



State Budget 2009

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FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PREMIER
AND THE OFFICE OF THE TREASURER

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REBUILDING AND RECOVERING FROM THE BUSHFIRES

Victoria's firefighting resources have received a boost in the 2009 State Budget to prepare the State for future bushfire seasons, including an upgrade in emergency services communication equipment.

The Premier, John Brumby, said the Victorian Government had committed to helping the State to recover from the worst bushfires in Australia's history which claimed 173 lives, 2029 homes and 57 businesses in February this year.

"The 2009 State Budget makes the right investments to keep Victorian families safe and rebuild after the bushfires," Mr Brumby said.

"The Black Saturday bushfires and bushfires earlier in the summer were the biggest tragedy in Australia's history, but in the worst of times for our state, we saw the very best of human nature.

"I am grateful to the many people across Victoria and the world who gave generously to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

"I am grateful to the many emergency services workers, volunteers and other Victorians who responded so magnificently to help those in need following this enormous tragedy.

"I thank the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who contributed funding and substantial resources towards our rebuilding effort.

"I am also grateful to the other states and countries for providing extraordinary support during the fires."

Mr Brumby said the 2009 State Budget would provide:

- \$56.2 million to the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) to improve its capacity to manage calls and dispatch units with the Country Fire Authority, Ambulance Victoria and the State Emergency Service;
- \$57.1 million to purchase new radios and upgrade radio and pager networks used by SES and CFA, building on \$450 million investment in communications since 2000;
- \$33.2 million to upgrade Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) pagers and radios;
- \$21.1 million to replace 87 CFA appliances over the next year;
- \$10.3 million to replace 15 heavy rescue vehicles, 7 four wheel drive vehicles, 9 rescue boats and 11 road crash rescue kits at VICSES units across Victoria; and
- \$10.3 million for 42 ultra light tankers.

The Victorian Government will also upgrade the Alfred Hospital's Burns Unit, with \$1.1 million to create single bedrooms for each patient containing their own bathroom in order to avoid cross contamination.

He also said the Victorian Government's fire agencies would work with local communities to implement a five-year \$52.7 million fuel reduction burning program to reduce the risk of bushfires across Victoria.

Mr Lenders said while no-one could put a price on the devastation felt by Victorians following the worst bushfires in Australia's history, the 2009 State Budget reflected the financial commitment from the Brumby Labor Government to respond to the fires and rebuild the State afterwards.

"The Brumby Labor Government, in partnership with Rudd Federal Government, is working to help Victorian families and rebuild the State after the bushfires which devastated our state this summer," Mr Lenders said.

"I said at the time we should provide every resource necessary to extinguish the fires, help fire-affected communities recover and families rebuild their lives and this Budget has delivered on that commitment."

The 2009 State Budget brings to book the almost \$1 billion cost of fighting the recent bushfires, responding to the emergency and rebuilding the State afterwards, including:

- \$344 million for fire fighting undertaken by DSE, MFB, CFA and firefighters from interstate and overseas;
- \$24 million for additional police resources, including Victoria Police and police from interstate;
- \$70 million over two years for individual case managers to work with Victorians affected by the bushfires;
- \$36 million for compassionate assistance, such as temporary housing, funeral expenses, emergency medical services, counselling services, and emergency hardship grants;
- \$51 million for a Business Assistance Package to help small businesses and primary producers, including business assistance grants, low-interest loans and business restart mentors;
- \$10 million for a tourism package to encourage tourists to visit regions affected by the bushfires;
- \$46 million to help clean up bushfire affected areas to allow the rebuilding effort to start;
- \$21 million to establish the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority;
- \$15 million to restore roads and public transport services;
- \$10 million for the Community Recovery Fund, including grants to sports clubs, community events and community facilities;
- \$3.9 million to recruit and recognise the efforts of emergency services volunteers;
- \$40 million over two years to establish an independent Royal Commission into the bushfires;
- \$26 million for a range of other bushfire-related costs, including animal welfare and stock management; and
- The waiving of stamp duty, land tax and land title fees and VicRoads licences for those directly affected by the bushfires.

Mr Lenders said every Victorian had been touched by the generosity of fellow Victorians and people across the globe who had donated more than \$330 million for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

"I thank every Victorian who contributed so generously to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund which has been able to provide extra assistance to bushfire affected communities on top of the almost \$1 billion package outlined in the 2009 State Budget," Mr Lenders said.