

# FIRE UPDATE

BUSHFIRE CRC NEWSLETTER DECEMBER/JANUARY 2013-14



Dr Jim McLennan interviewing residents near Coonabarabran.

Photo: NSW RFS

## NSW COMMUNITY SAFETY RESEARCH RELEASED

The report and *Fire Note* of a Bushfire CRC task force following the January 2013 bushfires in New South Wales has been released.

Following fires at Coonabarabran, Yass and the Shoalhaven, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service engaged the Bushfire CRC to conduct community-based research.

Bushfire CRC researchers conducted 238 interviews around the areas impacted by the fires. The full report, as well as the *Fire*

*Note*, are available on the [Bushfire CRC website](#).

After huge property losses during the October bushfires, the NSW RFS has again commissioned the Bushfire CRC, in partnership with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, to conduct research focusing on people's preparation, decision making and actions during the fires near Port Stephens, the Blue Mountains and the Southern Highlands. Data collection was undertaken in early December, with the report due in 2014.

## RESEARCH ON SHOW

The strength and diversity of the Bushfire CRC research and education program was on display at a recent research showcase in Melbourne. The showcase followed the Bushfire CRC AGM and included presentations from senior researchers and agency representatives on the value of Bushfire CRC research for the sector.

Three students of the PhD program spoke about the progress of their studies and how it linked in with the ongoing work of fire and land management agencies. Dr Briony Towers, who is now involved in the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC through RMIT University, studied bushfire preparedness messages for children. Much of her work has been adopted by agencies for their community education programs for fire and other natural hazards. Grace



Vincent, Deakin University, presented her research into firefighter fatigue. David Barton (above), RMIT, talked about the differences between resilience and recovery from his studies of the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Marysville.

Three more students were profiled in short informative videos. See more about the current work of Brenda Mackie, and the completed work of Rowena Morris and Jaymie Norris, both of whom are now employed by CRC partner agencies:

[www.bushfirecrc.com/research/event/2013-agm](http://www.bushfirecrc.com/research/event/2013-agm)

## CEO'S BLOG GARY MORGAN



What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago I wrote that Australia and New Zealand's national fire research funding was due to expire in mid 2013, with no new research funding guaranteed. But in early 2013 the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

was announced. On 10 December, it was officially launched by the Federal Minister for Justice, the Hon Michael Keenan MP, right in front of Parliament House in Canberra and flanked by a water bombing helicopter and fire and SES vehicles. It was fantastic to attend and represent the Bushfire CRC.

The AGM was held in late November, and arrangements are well underway to establish a Trust to ensure all Bushfire CRC members get the most out of their investment in a decade of fire science. Immediately after the AGM, we held a special event to emphasise to Bushfire CRC partners the advances in knowledge that Bushfire CRC research has achieved since Black Saturday across all scientific disciplines. The half day event also highlighted the achievements of the Bushfire CRC PhD student program to all partners, with past and current students speaking. Three short videos profiled the work of a further three students. Watch the videos on the [Bushfire CRC website](#).

It has been a very successful year, no matter how you measure it. We held our biggest conference ever with AFAC in Melbourne in September; outputs from the three year research extension are coming in; successful and important community research task forces were undertaken after major fires in Tasmania and NSW – with more research underway in NSW following the October fires; our first ebook was launched to help parents talk about bushfire safety with their kids; and throughout we connected with Bushfire CRC people across Australia and New Zealand through meetings, phone calls and social media. All of this will continue through the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

On behalf of the Board and the staff at your Bushfire CRC, thank you to all of you in the wider Bushfire CRC community for your superb efforts over the past year. A special thank you must go to the researchers, lead end users and agency supporters for their strong collaboration. The Bushfire CRC is pleased to be part of such a progressive industry.

My very best wishes to you and your family for a happy Christmas and a safe and successful New Year.



The Hon Michael Keenan, Minister for Justice, launched the new CRC in front of Parliament House.

## NEW CRC LAUNCHED

The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC was officially launched on the lawns in front of Parliament House in Canberra by the federal Minister for Justice, the Hon Michael Keenan, on 10 December. The new CRC will draw together all of Australia's fire and emergency service authorities with the nation's leading experts across a range of scientific fields to explore the causes, consequences and mitigation of natural disasters.

The Chairman of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Dr Laurie Hammond, said the CRC will build on 10 years of high quality scientific research at the Bushfire

CRC and will expand the research effort into other natural hazards, including flood, earthquake, cyclone and tsunamis.

"This investment in research is linked to the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and will improve approaches to mitigation, operational responses and community resilience to natural hazards," said Dr Hammond.

Importantly, most of the new research will not be hazard specific but cross-disciplinary, drawing on the expertise of scientists across a range of fields on issues common to all hazards.

## SEMINAR SERIES UNDER WAY

Bringing Australia's leading fire research to emergency service personnel in Australia and New Zealand, the Bushfire CRC's seminar series will focus on webinars and seminars scheduled through to June 2014.

Dr Michael Eburn from ANU kicked off the series with a webinar on 12 December covering law and policy for emergency services, while Dr Jim McLennan discussed community safety and decision making research on 16 December. Replay both at the [Bushfire CRC website](http://www.bushfirecrc.com).

More events have been scheduled in the New Year, based on feedback from our partners. Visit the [Speakers Bureau](#) section on the website to register your interest for an expert researcher to speak to your organisation.

### IN BRIEF

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

The call for abstracts for the 2014 Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and AFAC conference is now open, with abstracts to be submitted online by 14 February 2014. The theme of the conference, to be held in Wellington, NZ from 2-5 September, is 'After Disaster Strikes, Learning from Adversity'. For more information visit [www.afac.com.au](http://www.afac.com.au)

#### SHOWING OFF TO MPs

Both the Bushfire CRC and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC joined 32 other CRCs on display to federal MPs at the CRC Association showcase at Parliament House in Canberra on 9 December. Interest was high in both the current research and the future program. The showcase was launched by the Minister for Industry, the Hon Ian Macfarlane.

#### RESEARCHERS ENGAGED



Industry representatives are frequently keen to hear about the latest Bushfire CRC research through AFAC Groups. Recently the Bushfire CRC sponsored a research utilisation workshop with the Work Health Safety and Technical Group, who heard about firefighter health and safety studies from project leader Dr Brad Aisbett and PhD student Cara Lord from Deakin University. The Group also hosted project leader Dr Fabienne Riesen (CSIRO), who presented the latest air toxins science, and associate student Darryl Dixon (pictured above, Charles Sturt University), who is investigating exposure to asbestos.

### STUDENT BLOG [LYNDESEY WRIGHT](#)



As highlighted on the front page, Bushfire CRC researchers are back in field conducting community-based research in New South Wales following the October bushfires. This important research, undertaken at the request of the NSW Rural Fire Service in the Port Stephens, Blue Mountains and the Southern Highlands areas, will add to the data

collected earlier this year in other areas of NSW, as well as Tasmania, along with data collected from similar work following Black Saturday in 2009, the Perth Hills and Lake Clifton fires (WA, 2011).

Two things really strike me about the work that we have been doing following recent fire events. The first is the considerable benefit of having a team made up of both researchers and agency personnel. The researchers bring to the partnership their skills, their expertise and their independence; the agency personnel bring their knowledge, an understanding of the fire service processes and activities, and most importantly their community connection, which provides response rates that most researchers can only dream of.

The second is the enormously valuable data set that is being built up over time, creating a long term resource for researchers and agencies seeking to understand community preparedness and response to fires in a range of different environments and circumstances. It is my fervent desire that this important data set continues to be built upon and interrogated into the future as there is much rich information that we have not yet fully explored.