

COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO A BUSHFIRE.
DISTRICT COUNCIL OF LOWER EYRE PENINSULA

Cr Brian Treloar, Chairperson

On Monday 10th January 2005 a fire burnt 2,000 hectares in the Wangary area of Lower Eyre Peninsula. Next day, (Tuesday) the fire broke from its containment lines and became a monster of destruction for the next ten hours.

It was recorded as the hottest, fastest moving, most devastating fire ever experienced on Lower Eyre Peninsula. Normally, fire bans are imposed at 50 G F D I (Grassland Fire Danger Index). This one reached 345 G F D I by 12 noon. **It was one hell of a day.**

The statistics of that day have been recorded elsewhere, but the impact of 80,000 hectares burnt (the area similar from Christies Beach to Gawler, and from the sea to the foothills) and the 9 lives lost will be forever imprinted in our minds.

Council men and machines were involved from Day 1, January 10th and from there onward for weeks to come. The State Government immediately gave us \$150,000. It was used to clear roadsides of fallen and damaged trees, pits were dug for the disposal of some 47,000 dead stock and Edillilie Dump was opened 7 days a week for weeks on end to receive and sort fire damaged materials.

Employees were given a crash course in Asbestos handling and Offenders came later from Pt Augusta to help clear the roadsides. Minister Conlon said "If it needs doing, do it"

Soil erosion was an on going problem with graders in demand to clear drift from the roads on a regular basis.

We lost water, power, phone lines and the fire literally cooked several kilometers of bitumen roads.

135 properties were "cleaned up" by our Council workforce. This has had an impact on these men and their families. The Office Staff were also under considerable pressure and it's not finished yet.

The first \$150,000 was soon used and on request, the Minister provided a further \$150,000 (quote Minister Conlon "But there is NO more to come")

Council has waived application fees for fire replacement buildings, and outstanding rate installments can be deferred without penalty until the end of December 2005.

All fire affected properties have had their valuations reduced for this financial year.

An extra \$100,000 has been spent on the Recovery Process further restricting our Works Program.

ACTIONS REQUIRED FROM LESSONS LEARNT.

- 1 Closer communication and working relationship between Council and the C F S.
- 2 A need for the same Radio Communication system to be in the Council Office and in the Work Supervisor's vehicle. Hand held and portable radios are NOT satisfactory in bushfire situations.
- 3 Bushfire Prevention Management plans need to be SERIOUSLY and COMPREHENSIVELY updated and reviewed annually.
- 4 As Lower Eyre Peninsula has now been declared a serious bushfire risk area, we need a full time Prevention Officer between Lower Eyre Peninsula, Tumby Bay and Port Lincoln.
- 5 In conjunction with the C F S, a more aggressive Fire Awareness Promotion campaign, emphasizing EVERYONE'S responsibility for Fire Prevention and Property Protection.
- 6 Disaster and Evacuation Plans need to be updated, with periodic exercises involving all local Emergency Services.
- 7 Better Management of roadside vegetation with strategic fuel reduction areas established. This is necessary for bushfire control and human safety.

THANKS must go to all Councils and Volunteers who donated staff, money, machinery and time in assisting us to recover from the devastation of this fire.