

FIRE UPDATE

BUSHFIRE CRC NEWSLETTER JUNE 2013

SCIENCE ADDS VALUE TO DANGER RATINGS

Three interim reports into a new science-based fire danger rating system are now available on the [Bushfire CRC website](#). Under development by the Bushfire CRC, in partnership with the Attorney-General's Department and all states and territories, the proposed new fire danger rating system will incorporate topography, fuel availability and fire location into the fire danger system.

The reports reflect the need for the proposed new system to indicate the potential for damage to a community in terms of the probability of both lives and property loss, and further refine the role of weather forecasts. The reports have been completed by Bushfire CRC partners CSIRO, the University of Wollongong and the Bureau of Meteorology.

Deputy CEO and Research Director Dr Richard Thornton said the reports represent a major advancement in fire weather science in Australia.

"Increasing our understanding of large bushfires and the weather that contributes to them will allow for a substantial advancement in the ability to help communities understand their level of fire risk and to communicate that lives and property could be lost," he said. "It will also highlight which weather indicators are the best predictors of high fire risk days across the country."

The summary reports taking in Australia's bushfire fatalities, the probability of property loss and fire danger indicators are now available on the [Bushfire CRC website](#) by searching 'fire danger rating review'.

RESEARCH UPDATES AT FORUM

The biannual Bushfire CRC Research Advisory Forum was hosted by the Western Australia Department of Conservation and Environment (DEC) in late May at its new premises in Perth. The forum featured research updates from around half the current research program over two days.

The Bushfire CRC holds the forum every six months to review the progress of ongoing projects. Researchers and lead end users were given the opportunity to present an update of their activities and invited discussion from across the members of the Bushfire CRC. The forum provides an invaluable opportunity to get broad feedback from all stakeholders to support the research. Proceedings from the forum are on the [Bushfire CRC website](#).



▲ Dr Lachie McCaw from DEC launches the Research Advisory Forum.

CEO'S BLOG GARY MORGAN



'Social benefit' was the buzz phrase out of the 2008 review of the national Cooperative Research Centres program. Finally, Public Good CRCs were acknowledged for their long struggle for attention and ongoing support in a funding program renowned for supporting technological breakthroughs in the manufacturing, mining, medical and agriculture sectors.

Recent events indicate that scientific impact for social benefit is being recognised. The Australian Government has now re-funded the three major Public Good CRCs that were scheduled to finish this year. At the start of the year, \$47 million was allocated to a new Bushfires and Natural Hazards CRC for an eight-year research program. And in recent weeks, the CRC for Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems and the CRC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health each received \$25 million for five years funding to continue their important work.

Last month at the annual Cooperative Research Centres Association annual conference in Melbourne, three Bushfire CRC projects were singled out amongst the finest in the country.

PhD student Mika Peace was one of six finalists in the Showcasing Early Career Researchers award. Mika, from the Bureau of Meteorology, gave a five-



minute presentation via Skype (pictured above) from the Fire Weather Workshop in Busselton WA, on her research into the interactions between fire and the atmosphere. Although she didn't win, there were 51 entrants in this category so it was a great feat for Mika to get this far.

Two Bushfire CRC projects were short listed as finalists in the Excellence in Innovation Awards: the Community Safety research conducted through Professor John Handmer at RMIT University, and the PHOENIX bushfire modelling research under Dr Kevin Tolhurst at the University of Melbourne.

Again, we didn't win but our short listing was a major breakthrough for science with a community benefit.

WA WORKSHOP ON FIRE, WEATHER AND RISK

The Fire, Weather and Risk Workshop attracted almost 100 participants to Busselton, Western Australia at the end of May.

Held with the support of the Bushfire CRC, the Bureau of Meteorology, WA's Department of Environment and Conservation and Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the workshop brought weather, fire modelling and risk assessment researchers together with forecasters and fire management officers to discuss a wide range of issues, with an

emphasis on the transfer of the research to operations.

The participants also viewed the area that was significantly burnt in an escaped prescribed fire around Margaret River in 2011, and discussed the unique fire weather issues in the area, and the recovery of both the vegetation and the community. Two years ago this workshop was held in conjunction with the Bushfire CRC and AFAC annual conference in Sydney. Proceedings from the Busselton workshop will soon be on the Bushfire CRC website.



▲ Australia's leading experts in fire weather, modelling and risk assessment visited the site of the escaped planned burn near Margaret River (2011).

IN BRIEF

FIRE BEHAVIOUR SCIENCE

The current state of knowledge of fire behaviour in Australia for the operational practitioner will be presented at a symposium on 14-16 October.

Hosted by CSIRO Ecosystems Sciences at the CSIRO Discovery Centre in Canberra and supported by the Bushfire CRC, the symposium will present the latest findings of Bushfire CRC research in this area, as well as other fire behaviour research. The forum is ideal for not just fire scientists, but fire management staff in both fire and land management agencies.

US VISIT

The Bushfire CRC, along with Victoria's emergency services agencies, met with Bob Jensen, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the United States Department of Homeland Security, who is visiting Australia as a Fulbright scholar.

The US Consulate General, Mary Burce Warlick, hosted a reception to welcome Jensen to Australia and the Bushfire CRC was invited to attend. Next day, he met with management at the Bushfire CRC offices to discuss opportunities for strategic alliances and research collaboration.

RESEARCH UTILISATION BLOG **NOREEN KRUSEL**



As a part of the Bushfire CRC's learning about end user/researcher collaboration, I have commissioned some research to explore the role of the Lead End User. This review isn't an evaluation or assessment of performance – it's exploratory and the research aims to tease out and document the experience of lead end users

with the Bushfire CRC program. Participation is optional, but I encourage all lead end users to participate as your opinions are valued. Please [contact me](#) for further information.

RESEARCH BLOG **LYNDSEY WRIGHT**



Research outputs and research communications come in many formats, aimed at many different audiences. In [August last year](#) I wrote that the best outputs from the Bushfire CRC will both challenge and provoke thinking. This is true, no matter the format.

Some researchers think only fellow researchers read journals. This is not the case. On many occasions I have received comments from end users on the value they place on academic publications. In part, this is because they are peer reviewed and hence given a high degree of credibility. Also, in journal papers research outcomes can be presented in more detail together with the underlying theory or methodology, which users value.

I encourage all researchers to continue to challenge their audience, and for end users to continue to embrace the research outputs of the Bushfire CRC, whatever their format.

COMMUNICATIONS BLOG **DAVID BRUCE**



Meeting visiting US public affairs Fulbright Scholar Bob Jensen recently (see above), I found most interesting his insights into the role of communications during times of heightened alert. He

explained why public affairs officers were critical to the core business of emergency service agencies, and not an afterthought or add-on.

"We save lives too," he told participants at the Emergency Media and Public Affairs conference in Brisbane. He said we are part of operations too. If we warn enough people, that's fewer people to rescue. The Commissioner of the NSW SES, Murray Kear, went one step further at the conference by stating that information is now more important than response for agencies. Recent examples were cited in support of this where attempting to subdue the forces of the natural hazard (bushfire, flood, cyclone) were secondary to warning and assisting people in its path.

At the Bushfire CRC communication is also a whole of organisation priority, not just for us communicators: whether it is through this newsletter, other publications, our website, social media interaction, email lists, and our conferences and workshops. If we don't get the new learnings from research out and about amongst our partners then we are not helping them save lives.