

7a

FROM THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Tuesday, 5 May, 2009

BUSHFIRE THREAT REDUCTION THE CENTREPIECE OF A \$116.2 MILLION PARKS AND BIODIVERSITY BOOST

The Brumby Labor Government's fire agencies will work with communities to implement a five year **\$52.7 million** fuel reduction burning program to reduce the risk of bushfires across Victoria, as part of a **\$116.2 million** package for parks and biodiversity.

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings, said the program of fuel reduction burning was a first for Victoria and would ensure that fire agencies maximised the amount of fuel reduction burning carried out in safe climactic conditions.

"The Brumby Labor Government is helping communities rebuild after this year's tragic bushfires," Mr Jennings said.

"While the Bushfires Royal Commission will examine a range of policy areas, including fuel reduction burning, this fuel reduction burning package will provide certainty for communities living with the threat of bushfires."

Mr Jennings said the Brumby Labor Government committed \$10 million to commence the implementation of Victoria's Bushfire Strategy *Living with Fire* in 2008-09.

The 2009 State Budget package also includes **\$10 million** to upgrade infrastructure at Point Nepean when an additional 90 hectares of land is incorporated into the Point Nepean National Park. This project will secure up to 32 jobs in construction. An additional **\$4 million** over four years is provided for the ongoing management and operation of the park.

"The Brumby Labor Government's State Budget commitment of \$10 million to the expansion of the Point Nepean National Park will be used to protect heritage sites, refurbish some existing buildings, upgrade roads and car parks," Mr Jennings said.

"Through this investment the Brumby Labor Government is delivering on its commitment to work with the Commonwealth as it transfers management of the 90 hectare site to Parks Victoria.

"This funding is on top of the \$15.5 million already committed by the Rudd Federal Government for improvements to infrastructure, additional remediation of land and buildings and priority conservation works at the former Quarantine Station.

"The 2009 State Budget also delivers on the Brumby Labor Government's **\$38.5 million** commitment to establish four new National Parks on the Murray River to protect Victoria's iconic River Red Gums.

"This funding will be used to establish the new parks as well as expanding existing ones and providing comprehensive support to forestry workers and communities.

"This funding will also be used to create a range of employment opportunities in local communities, including an additional 30 Parks Victoria rangers and 10 workers to construct fencing and carry out ecological thinning of trees.

Media contact: Lyall Johnson 9651 5799 / 0400 422 142

www.premier.vic.gov.au www.budget.vic.gov.au

“Along with the creation of other protected areas and the expansion of existing National Parks, 160,000 hectares will now be protected in conservation reserves along Victoria’s Murray, Goulburn and Ovens Rivers corridor.

“This package builds on the Brumby Government’s program to improve and expand Victoria’s parks and reserve system.

“We have already delivered the new Otways and Coboboonee National Parks, we are continuing the work to establish four new national parks on the Murray River and proceeding with the commitment to protect 41,000 hectares of old growth forest in East Gippsland.”

The 2009 State Budget also includes **\$4 million** for Parks Victoria to further improve the facilities around Port Phillip Bay and Western Port, including upgrades to jetties and boat launching facilities, as well as development of precinct plans for many important harbours to make water based activities, including boating and fishing, more accessible.

A further **\$2 million** over four years has been allocated to maintain and improve the Yarra Bend Park. The funding will assist maintenance and improvements to the park’s existing assets and conservation areas, as well as developing a long-term strategy plan for the park.

“The role of Yarra Bend Park has changed over the years and it is a major metropolitan park with important heritage buildings and conservation areas, providing an important link in the chain of parks and open areas along the Yarra River,” Mr Jennings said.

Mr Jennings said the 2009 State Budget also committed **\$1 million** for visitor facilities and trails at the Frankston Reservoir Park which will be opened to the public once governance arrangements and hydrological works are completed.

Another **\$1 million** has been allocated to develop a strategic plan for the Dingley Green wedge and create new sections of cycling and walking trails to link existing parks, in line with the chain of parks concept, creating a linked park network for the sandbelt region of Melbourne.

Priority works at six outer urban parks will be undertaken under a **\$2 million** package to boost local recreation opportunities.

“The State Budget also provides **\$950,000** over three years to help with wildlife care and rehabilitation,” Mr Jennings said.

“The funding extends the successful pilot program to assist accredited wildlife carers and shelters in their vital work. This program, initiated by our Government, provides grants of up to \$5000 to volunteer carers to upgrade facilities.

“Wildlife shelters have been placed under huge pressure as a result of Victoria’s devastating bushfires and this grants program will enable them to repair and expand their facilities as an important part of our recovery following the fires.”