

# Are Big Fires Inevitable?

A national forum presented  
by the Bushfire CRC

Tuesday 27 February 2007

Parliament House, Canberra

Parliamentary Theatre

## PROGRAM



The Bushfire CRC gratefully acknowledges the  
support of the following:



**Australian Government**  
Department of Transport and  
Regional Services



**Australian Government**  
Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry



Established and supported  
under the Australian  
Government's Cooperative  
Research Centres Programme





# Are Big Fires Inevitable?

## WELCOME

The Board and Executive of the Bushfire CRC are delighted to welcome participants to today's National Bushfire Forum - "Are Big Fires Inevitable?"

Since the decision to establish the Bushfire CRC following the major fires in New South Wales in 2001/02, we have had further devastating fires in 2003 in Canberra and the Alps, in 2005 in the Eyre Peninsula and the Perth Hills, in January 2006 in the Grampians, NSW mid-north coast and the Southwest Slopes. We know there is a similar picture in other fire prone parts of the world.

The accumulated toll of loss of life and property combined with vast environmental damage plus the frequency of occurrence of these severe fires has raised concerns that we may be facing a new paradigm that questions our current thinking on how to balance fire suppression and fire prevention, on managing the land, the environment and water resources, and on the role of communities.

We are especially interested in what the practitioners say, what policy makers think and how research can or should best inform the debate.

We are indebted to the advice of the panel who recently reviewed the Bushfire CRC that recommended the CRC should take a stronger role in promoting discussion on major bushfire issues.



Hosting this event at Parliament House seems a fitting location for an issue that is so important to the Australian economy, environment and community. It also allows participation by our political leaders and we're pleased to have their active involvement.

Today is not about attributing blame or promoting single issue causes, but it is about gaining a greater understanding of an increasingly complex issue, what should be done, who needs to contribute, and the research agenda needed to help define and underpin new policies and practices for the future.



**Ian MacDougall, AC AFSM**  
Vice Admiral RAN Rtd  
Chairman Bushfire CRC



**Kevin O'Loughlin**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Bushfire CRC

# PROGRAM

## 08.00 Registration

Theatre Foyer, Mezzanine Level  
Parliament House, Canberra

### Master of Ceremonies

#### Ian Mannix

Manager, Emergency Broadcasting and  
Community Development, ABC Local Radio

## 08:30 Welcome and Introduction

#### Kevin O'Loughlin

CEO, Bushfire CRC

#### Ian MacDougall

Chairman, Bushfire CRC

#### The Hon. Gary Nairn, MP

Special Minister of State

#### Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz

Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and  
Conservation

## 09:00 The Megafire Reality

#### Jerry Williams

Senior Advisor,  
The Brookings Institution, USA

## 09:30 The Climate Link to Big Fires

#### Neville Nicholls

Professorial Fellow, School of Geography and  
Environmental Science, Monash University

#### Will Steffen

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), Australian  
National University

## 09:50 An Australian Perspective on Big Fires

#### Phil Cheney

Honorary Research Fellow CSIRO

## 10:05 Questions and Discussion

## 10:30 Morning Tea

## 10:50 Bushfire Panel

### Panel Chair

#### Murray Dudfield

New Zealand Rural Fire Service  
National Rural Fire Officer

### Panelists

#### Phil Koperberg

Bushfire CRC Board Member

#### Euan Ferguson

Chief Officer, South Australian Country Fire Service

#### John Gledhill

Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service

#### Rick Sneeuwjagt

Acting Director Regional Services, Department of  
Environment and Conservation, WA

## 11:20 Questions and Discussion

## 11:40 Forestry Panel

### Panel Chair

#### Peter Kanowski

Professor and Head of School, School of Resources  
Environment and Society, Australian National University

### Panelists

#### Tony Bartlett

General Manager, Forest Industries Branch, Department  
of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

#### Allan Hansard

Chief Executive, Tree Plantations Australia

#### Rod Keenan

Head of School, Forestry and Ecosystem  
Science, University of Melbourne

## 12:10 Questions and Discussion

## 12:30 Lunch

## 13:10 Water Panel

### Panel Chair

#### Gary Jones

Chief Executive, eWater CRC

### Panelists

#### Rob Vertessy

Chief, CSIRO Land and Water

#### John Riddiford

Chief Executive Officer, North East Catchment  
Management Authority, Victoria

#### Richard Norris

Program Leader Education and Training,  
eWater CRC and Director, Institute for Applied  
Ecology, University of Canberra



**13:40 Questions and Discussion**

**14:00 Environment Panel**

**Panel Chair**

**Gordon Duff**

Chief Executive Officer, CRC for Forestry

**Panelists**

**Brian Gilligan**

Consultant

**Mark Adams**

Professor, School of Biological Earth and Environmental Sciences University of New South Wales

**Alan Andersen**

Chief Research Scientist, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems

**Bruce Leaver**

First Assistant Secretary, Parks Division, Department of Environment and Heritage

**14:30 Questions and Discussion**

**14:50 Fire & Communities Panel**

**Panel Chair**

**Ian Mannix**

Manager, Emergency Broadcasting and Community Development, ABC Local Radio

**Panelists**

**John Handmer**

Professor and Head, Human Security Program, RMIT University

**Greg Mullins**

Commissioner NSW Fire Brigades

**Lee Johnson**

Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

**Ewan Waller**

Chief Officer, Fire and Emergency Management, Department of Sustainability and Environment

**Neil Bibby**

Chief Executive Officer, Country Fire Authority

**15:20 Questions and Discussion**

**15:40 Afternoon Tea**

**16:00 Forum Summary from the Chairs**

**Moderator**

**Ian Mannix**

**Panel Chairs**

**Murray Dudfield**

**Gordon Duff**

**Gary Jones**

**Peter Kanowski**

**Kevin O'Loughlin**

**16:30 Comments by the Attorney General**

Introduced by

**Ian MacDougall**

Chairman, Bushfire CRC

**The Hon. Philip Ruddock, MP**  
Attorney General

**16:40 Actions Arising**

**Panel Chair**

**Barry Carbon**

Consultant

**Panelists - Policy / Industry / Research**

**Tony Bartlett**

General Manager, Forest Industries Branch, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

**Naomi Brown**

Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Fire Authorities Council

**Jerry Williams**

Senior Advisor,  
The Brookings Institution, USA

**17:10 Closing Comments**

**Kevin O'Loughlin**

CEO, Bushfire CRC

**17:15 Close**

**17:15 Cocktail reception**

Forum to be followed by drinks in the Marble Foyer until 18.15 PM.

# PARTICIPANTS

- Ross Alexander, Treefarm Supervisor, Timbercorp Forestry
- Brian Ashe, Manager Major Projects & Research, Australian Building Codes Board
- Peter Attiwill, Honorary (Principal Fellow), University of Melbourne
- John Baird, Rector, Australian Defence Force Academy, Bushfire CRC Board Member
- Sophie Beeton, Advisor, Office of the Hon. Jim Lloyd MP
- Tony Blanks, Manager Fire Management Branch, Forestry Tasmania
- Michael Blyth, Director Four Scenes
- David Bowman, Professor of Forest Ecology, University of Tasmania
- Senator Bob Brown, Australian Greens
- David Bruce, Communications Manager, Bushfire CRC
- Catherine Bryant, Emergency Management Policy, Emergency Management Australia
- Valerie Buckle, Executive Assistant, Bushfire CRC
- Ray Canterford, Branch Head, Bureau of Meteorology, Bushfire CRC Board
- Colin Chartres, Chief Science Advisor, National Water Commission
- Ian Christie, Director Fire & Emergency Services, Parks Victoria
- Chris Coleman, Broadcaster, ABC
- Wendy Craik, Chief Executive Officer, Murray Darling Basin Commission
- Lesley Crombie, Manager Knowledge Networking, Bushfire CRC
- Ross Dickson, Acting Director Land Management and Technical Services, Forests NSW
- George Dodds, General Manager Catchment Operations and Major Projects, Sydney Catchment Authority
- Stephen R. Dovers, Professor, Australian National University
- Christian Downie, Research Fellow, The Australia Institute
- Ken Eastwood, Associate Editor, Australian Geographic
- Annette Ellis, Electoral Division of Canberra (ACT), Australian Labor Party
- Shane Fitzsimmons, Chief Operations Officer, NSW Rural Fire Service
- Tony Fleming, Deputy Director General, Department of Environment and Conservation NSW
- Gary Foley, Deputy Director (Services), Bureau of Meteorology
- Ian Gabites, Electoral Officer, Electoral Division of Lyons (TAS)
- Anne Gardiner, Head of Compliance, Deutsche Asset Management Australia, Bushfire CRC Board Member
- Bob Gordon, Managing Director, Forestry Tasmania
- Jim Gould, Ensis Bushfire Research, Research Leader, Bushfire Behaviour and Management, Bushfire CRC
- Carolyn Gresele, Policy Manager, Murray Darling Basin Commission
- Mike Harris, Director, Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
- Peter Harris, Victorian Government, Department of Sustainability and Environment
- The Hon. David Hawker, MP, Speaker, House of Representatives
- Joanna Hewitt, Secretary, Primary Industries Standing Committee
- Matthew Higgins, Senior Curator of the People and the Environment, National Museum of Australia
- Athol Hodgson, President, Forest Fire Victoria
- Craig Hynes, Chief Operating Officer, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA
- David King, Director, James Cook University
- Nick Kittel, On-line Producer, ABC Canberra
- Ross Knee, Principal Strategic Planner, ACTEW Corporation
- Jo Kneebone, Manager Risks to the Share Water Resources, Murray Darling Basin Commission
- Noreen Krusel, Manager Community Infrastructure, Country Fire Authority
- Peter Lawler, Natural Disaster Policy, Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Frank Lawless, Melbourne Water
- Bob Leicester, CSIRO, Research Program Leader, Bushfire CRC
- Mike Leonard, Advisor Strategic Issues, Bushfire CRC
- The Hon. Jim Lloyd, MP, Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads
- Kim Lowell, Professor in Spatial Systems Modelling, CRC for Spatial Information
- Richard Lyons, Director, Office of Emergency Services, NSW Government
- Rob McAlpine, Forest Fire Protection, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Sarah McCaffrey, Research Social Scientist, USDA Forest Service
- Michael Merriman, Senior Programme Manager, Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Mira Mihajlovic, Liaison Officer, Department of Education Science and Training
- Senator Christine Milne, Australian Greens
- Li Peng Monroe, Assistant Director Emergency Management Liaison, Emergency Management Australia
- Gary Morgan, Manager Strategic Implementation, Bushfire CRC and Australasian Fire Authorities Council
- Richard Munn, SA Water
- Tony Nicholson, Senior Policy Officer, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Robin Nielsen, Manager, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Christine Owen, University of Tasmania, Research Program Leader, Bushfire CRC
- Daniel Owen, General Manager, Local Government & Natural Disasters, DOTARS
- David Prestipino, Director, Natural Disaster, Planning and Research Section, DOTARS
- David Prince, Acting Commissioner, Emergency Services Agency, ACT Emergency Services Authority
- Mile Prosser, Manager Pulp and Paper, Australian Plantation Products and Paper Industry Council



- Adrian Pyrke, Manager Fire Operations and Support, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service
- Warwick Ragg, Chief Executive, Australian Forest Growers
- Shanti Reddy, Project Leader, Remote Sensing Science and Strategy, Geoscience Australia
- Brian Richardson, General Manager, Ensis Forest Bio-security and Protection, Bushfire CRC Board Member
- Monica Richter, Head of Climate Control, Australian Conservation Foundation
- Rob Rogers, Acting Commissioner, NSW Rural Fire Service
- Michael Ross, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT Emergency Services Authority
- Brian Royal, Manager Commercial Services, Forests NSW
- John Schneider, Group Leader Risk Research, Geoscience Australia
- Nick Schofield-House, Science Manager, Land and Water Australia
- Alby Schultz, MP Member for Hume
- The Right Hon. Ian Sinclair AC, Chair, Murray Darling Basin Commission
- Ralph Smith, Manger Bushfire and Environmental Protection, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA
- Maria Taranto, Project Manager, HighFire, Bushfire CRC
- Ken Thompson, Deputy Commissioner, Capability and Support, NSW Fire Brigades
- Malcolm Thompson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, National Water Commission
- Richard Thornton, Research Director, Bushfire CRC
- Roger Underwood, Representing the Institute of Foresters of Australia
- Anna Van Dugteren, Australian Greenhouse Office
- Penny Watson, Ecologist, Hotspots Fire Project, Nature Conservation Council of NSW
- Kellie Watson, Education and Training Manager, Bushfire CRC
- Pat Westwood, Bushfire Management Project Coordinator, Nature Conservation Council NSW
- Roger Wettenhall, Emeritus Professor, University of Canberra
- Mike Williams, Manager Fire Management Branch, Department for Environment and Heritage SA
- Ian Wilson, Business Manager, Bushfire CRC
- Peta Winzar, Group Manager, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Mike Woods, Commissioner, Productivity Commission

## SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS

- Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation
- Mark Adams, University of New South Wales, Research Program Leader, Bushfire CRC
- Alan Andersen, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Research Project Leader, Bushfire CRC
- Tony Bartlett, General Manager, Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
- Neil Bibby, Chief Executive Officer, Country Fire Authority
- Naomi Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Fire Authorities Council
- Barry Carbon, Consultant
- Phil Cheney, Honorary Research Fellow CSIRO
- Murray Dudfield, National Rural Fire Officer, National Rural Fire Authority, New Zealand
- Gordon Duff, Chief Executive Officer, CRC for Forestry
- Euan Ferguson, Chief Officer, Country Fire Service South Australia
- Brian Gilligan, Consultant
- John Gledhill, Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service, Bushfire CRC Board Member
- John Handmer, Research Program Leader, Bushfire CRC
- Allan Hansard, Chief Executive, Tree Plantations Australia
- Lee Johnson, Commissioner, Queensland Fire & Rescue Service
- Gary Jones, Chief Executive, eWater CRC
- Peter Kanowski, Professor and Head of School, School of Resources, Environment and Society, Australian National University
- Rod Keenan, Head of School of Forest and Ecosystem Science, University of Melbourne
- Phil Koperberg, Board Member, Bushfire CRC
- Bruce Leaver, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Environment and Heritage
- Ian MacDougall, AC AFSM Vice Admiral RAN Rtd, Chairman Bushfire CRC
- Ian Mannix, Manager, Emergency Broadcasting and Community Development, ABC Local Radio
- Greg Mullins, Chief Fire Officer, NSW Fire Brigades
- The Hon. Gary Nairn, MP Special Minister of State
- Neville Nicholls, Professional Fellow, Regional Climate Group, Monash University
- Kevin O'Loughlin, Chief Executive Officer, Bushfire CRC
- Robyn Owens, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training), University of Western Australia, Bushfire CRC Board Member
- John Riddiford, Chief Executive Officer, North East Catchment Management Authority, Victoria
- The Hon. Philip Ruddock, MP Attorney-General
- Rick Sneeuwjaagt, Manager, Fire Management Services, Dept of Environment & Conservation, WA
- Prof Will Steffen, Pro-Vice Chancellor Research, Australian National University
- Rob Vertessy, Chief, CSIRO Land and Water
- Ewan Waller, Chief Officer, Fire and Emergency Management, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria
- Jerry Williams, Senior Advisor, The Brookings Institution, USA

## ABOUT THE BUSHFIRE CRC

The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre is a partnership between 30 organisations including fire and land management agencies, universities, Australian Federal Government agencies and New Zealand fire and forest agencies. It was established in 2003 under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres program and is funded for a seven year period.

Today the Bushfire CRC is looking at a broad range of topics including fire behaviour and suppression, fire as part of the natural landscape, fire weather, community self-sufficiency, firefighter safety and building protection.

Bushfire CRC researchers are working within communities from Victoria's western district to far North Queensland, the alpine regions of New South Wales and Victoria, to the Tasmanian forest regions, South Australia's Eyre Peninsula and the tropical savannas of the north.

The formation of the Bushfire CRC was a major step by the fire and land management agencies and research partners in Australia and New Zealand. It was a move towards a better understanding of the complex social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires. The

combination of partner resources and the Australian Government's grant through the Bushfire CRC program is a substantial investment in national bushfire research.

Already, this investment is having an impact. New decision support tools are being used in areas such as smoke management, aerial suppression, prescribed burning and fire weather forecasting. Important research has started on the role of fire in the high country. In tandem with researchers, fire and land agencies are gaining an insight into the way people face the bushfire threat.

The Bushfire CRC also has a role in promoting discussion and policy support for big picture issues around bushfire management. It also has a responsibility to educate the general community as well as the next generation of fire researchers through training, knowledge networking, technology transfer, short courses, workshops and public forums.

The Bushfire CRC is very pleased to have the support of its partners and to work closely with the industry's peak body, the Australian Fire Authorities Council.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about the Bushfire CRC please let us know. The Bushfire CRC has produced a range of publications and resources for its members and for the general public. Conferences, workshops and community events are also held regularly throughout the year.

Find out more about the Bushfire CRC at [www.bushfirecrc.com](http://www.bushfirecrc.com)  
Or contact us at [bushfireforum@bushfirecrc.com](mailto:bushfireforum@bushfirecrc.com)  
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