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## **Black Friday anniversary renews importance of ongoing bushfire research**

Australia's peak fire management and research organizations are calling for ongoing support for scientific research to deal with the bushfire threat to our communities.

Tomorrow marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Black Friday, Victoria's highest fatality bushfire events. From December 1938 to January 1939, fires burnt around two million hectares, causing 71 fatalities and destroying more than 650 buildings. The fire severity peaked on Friday January 13 - Black Friday.

The anniversary is a timely reminder of our capacity as a society to deal with fire.

Black Friday and later events such as Ash Wednesday in 1983, the alpine fires of 2003 and 2006/7, and the Eyre Peninsula fires of 2005, reinforced the critical needs that were identified in 1939.

Better resourcing, technology, community understanding, communications, acceptance of fire as a natural occurrence and the sharing of risk between property owners and fire agencies are just some of the lessons still being learnt through experience and rigorous scientific research.

Today, Australia's Chief Fire Officers now believe that our current knowledge and practices on bushfire management will not meet the expected needs of the community in coming decades.

Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) CEO Gary Morgan said scientific research into bushfires must continue in order to improve our understanding of the multiple impacts of bushfires.

"Climate change and drought are altering the nature, ferocity and duration of bushfires and an ageing and declining volunteer population are challenging the way fire agencies are going to be able to manage these events."

"These issues are being further compounded by the expanding rural-urban fringe and the desire for people to retire to these semi-rural or rural areas. These demographic changes mean there will be increasing numbers of people living in these higher risk zones that are less capable of dealing with the fire risk."

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), the Bushfire CRC and each individual Australian fire agency, are working to establish a new Cooperative Research Centre for fire in Australia. The Bushfire CRC was funded for a seven year term by the Australian Government, which ends in 2010.



“Australians are very innovative at addressing challenges. Through research we have provided Australians with ways to improve community safety. However, just as the Bushfire CRC has helped fire agencies today, new research is vital to provide innovative ways to tackle bushfires in the future,” Mr Morgan said.

Naomi Brown, AFAC CEO, believes the Australia is in for some very challenging times ahead.

“When we consider recent events it is not hard to imagine a repeat of Black Friday. The Victoria fires of 2006 were the longest campaign fires in recorded history. And the Canberra fires of 2003 showed the devastation that can be caused by this type of run away bushfire entering urban zones,” said Naomi.

Ms Brown said that the Bushfire CRC was a valuable resource for research to support the work of fire agencies but much more needed to be learnt to deal with future challenges.

“There is still so much we need to know about how the changing Australia is facing is going to affect emergency service operations. That is why we are working to establish a new Cooperative Research Centre to tackle the key challenges the industry is facing.” she said.

**Gary Morgan and Naomi Brown are available for interview.**

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