

#### Community Centre

- Lack of information
- More than happy to assist in future with distribution of information

#### Pub

- Community Hub
- Lack of current information

#### 90 Mile Beach Holiday Retreat

- Disgruntle accommodation owner
- Able to see the fire from retreat and didn't appreciate CFA telling her what was happening when she could visibly see the fire

### Golden Beach

#### Blue Water Foodarama

- Felt informed as local brigade was keeping them informed
- Thankful that we visited Golden Beach
- Feeding and watering CFA crews

Oliver's Kitchen - 3 x community members

- Splintered community
- Concerns – fuel reduction, where do we go?, NSP issues, warnings(phone), emergency alerts
- Residents very concerned with lack of response

We also spoke to a person who claimed to have called in the fire. We encouraged this person to contact Crime Stoppers or the Sale Police with information relating to the fire, but they declined.



**Appendix C Spoon Bay Track Fire Event - Hot Debrief Report** (Loch Sport- Seacombe area 27th – 28th September 2012)

**HOT DEBRIEF – CRG MEETING TUESDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER 2012**

**Present:** Members of the Loch Sport CRG, members of the Community Emergency Planning Group, local residents/property owners, Parks Vic, DSE Heyfield District, CFA - Gippsland Region, Wellington Shire Council

Questions	
<b>What worked well?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NSP – PLR was used by holiday makers, around 4-5 cars, a member of the Community Emergency Planning Group went and spoke with them. They were interested in finding out further information about the fire. Gave them confidence that a local resident had spoken with them.</li> <li>• Local Ambulance had contingency plans in place in case of isolation e.g., use of air transport in an emergency and use of water transport for paramedical personnel to supplement the local Ambulance Community Officers at Loch Sport</li> <li>• Bull dozers / multiple units were on site and fire-bombing was available.</li> <li>• Updates available through CFA/DSE websites. Information updated every 5 minutes (also had an expiry time)</li> <li>• One member spoke about the 19FIRE System – a private emergency alarm system, which warns the mobile phone recipient of a fire in their area (not a free service). She is very happy with this service.</li> <li>• (Weather / wind worked in communities favour) Also minimal smoke in township from fire.</li> <li>• Fire well monitored by lead agency and alert messages appropriate to fire status.</li> <li>• Several people left the township and sought accommodation elsewhere.</li> </ul>
<b>What did not work well?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of communication / information – more difficult to access information with power outage.</li> <li>• When SP Ausnet contacted re power outages, message simply said there was a problem with the lines outside of town, no indication of a fire in the area.</li> <li>• Many community members didn't know there was a fire until the power went out.</li> <li>• No siren warnings in town – some people were expecting to hear the siren to alert them.</li> <li>• Loss of power caused many issues – no pumps for water tanks, unable to access water, several people had not charged their mobile phones / laptops. Some vehicles had limited petrol/diesel in them (50km drive to Sale).</li> <li>• Radio advice from ABC Gippsland – some people left town and stayed in motels, added expense and they may not leave should this occur again.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No mechanism of identifying who had left the township.</li> <li>• Radio updates stated the fire was 20km from township, when it was only 8.5km.</li> <li>• ABC Radio reports, particularly the evening sessions, indicated there were major issues for Loch Sport. Relatives were ringing from other States to check on family after hearing reports.</li> <li>• DSE/CFA website updates – Issues with levels of Advice. Watch and Act was on the DSE/CFA website for a long time, ? longer than it needed to be. Alert messages fluctuated up and down. Community members found this difficult to understand.</li> <li>• People drove through from Golden Beach unaware of the fire event – no signage / police presence at Loch Sport/Golden Beach intersection.</li> <li>• Health Centre &amp; Ambulance have minimal capacity to generate power in a power outage.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suggested Opportunities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early warning sirens for the township.</li> <li>• Community education re maintaining a plug in phone – consult with Telstra – many households are completely cordless.</li> <li>• Education re stock piling water in case of power outage. Also portable, battery operated radios with spare batteries.</li> <li>• Encourage residents to charge mobiles/laptops overnight.</li> <li>• Use the Loch Sport Link to explain the three levels of Advice in an emergency event.</li> <li>• Utilise the Bakery, Lodge Supermarket &amp; Community House to display the latest updated emergency information (Can be hand written in a power outage)</li> <li>• Make sure cars/boats are fuelled up.</li> <li>• Red Cross have an operational catering trailer, but local Unit is non-operational at present. Organise a Volunteer List of local residents with Food Handling qualifications in case trailer needs to be accessed in an emergency (Could be enlisted / trained as part of the Red Cross Registration / Personal Support team)</li> <li>• SES has generators which could be utilised for the Health Centre and Ambulance Station in an emergency. Delivery of a Fire Ready Victoria meeting to address issues around communities lack of understanding of warnings and alerts and how they are used as well as information regarding how to plan and prepare for the incident of fire in their area.</li> </ul>

## **ACTIONS / FOLLOW UP:**

- **Investigate the process for having local sirens.** CFA will follow through with local CFA and HQ and report back through the Community Emergency Planning Group. **Attended.** Further advice from MAV and OES.
- **DSE to supply information regarding why certain alert's were sent at particular times** to help the community understand why they moved up and down between levels – requested by community members. DSE spoke on the three levels of emergency warnings. The Watch & Act Alert was activated when the fire passed a pivotal line, once under control the message reverted back to Advise. This occurred on several occasions, hence the changes up and down in the level of emergency messages to the community.
- **Use the Loch Sport Link** to explain the three levels of Advice in an emergency event - CFA will supply CFA literature on emergency warnings for the next edition.
- Community House Rep noted that she intends on **printing Alert/Warning information** and distributing to local businesses to keep community members informed.
- The **CFA website** appears to have been more commonly viewed, but the DSE website would have contained the same Alert information, as all warnings/information come from a **“One Source One Message system”**. The information in this case was constructed, distributed and updated by the DSE Information Unit.
- DSE reassured the community that **additional resources will be monitoring the area** for the next few weeks in case of a flare up.
- DSE also spoke on **Arson investigation** and encouraged the community to be vigilant with reporting any suspect activities to **Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.**
- CFA spoke on **CFA programs**, including Fire Ready Victoria meetings and Home Bushfire Advice Service, literature provided. Names for follow-up of Community Fire Guard Groups also obtained. Discussed using the November Market in Loch Sport as an Emergency Information/Awareness Session.
- All above issues and recommendations will be discussed at the **Community Emergency Planning Meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> October** at the Community House, 11am-12.30pm. Local community members welcome. Information will be utilised in the Community Emergency Planning template.
- Community Emergency Planning Group to talk with SP Ausnet re vegetation around poles and power outage issues.



## **CFA Response to Action Items 03/10/2012**

### **Process for requesting Community Alert Sirens:**

Attached is a copy of the *Use of Sirens for Brigade and Community Alerting: Combined Policy and Guidelines* for the CRG and Community Emergency Planning group's to view.

They will need to follow the guidelines and procedure outlined on pages 5 to 10 utilising the guidance questions (pages 12 & 13) to assess need in having Community Alert Sirens placed in their community.

### **Information about the three levels of Bushfire Alerts and Warnings:**

I have attached the CFA *Bushfire Alerts and Warnings* information document. This document outlines – the three levels of alerts and what they mean; how the alerts can be received; and what information the alerts will contain.

**Appendix D Images of fuels in fire area**

**Image 1 - Typical fuels in non fuel reduced areas**



**Image 2 - Fuel on South side of road near fire area**



**Image 3 - Nth side of road, FRB conducted in 2009**



**Image 4 - FRB completed in 2012 adjacent to fire area**

