



MEDIA RELEASE

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Bushfire Research on the Snowy Plains

Cooma residents last night (Thursday 12 April) heard about a range of bushfire research projects underway in the region.

The NSW Rural Fire Service hosted the session for the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre at the Cooma Fire Control Centre.

Many of the Bushfire CRC researchers have active projects across the Cooma-Monaro region including the High Fire project, which is looking at the interaction between fire and grazing in alpine areas of Australia.

The High Fire project has several research sites on the Snowy Plains as well as sites in the Kiewa Valley in Victoria and in the Cotter Catchment in the ACT. Some of the sites were set alight recently as part of the project.

The Federal Member for Eden-Monaro, the Hon Gary Nairn, welcomed the researchers at the Cooma forum and said much of the Bushfire CRC work was taking up the recommendations of his inquiry into the 2003 alpine bushfires.

"As part of the inquiry I was keen to see good hard practical work done in this area so we could cut out a lot of the emotional argument and deal with facts and science," Mr Nairn said.

"The CRC has been doing some great work so far but it is going to take a few years to really have the full evidence because every year is a different weather cycle. You can't make definitive decisions based on just one or two seasons."

Mr Nairn said the High Fire project was now starting to get interesting results. "But we do have to keep it going and I will be doing all I can to help ensure that that does occur as an ongoing project."

The chief executive officer of the Bushfire CRC, Mr Kevin O'Loughlin, said the High Fire project was a good example of research work done in partnership with local communities.

"The support we are getting on the Snowy Plains from the local landowners, the Rural Fire Service and the National Parks and Wildlife Service is invaluable and is helping to shape this important work," he said.

"I think the work being done here is quite unique. There was research in the past on the effects of grazing and separate research on prescribed burning but not on the two things combined and that is what is happening today on the Snowy Plains."

Background to Snowy Plains research

- The Bushfire CRC's HighFire Project is a federally funded national project to study the influences on bushfire fuels in Australia's high country.
- The research work at Snowy Plains was established in 2005 to address recommendations 16-19 of the "Nation Charred" report from the House of Representatives Inquiry into the 2003 Canberra and alpine fires, chaired by Gary Nairn.
- The project is studying the impacts of both cattle grazing and prescribed burning on vegetation structure, species composition and fuel accumulation in snow gum woodlands and sub-alpine grasslands in NSW, the ACT and Victoria.



M E D I A R E L E A S E

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- The Bushfire CRC HighFire team is now more than two years into their project and they are starting to see the scientific outcomes of their research effort.

Some early results

- The project is improving our understanding of fire behaviour in high country environments and in so doing improving the safety of people and property in high country landscape. The result will be a better capacity to manage bushfire risk in high country terrain.
- Indicative research results on high country fuels and ecosystems has found that the fast growing re-growth of alpine ash after the 2003 fires is already taking more water than the mature trees they replaced. This is telling us that the likely result is there will be less water available for stream-flow from mountain catchments burnt in 2003 and now in 2006/07.
- The research team is developing systems and technologies that will quantify the effects of climate on greenhouse gas (carbon flux) emissions from fires. In particular the team has designed and built a mobile 'greenhouse laboratory. This laboratory is capable of continuous measurement of greenhouse gas (CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O) emissions 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This unit is the first of its type to operate in the Australian high country.

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