

MEDIA RELEASE

Bushfire research to take on future challenges

8 NOVEMBER 2007

Australia and New Zealand's leading fire and land managers, research bodies and industry partners are meeting in Melbourne today to determine the future needs of fire research in Australia and New Zealand.

The Bushfire CRC and the peak industry body, the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC), have begun to focus on the next Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) after the current seven-year term expires in 2010. The two organisations will lead a consortium bidding for new CRC funding to support the fire industry into the next decade.

In announcing its continued support for the Bushfire CRC, AFAC noted that the major influences on bushfire management – climate change, drought, shifting populations, an ageing workforce, a shrinking volunteer base, innovative technology and health and safety concerns – are key national priorities.

“The establishment of the Bushfire CRC was a major step forward in combining a broad range of research strengths to better understand the role of fire in our land,” said AFAC President and Chief Fire Officer of the South Australia Country Fire Service Mr Euan Ferguson.

“But the fire industry recognises that we are only at the beginning. As people continue to shift into bushfire zones, as volunteer firefighters become harder to recruit, and as drought and climate change make bushfire seasons longer and more severe, the need for a continued and coordinated research program has become even more essential,” said Mr Ferguson.

The Bushfire CRC was established in 2003 under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centre program to better understand the complex social, economic and environmental aspects of bushfires.

It has more than 30 partners including fire and land management agencies across Australia and New Zealand, universities, and government agencies including the CSIRO, Emergency Management Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.

Under the guidelines of the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres program, rebidding CRCs are required to formulate a fresh research agenda that builds upon the achievements of the first term and includes new industry and research partners.

Bushfire CRC Chairman Mr Len Foster said the industry was now starting to see the early results of this national research effort and collaboration. “Combined with a strong education and a knowledge transfer program, the Bushfire CRC is delivering practical benefits to the fire and land management industry and the wider economy and society.

“We are optimistic our rebid will succeed but we understand the size of the challenge. With up to 22 CRCs eligible for a rebid and an unknown number of new CRC prospects, some research programs will come to an end unless there is a substantial increase in the CRC program budget.”

“ It is vital we secure further research in this field as Australia is facing numerous environmental challenges heading into the future. The use of water, the health of our biodiversity, sustainable urban planning and carbon offsets are all big issues for this country and they are all issues affected by fire. Before we can start to plan for the long term management of these issues we must know more about the role fire will play in all of them.”

A rebid working group, led by AFAC CEO Naomi Brown and Bushfire CRC Acting CEO Gary Morgan, is now preparing to submit a bid to the Department of Education, Science and Training in early 2008. The successful bidders are announced at the end of 2008.

For further information contact.

David Bruce, Communications Manager, Bushfire CRC, 03 9412 9606 or 0414 223 281.

Jay Gleeson, AFAC Communications Coordinator on (03) 9419 2388 or 0405 487 319.