

Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund

12 month report



February, 2010

 Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY

 Victoria
We will rebuild



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All figures used in this 12 Month Report are correct
as at 1 February, 2010, unless otherwise stated

Messages



Pat McNamara

Pat McNamara, Chair, Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund

A year ago, one of Australia's most significant disasters led to our greatest ever collective act of generosity.

Our horror as thousands of people lost family members, friends, neighbours, homes, pets, possessions and community infrastructure to the bushfires that swept through Victoria was quickly transformed into unprecedented generosity, compassion and action.

The intent of those who donated was clear: while nothing could ever replace lives lost or memories destroyed in these fires, people wanted to give individuals and communities who had lost something or everything, a start on rebuilding their lives. Consistent with this, the intent of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009 was *'to support individuals and communities in towns and suburbs affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires'*.

As this report demonstrates, the intent has been honoured. Of the \$389 million available, including \$6 million in interest, almost all has been allocated. More than 22,000 individual payments totalling \$232 million are helping people who have spent the last year recovering and rebuilding. More than \$57 million has already been committed to community recovery initiatives.

This report is a way of thanking those who contributed so generously and to show how donations are helping people who need it most. It's about the commitment to accountability and transparency to donors, beneficiaries and the public. The Appeal Fund is also committed to showing those directly affected by the bushfires how donations intended to support them have been distributed.

The report recognises the enormous amount of work done by agencies and individuals to support those in bushfire affected areas: including Red Cross and other community organisations; the Victorian and Australian Governments; and the Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank John Landy AC CVO MBE, who was the inaugural Chair of the Appeal Fund. John's tireless efforts in the first seven months of the Fund ensured those people impacted most directly by the bushfires were given the support they required.

While the work is not yet over – there are many who still have major battles ahead as they recover physically, emotionally and financially – it is appropriate that we use this anniversary to reflect on how one of our greatest tragedies also became a powerful example of kindness and hope.





Robert Tickner

**Robert Tickner, CEO,
Australian Red Cross**

At Red Cross we know when people come together great things can happen. When more than half a million people, companies and governments felt the pain and suffering of families and communities torn apart by last year's bushfires, they did not hesitate to respond. The result was staggering; a true demonstration of the power of humanity.

We are very pleased to report back to those generous donors that their contributions have been meaningful and effective. The initial focus of the Independent Advisory Panel was delivering urgent assistance to those who had lost loved ones, were severely injured, had lost homes or had been displaced. This enabled people to farewell their loved ones with dignity, to start the process of physical and emotional recovery and to shelter safely while they dealt with the magnitude of the disaster.

Around 75 per cent of the Appeal Fund is assisting individuals and families, with most of those funds already in the hands of bushfire affected people. Understandably some families have needed more time to make decisions about their future; this is not uncommon following a disaster of this severity, so some flexibility has been very important to ensure assistance reaches people when they need it most.

Donors have also helped affected communities in their recovery, with up to 25 per cent allocated for community initiatives that are not core government responsibilities, including \$43 million for specific projects identified as priorities by Community Recovery Committees. These Committees have used their intimate knowledge and understanding of the needs of their own communities to develop Community Recovery Plans that identify specific, tailored and localised responses.

The funding allocations approved by the Panel are entirely consistent with what we told donors when the Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009 was launched on 8 February.

Red Cross is proud to work side by side with other agencies, the Department of Human Services, the wider Victorian and Australian Governments and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) to continue the long term process of recovery in the affected regions. We send our heartfelt thanks to the donors who came together to make this possible and we commit to continuing to do all we can to support individuals and communities in their own recovery.

Purpose of the Fund

The events of February 2009 changed many lives forever. People directly affected by the Victorian bushfires lost belongings, homes, communities and in the worst cases, family and friends. Those who followed the disaster and its aftermath on television, radio, the web or in newspapers felt a sense of both disbelief and compassion.

The overwhelming financial and material support from Australians and people from overseas has been well documented. The Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009, launched in partnership with the Victorian and Australian Governments, received an unprecedented \$379 million in donations, the largest single charitable appeal in Australia's history. All of these funds were immediately transferred to a Trust Account established by the Victorian Government for distribution through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. Appeal donations, together with interest and funds provided directly to the Trust Account, brought the total available to \$389 million.¹

Every cent of the money raised will go to support bushfire-affected people and communities. The Advisory Panel overseeing the Fund knows it is responsible for allocating these funds on behalf of all donors, and it does so with rigour and compassion.

This report outlines how the Appeal Fund has supported survivors of the bushfires and their communities in the 12 months since it was established, and how it will continue to provide support to individuals and communities where it is most needed.

¹ At the time of writing, \$379 million was raised by the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009, \$6 million in interest had been earned by the fund and \$4 million was contributed directly to the Trust Account, bringing its total value to \$389 million.

Expectations of donors

People from across the world gave what they could to help those impacted by the bushfires. Individuals, businesses and governments entrusted the Fund's Advisory Panel with the task of ensuring those who are most in need received the support they required.

To ensure funds were disbursed consistent with the appeal's intent and the expectations of donors, a set of principles and a list of criteria for payments were developed by the Panel.

The following principles were established to guide the Panel in its role:

- assisting people in rebuilding their lives;
- distributing the money fairly and equitably taking into account the extent of loss suffered by individuals and communities;
- providing for emergency, short-term and long-term support;
- ensuring that no-one would gain an undue financial advantage from donated money;
- ensuring there would be appropriate community involvement in decision-making where funds are used for rebuilding communities; and,
- ensuring that application and disbursement processes would be as swift and responsive as possible to ensure those most in need receive support, while also being rigorous enough to ensure funds are distributed properly.



The Panel moved to quickly adopt a set of criteria that reflected the publicly stated intent of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal. Any gift proposals approved by the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Advisory Panel must:

- be consistent with the Appeal’s intent;
- meet a priority need;
- provide assistance to individuals and communities;
- align with the expectations of affected individuals and communities;
- not unnecessarily duplicate other funding and not be a core responsibility of government;
- be effectively and efficiently delivered, while adequately managing risk;
- contribute significantly to immediate, short, medium or long-term outcomes for individuals and/or communities; and,
- align with donor expectations.

Needs of bushfire-affected individuals and communities

The paramount concern for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Advisory Panel has been to meet the needs of bushfire-affected individuals and communities. These people and towns devastated by the fires have specific circumstances and requirements that donated money can go some of the way to addressing.

The generous donations allowed the Fund to develop a broad range of gifts to ensure the fairest outcome for as many people in need as possible.

Whether it was for bereaved children and young adults who lost one or both of their parents to help them with ongoing costs into the future, psychological support for those most severely impacted, or money to help people rebuild homes, the Appeal Fund has been able to assist people and communities in many different ways pick up the pieces and start again.



Women’s Bush to Beach Retreats

Friendships were struck, hearts began healing and tears were shed as 600 bushfire-affected women came together over two weekend retreats held in Lorne in 2009.

Run by bushfire affected women, for bushfire affected women, the retreats were funded and supported by VBAF, VBRRRA and a number of private donors. They focused on encouraging women’s leadership within their own communities, and creating bonds between women so that they could support each other through the rebuilding and recovery process.

Women attending the retreat were given time to relax – being treated to yoga classes, chocolate therapy, belly dancing classes, hair, beauty and massage treatments and dancing to a live band and DJ – and were also given the chance to attend grief and bereavement assistance, discussion groups, rebuilding information sessions and financial assistance sessions.

For most, the retreat was an opportunity to reflect on what they had felt on the day of the fires and how their lives had changed since.

In amongst the tragic stories of loss and terror were some genuine rays of hope and strength: the women shared how they had become better connected with their communities as a result of the fire, humbled by the generosity of people, and more appreciative than ever before of the small things in life.

All participants embraced the experience with open arms, with one describing the retreat as “magical ... a priceless gift of hope and courage and strength.”

Governance arrangements

Structure of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund

The independent Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Advisory Panel is chaired by the Hon. Pat McNamara, former Deputy Premier of Victoria.

Other Panel members are the Hon. Robert Tickner, CEO, Australian Red Cross; Lyn Gunter, former Mayor of Murrindindi Shire; Professor Glyn Davis AC, Vice Chancellor, University of Melbourne; Christine Nixon, Chair, Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA); Kerry Murphy, Chair of the Country Fire Authority; and Pam White, ex-officio, Department of Human Services. The former Governor of Victoria, John Landy AC CVO MBE, was a member and founding Chair of the Panel until September 2009.

Supporting the Advisory Panel is the Secretariat and the Implementation Unit provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The Secretariat focuses on policy development for types of payments, liaison with the Australian Taxation Office and stakeholder relationships. The Implementation Unit is responsible for assessing applications, making payments and working with DHS case managers to assist bushfire-affected people.

Every effort has been made to ensure a smooth application process. The Advisory Panel stands by the processes built on checks and balances, which ensure the money goes to the right people and projects.

Administration of donated money

Funds donated through Red Cross are held in a separate trust account established by the Victorian Government. These funds are being administered and distributed through DHS at the direction of the Advisory Panel.

From the day the Fund was established, the Hon. John Brumby, MP, Premier of Victoria and Australian Red Cross made a commitment that no funds would be taken from the Appeal to cover administration, and any interest earned would be put straight back into the Fund.

All costs in administering the Fund have been met by the Victorian Government.

Audit process and outcomes

The administration of funds has several levels of audit accountability to ensure moneys are paid and used appropriately.

Independent auditors have been appointed by the Red Cross to audit all appeal monies received by it and transferred to the trust account.

Independent auditors have also been appointed by DHS to conduct periodic reviews of claims and assurance on the adequacy of internal control structures established in respect of the collection, disbursement and investment of the Trust's monies; over the management of sensitive and personal information; and to provide any other advisory or assurance services necessary to support probity and transparency around Fund monies.

The Victorian Auditor-General can audit the operations of the trust account as part of the annual audit of the financial statements of DHS. The Auditor-General receives reports from the Fund's independent Auditor.

Freedom of Information requests received

A small number of requests have been received under the *Freedom of Information Act* 1982 (FOI Act). Requests received by the Secretariat and DHS will be handled in accordance with principles of transparency and good governance underpinning the FOI Act. The FOI Act provides a general right of access to information held by relevant agencies, limited only by exceptions or exemptions necessary for the protection of matters such as the private affairs of persons in respect of whom information is collected and held.

Privacy

All applications to the Fund are treated in accordance with information privacy principles. Some information is collected to assess and verify eligibility for financial assistance through gift payments and to verify that information is true and correct, which may involve contact with other relevant agencies or persons.



How individual gifts were developed

The initial focus of the Advisory Panel was delivering urgent assistance to people who had lost loved ones, were severely injured, had lost homes or had been displaced. Although most of this assistance has been distributed, the Fund is still receiving and processing applications from people who have not, until now, felt ready to decide about the future or seek assistance.

Payments to individuals and families will account for at least 75 per cent of the total Fund. Extensive assistance and ongoing support is being provided to individuals and families. The Fund's emphasis has now turned to community rebuilding, with the balance of the donated money allocated to community projects.

Each gift developed by the Advisory Panel has its own specific set of eligibility criteria that both reflect the needs of the individuals and the intent of the donors, and this determines the appropriate amount of support each applicant can receive.



Initial Emergency Payments

Compassion and Bereavement

To provide immediate support to those families who lost loved ones in the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Gift amount: \$10,000 for next of kin

Announced	12 February, 2009
Allocated	\$1.74 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	175
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.77 million

Initial Home Dislocation

Funding for people whose principal place of residence was destroyed, or they were otherwise unable to return home for at least seven days.

Gift amount: \$5000 per household, plus \$2000 for each person over 18 living in an eligible household, plus \$1500 per child under 18 living in the eligible household

Announced	12 February, 2009
Allocated	\$30 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	4259
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$27.4 million

Tools of Trade

Payment to assist people who lost equipment vital to their trade and employment and were an employee working for a registered business

Gift amount: \$5000 lump sum

Announced	25 February, 2009
Allocated	\$1.5 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	380
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.5 million

Support Payments

Severe Injury

Funding for people who were hospitalised and required surgery or further hospital treatment.

Gift amount: \$7500 lump sum

Announced	12 February, 2009
Allocated	\$1.2 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	171
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.3 million

Severe Injury Transition to Home

Lump sum payment to the severely injured who had a prolonged stay in hospital. An additional payment was also made available for those who required specialist support to return home after hospital.

Gift amount: \$50,000 lump sum plus up-to \$50,000 based on need for specialised support (such as home and car modifications), for those who are eligible.

Announced	22 April, 2009
Allocated	\$2 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	35
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.7 million

Exceptional Hardship

Financial support to individuals and small business owners who faced immediate hardship, distress or misfortune as a result of their significant contribution to the bushfire effort.

Gift amount: Up to \$8000

Announced	17 March, 2009
Allocated	\$800,000
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	206
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.3 million

Women Gathering After the Fires

During 2010, groups of women throughout bushfire affected communities will come together to befriend, support and encourage one another as they recover and rebuild.

Women are encouraged to form a new group or support an existing group with a \$500 gift from the \$222,000 Women Gathering After the Fires program, funded by the Appeal Fund, which will be coordinated by the Women's Health Goulburn North East network.

This program recognises the vital importance of creating connections within communities that have been affected by tragedy.

It aims to create a friendly environment in which women can come together to share their stories, reflect on what has happened, and gather strength from one another.

Applicants for the program will attend one of seven two day workshops around Victoria, to learn new skills and get some tips on organising and running an effective group. Each group will be asked to meet at least six times, to allow plenty of time for new connections and friendships to flourish.

More detail about the program, including information on applying, is available from the Women's Health Goulburn North East website: http://www.whealth.com.au/women_gathering_after_fires.html.

Winter Needs

A \$2000 grant per home that was destroyed or damaged, to assist with the purchase of items such as blankets, clothing, fuel and the like.

Gift amount: \$2000 per household

Announced	13 May, 2009
Allocated	\$8 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	4185
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$8.3 million

Bereaved Children and Young Adults

Establishment of trusts and up-front payments for bereaved children and dependent young adults 18 to 26.

Gift amount: Financial support provided on an ongoing basis

Announced	4 June, 2009
Allocated	\$8 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	74
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$2.6 million

Compassionate Financial Support

Support for next of kin suffering exceptional financial hardship as a result of losing a loved one in the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Gift amount: Up to \$75,000

Announced	12 November, 2009
Allocated	\$10.85 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	74
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$1.8 million

Psychological Support Phase 1

To provide support for children and youth, counselling services for people who need more support and bereavement support groups to assist people who have experienced loss.

Gift amount:

- \$4.6 million package for primary and high-school aged children and young adults, including a web based component;
- \$3.5 million towards individual counselling vouchers which builds on government-funded psychological services for people who may need more support; and,
- \$700,000 towards bereavement support groups.

Announced	2 July, 2009
Allocated	\$8.8 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	320
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.05 million

Psychological Support Phase 2

To provide support for older people, families, men and women, who may be experiencing stress, trauma and isolation, to cope, rebuild support networks and reconnect with their communities.

Gift amount:

- \$1.5 million for Parent Information and Support groups to assist parents to support their children who may be experiencing a range of distressed responses such as grief, loss and trauma;
- \$1.3 million for health and wellbeing activities for older people to support better connections with their communities and each other, and to promote positive mental health and improve their physical health and well being;
- \$800,000 for women and men who feel under stress to take respite at organised retreats that assist them to develop new networks, share experiences and learn new coping skills.

- \$223,000 for women experiencing stress to gather to build leadership and coping skills, build new networks and reconnect with their community and each other.
- \$360,000 to assist men to reconnect and re-engage with each other and their community through skills, knowledge building and information based activities.

Announced	9 October, 2009
Allocated	\$4.1 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	2
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.2 million

VBAF Scholarships

To provide opportunities for bushfire affected students to undertake tertiary or vocational education.

Gift amount: \$15,000 per student per annum for the duration of the course of study.

Announced	12 November, 2009
Allocated	Up to \$3 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	0
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.0 million

School Holiday Program

Funding for the YMCA to implement school holiday programs for primary and secondary school students in bushfire affected areas.

Gift amount: \$5 million package

Announced	4 June, 2009
Allocated	\$5 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	5
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.9 million

Rebuilding and Recovery Payments

Household Repairs

A short-term measure to help people affected by the bushfires make minor repairs to properties damaged by fire, water or smoke. On 12 March 2009 this grant was expanded to include payments to landlords, so that emergency repairs could be made to allow tenants to reoccupy their homes.

Gift amount: \$3000 lump sum

Announced	25 February, 2009
Allocated	\$2.36 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	919
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$2.8 million

Rehousing and Recovery (destroyed properties)

Payment to home owners whose principal place of residence or sole asset was destroyed by the bushfires.

Gift amount: \$35,000 lump sum plus \$15,000 contents payment, plus a further needs-based payment of up to \$50,000

Announced	11 March, 2009
Allocated	\$119 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	3892
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$110 million

Rehousing and Recovery (damaged properties)

Payment to people whose principal place of residence was damaged by the bushfires. Up to \$15,000 was available for the repair or replacement of other external structures, including sheds.

Gift amount: \$15,000 lump sum, plus a further, needs-based payment of up to \$20,000

Announced	11 March, 2009
Allocated	\$22.5 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	2167
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$29.2 million

Rehousing and Recovery (tenant properties)

Payment to tenants, whose principal place of residence was destroyed by the 2009 Victorian bushfires and need to assist with replacement of contents lost or damaged.

Gift amount: \$15,000 lump sum

Announced	11 March, 2009
Allocated	\$9 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	475
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$6.6 million

Rehousing and Recovery (houses under construction and other structures)

Funding for people whose house under construction was destroyed during the bushfires.

Gift amount: Up to \$25,000 pre lock-up, which is defined as the period during the construction stage. \$35,000 for post lock-up, which is defined by the presentation of a certificate of occupancy, when the house is ready to be moved into after construction.

Announced	28 June, 2009
Allocated	Allocation in overall Rehousing and Recovery funding
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	Allocation in overall Rehousing and Recovery funding
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	Allocation in overall Rehousing and Recovery funding

Support for Boarders to Rehouse

Assistance for people renting a single room in a property.

Gift amount: \$5000 for less than two people and \$7,500 for three or more people

Announced	28 June, 2009
Allocated	\$250,000
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	85
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$410,000

Transitional Support for Homeowners, Tenants and Boarders

Support for the transition to a new home for home owners whose property was destroyed and for tenants and boarders whose primary place of residence was destroyed.

Gift amount: Homeowners – \$10,000 gift for singles and couples, \$15,000 gift per family of three or more. Tenants and boarders – \$5000 per home for up to two residents and \$7500 per home for three or more residents

Announced	28 June, 2009
Allocated	\$23 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	1609
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$16.6 million

Rural Property Recovery Assistance

Support for rural landowners who suffered hardship or distress due to damage caused to rural properties of more than two hectares.

Gift amount: Up to \$5000

Announced	20 April, 2009; extension to 2ha on 16 July 2009
Allocated	\$5 million (properties of more than 5 ha) \$4 million (properties between 2 and 5 ha)
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	1643
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$7.9 million

Primary Producers Repair and Restoration

To assist and relieve the stress of primary producers who have suffered loss and damage to their properties and farming activities as a result of the 2009 bushfires.

Gift amount: Financial support of \$10,000 for primary producers not eligible for Commonwealth assistance (ie, less than 51 per cent of income derived from farming activities); \$5000 for those who received Commonwealth assistance.

Announced	17 September, 2009
Allocated	\$7 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	633
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$4.8 million

Essential Services Temporary Accommodation

Provision of essential services, such as toilets and showers, to between 500 and 1000 people whose principal place of residence was destroyed in the 2009 Victorian bushfires, and are living in temporary accommodation.

Gift amount: Financial support provided on a case-by-case basis

Announced	13 June, 2009
Allocated	\$11 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	8 (for 354 units)
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	1.7 million

Hazardous Trees

To help residents in bushfire-affected areas meet the cost of assessing and removing hazardous trees on their private properties.

Gift amount: Up to \$4000 per household

Announced	8 September, 2009
Allocated	\$6 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	788
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$2.7 million

Strathewen CRC

In the wake of the fires, Community Recovery Committees (CRCs) were established in 31 local areas, to work with people and businesses to identify what would be needed to rebuild, recover and regenerate. VBAF is funding some of those projects.

The Strathewen Community Renewal Association was one of the CRCs established in mid-2009. Bringing together people with strong local ties, commercial and business experience, and a strong sense of local history, the Association immediately rolled up its sleeves and got to work.

“Our greatest challenge has been trying to take the diverse range of plans for the future, and turning them into a single plan with broad community support,” says Malcolm Hackett, the Chair of the Association.

“It’s also been really important for us to turn the tremendous level of goodwill out there into practical help.”

Malcolm says that, although Strathewen’s local population was scattered across Victoria after two-thirds of the town’s homes were lost in the fires, the community is still vibrant and communicating well.

“Our priority for 2010 will be welcoming people back onto their own land – and engaging the new people who are starting to move here.”

The Community Recovery Plan developed by Strathewen focused heavily on rebuilding community hubs, including the local Primary School and the Strathewen Hall.

“The school has always been the touch point for local people, even if their kids are fully grown. It’s a vital element of bringing people back – which is the only way we’re going to rebuild this community,” Malcolm says.

“Strathewen was very heavily hit. We’ve had good support from council and other agencies, and we’ve been impressed by the people who have come to us to help. We’ve had our glitches, but overall, we feel like we’ve been supported,” he says.

Community Projects

While the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund's first priority was to focus on providing support to individuals and families to assist with their urgent and ongoing needs, the Advisory Panel was always aware the appeal intent also included assistance for communities to recover.

The gifts developed by the Fund to rebuild local communities recognise that fire-affected individuals lost not only their loved ones and their homes, but also had their communities severely impacted. As well, while other members of these communities may not have been directly impacted by the fires, their towns and localities will take many years to recover both psychologically and physically. The Panel recognised community rebuilding as an essential part of the healing of individuals, and has provided significant financial support to aid the recovery process.

Consistent with this intent the Advisory Panel has set aside about a quarter of the donated funds for community projects in the bushfire affected areas. This includes \$43 million allocated as part of *Rebuilding Together*, Victoria's Statewide Plan for Reconstruction and Recovery local projects, which are identified by local communities as priorities for their recovery. \$19.9 million of this allocation has already been committed to specific projects that are ready to proceed.

The projects that the Fund will support have all been identified by Community Recovery Committees (CRCs) in bushfire affected areas. Each of the CRCs set up after the bushfires has worked with local individuals and organisations to develop long term Community Recovery Plans that identify specific, tailored, localised responses needed and supported by the community.

The Community Recovery Plans set out the priorities to rebuild facilities and provide services and other aid for communities in their recovery.

Working with the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), the Advisory Panel is identifying the projects in the Community Recovery Plans that can be supported by the Fund.

Projects supported by the Fund need to reflect the criteria approved by the Panel, which includes the original intent of the Appeal, the wishes of the donors and the needs of communities. The projects must also contribute directly to the re-establishment of towns and communities affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Not all projects will be suitable for VBAF funding. Other projects in the plans may be supported by the Australian and Victorian governments, VBRRA and corporate and philanthropic donors.

Other community funding already approved for distribution includes:

- \$9.1 million Community Assistance Package delivered through local governments to provide additional recovery and rebuilding services and activities, such as grief and trauma support services, repairing community infrastructure and community support services, to help bushfire-affected individuals and communities recover and rebuild; and,
- Around \$1.9 million for Community Events to help communities hold activities, such as winter health information sessions and community festivals for local residents.

The Appeal Fund will continue to work with VBRRA in the coming months to fund further appropriate projects for bushfire-affected communities.

Community gifts

Community Winter Needs

To assist communities in the bushfire affected areas to (relieve psychological distress during winter) promote positive well being over the cold winter months.

Gift amount:

- Between \$5,000 and \$25,000 per affected community for winter activities based on need.
- \$500,000 central fund for needs based infrastructure to accommodate winter needs, such as heaters and other temporary facilities.

Announced	4 June, 2009
Allocated	\$1 million
Number of Payments as at 1/2/2010	163
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.6 million

Community Summer Events

To assist communities in the bushfire affected areas to (relieve psychological distress over the summer months) promote positive well being over the Christmas and New Year period and for community based memorial and commemorative events.

Gift amount: Between \$5000 to \$15,000 per affected community for summer and Christmas events based on need

Announced	14 December, 2009
Allocated	\$290,000
Number of Payments as at 1/2/2010	6
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$50,000

Commemorative Events

Funding for community-based commemorative events in 2010, such as memorial services to acknowledge the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Gift amount: A needs based allocation of between \$10,000 and \$30,000 across all of the Community Recovery Committees.

Announced	14 December, 2009
Allocated	\$0.6 million
Number of payments as at 1/2/2010	19
Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$0.6 million

Community Assistance Gift (formerly Local Government Disaster Assistance and Recovery Services Gift)

To assist bushfire-affected councils to deliver disaster-related services that directly benefits residents. Money provided to local governments through this payment is for works outside of the Community Recovery Plans.

Gift amount: \$9.1 million – needs based, spread over each affected LGA based on impact – damages and losses.

Announced	7 April, 2009
Allocated	\$9.1 million

Number of Payments
as at 1/2/2010:

- Cardinia Shire Council (\$49,200);
- Casey City Council (\$50,000);
- Corangamite Shire Council (\$50,000);
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council (\$50,000);
- Southern Grampians Shire Council (\$50,000);
- Wangaratta Rural City Council (\$50,000);
- Alpine Shire Council (\$178,300);
- Indigo Shire Council (\$300,000);
- Baw Baw Shire Council (\$400,000);
- Greater Bendigo City Council (\$400,000);
- Horsham Rural City Council (\$400,000);
- South Gippsland Shire Council (\$400,000);
- Wellington Shire Council (\$351,000);
- Latrobe City Council (\$700,000);
- Mitchell Shire Council (\$700,000);
- Nillumbik Shire Council (\$700,000);
- Whittlesea City Council (\$700,000);
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council (\$700,000);
- and,
- Murrindindi Shire Council (\$2,500,000).

Disbursed as at 1/2/2010	\$8.7 million
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* Hepburn has been allocated \$50,000, which is yet to be disbursed

Community Assistance Gift

To assist Councils to deliver bushfire-related services to benefit all members of their communities.

	Grief Counselling/psych support	Fire preparedness/future prevention	Support services	Disaster relief	Facility repair/upgrade	Bushfire related planning	Community education/information	Community strengthening	Removal of fire waste/hazards	Training	Land management/restoration
Murrindindi											
Cardinia											
Casey											
Corangamite											
Macedon											
Southern Grampians											
Wangaratta											
Alpine											
Indigo											
Baw Baw											
Greater Bendigo											
Horsham											
South Gippsland											
Wellington											
LaTrobe											
Mitchell											
Nilumbik											
Whittlesea											
Yarra Ranges											
Hepburn											
Mt Alexander											
Southern Grampians											

Partners

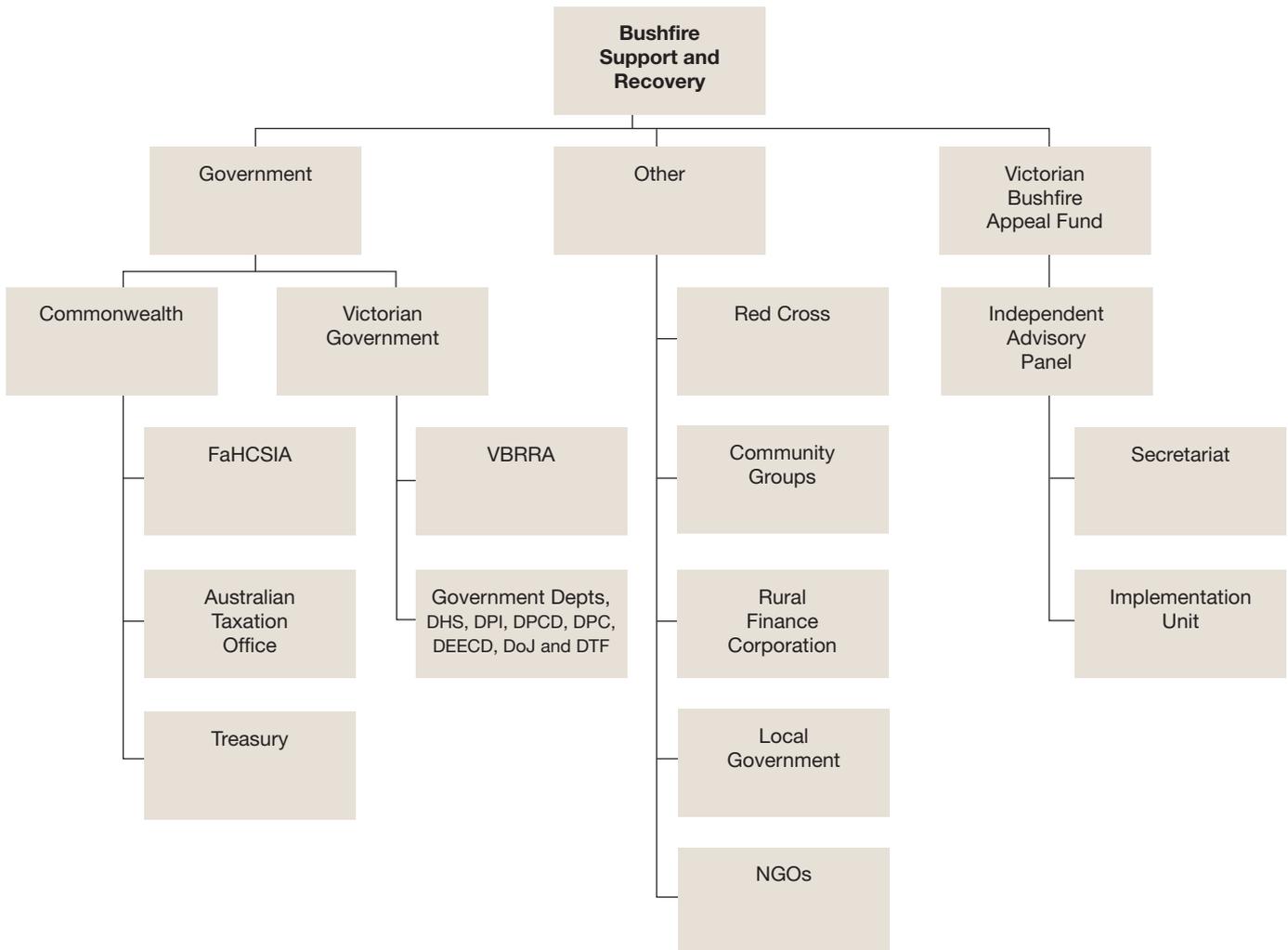
The priority role of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund in the recovery and reconstruction effort has been to support individuals, with a significant portion of the Fund allocated for this purpose.

A clear criterion of the Fund has been to complement, and not replace, core government business.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund is one of a number of sources of support for bushfire-affected communities and individuals.

The Commonwealth Government, Victorian State Government and local governments have all been providing financial support, as well as helping to rebuild communities. There are also numerous not-for-profit agencies and community groups involved at local and statewide levels.

VBAF's role has been made easier by the partnerships with all the relevant public and private sector organisations also involved in the recovery and reconstruction effort.



VBAF's Partnerships

Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government has worked closely with the Victorian Government and Red Cross in supporting the establishment and administration of VBAF.

The Panel successfully made representations to the Commonwealth Treasury to make changes to charitable tax laws to allow the Fund to distribute donated money to broader categories of people and communities in need. The Fund has welcomed the Commonwealth's support on this, which resulted in limited financial support provided to some groups that were previously excluded from charitable assistance, such as primary producers.

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has also provided a high level of advice to the VBAF Secretariat and Advisory Panel since February 2009, to ensure all gifts for assistance meet relevant charitable tax law requirements.

By assessing each proposal, the ATO has helped the Fund ensure that monies have been disbursed in a way that is compliant with both taxation and charities legislation.

Victorian Government

The Victorian Government has committed to providing administrative support for VBAF to ensure all donated funds go to bushfire affected individuals and communities.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) administers all VBAF gifts to bushfire affected individuals, and provides support for the VBAF Advisory Panel. Until August 2009, the Secretariat support for the Advisory panel was provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC).

DHS and the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) are also responsible for delivering a range of VBAF-funded psychological support services to bushfire affected communities.

VBAF also works closely with other Victorian Government Departments to target support to groups affected by the fires. For example, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) oversees the VBAF school holiday program, which gives bushfire affected students holiday activities and respite for parents who continue the difficult task of rebuilding their homes and lives. DEECD also administers the VBAF Tertiary and Vocational Education Scholarship program, to encourage bushfire impacted students to undertake further education.

Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority

Through its close work with bushfire affected communities, the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) helps VBAF to help identify needs and issues that are specific to bushfire-affected individuals and local communities.

VBRRA community engagement officers assist Community Recovery Committees to develop proposals and projects integral to their local recovery. VBRRA also identifies the community-instigated projects that might be suitable for consideration by the VBAF Advisory Panel for funding.

VBRRA also administers a number of VBAF-funding initiatives, such as psychological support programs, essential services for temporary accommodation and assistance with the removal of hazardous trees from bushfire affected properties.

Red Cross

Red Cross is one of the world's most recognisable charitable organisations with world wide experience in disaster response and relief.

Red Cross established the Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009 in partnership with the Victorian and Australian Governments, collected funds and transferred those funds to the Trust Account established for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

The organisation and Victorian Government jointly appointed members to the VBAF Advisory Panel. Red Cross continues to serve as a member of the Panel and also provides invaluable expertise on the needs of individuals and communities in the aftermath of disasters.

As a charitable organisation, the involvement of Red Cross ensured that all donations to the Appeal were tax deductible. Red Cross also provides a direct interface with donors to the Appeal and continues to provide updates on the progress of VBAF.

Rural Finance Corporation

Rural Finance Corporation – a Bendigo-based specialist rural lender to primary producers and rural businesses wholly-owned by the Victorian Government – played a critical role in supporting rural Victorians affected by the bushfires.

A finance provider to the rural sector for more than 60 years, administering Natural Disaster Relief Schemes and other programs on behalf of the Victorian Government and Commonwealth, Rural Finance administers a number of VBAF gifts for rural Victorians affected by the bushfires, such as the Primary Producers Repair and Restoration Payment, the Rural Properties Recovery Assistance Payment and the Tools of Trade Payment.



Wandong School Holiday Program

On a beautiful, mild summer's day in the quiet town of Wandong, 43 kids are grinning from ear to ear.

Gathered in the local community centre, totally energised by a two hour circus workshop, the kids are doing everything from decorating biscuits with clown faces to imitating Australia's recent win over Pakistan in the Sydney Test.

All of the kids are attending the YMCA-run, VBAF-funded holiday care program. It's designed to give parents in bushfire-affected communities some respite during the school holidays, and their children much-needed activities and support, with a strong focus on providing a safe, educational environment for young people.

The kids, though, don't seem to realise there's anything but fun on the agenda.

Katie, Tom and Jack are all seven, classmates at Wandong Primary. When asked about what they like best about the program, they are unanimous: "Everything!". Ella, who is 10, has a different perspective – "it's better than being bored at home".

YMCA Program Coordinator Chris Simmons notes that for any small community which lacks the services people in bigger communities take for granted, any holiday program would be a bonus.

But for Wandong – which was hit hard by the February fires – it's truly a gift.

"While the kids have fun and make friends, their parents are continuing to rebuild, or working for businesses that are supporting the rebuilding and recovery of the community," Chris says.

Wandong's program is one of 14 school holiday programs across Victoria which has been funded through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.



Financials

In the 12 months since the 2009 Victorian bushfires more than \$389 million, including \$6 million in interest, has been provided to the Fund. Every cent is being used to support individuals and communities affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires.

The Appeal Fund has allocated more than 95 per cent of all funds raised.² Around \$301 million has been allocated to assist affected individual and families, and the balance allocated to community identified initiatives.

The Appeal Fund considered and developed payments in two main streams: assistance to individuals and families; and assistance to bushfire affected communities.

² Correct as at February 1, 2010

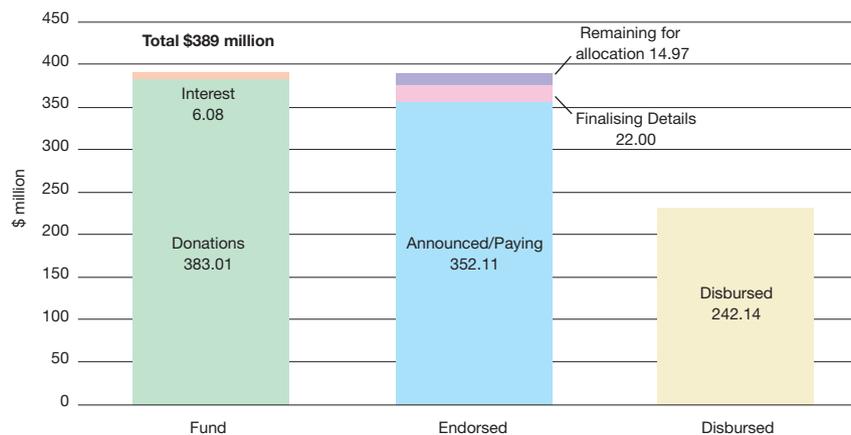
Assistance to Individuals and Families

The priority of the Appeal Fund was to help bushfire-affected individuals and families. The Fund has made available 28 types of gifts worth an estimated \$295.1 million, with 22,105 payments made and more than three quarters of this allocation (\$232.1 million) spent across three broad categories.

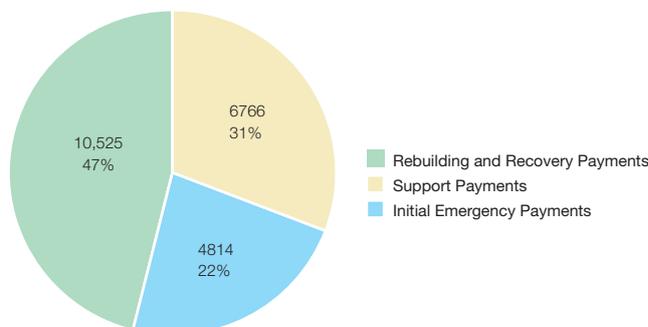
If there is allocated money remaining, but not taken up, it will go to where it's most needed. That could be to individuals or into community initiatives – the Panel, in consultation with bodies such as VBRRA, will decide where it is needed the most.

At times the initial estimated amount allocated to a gift type will be higher than what is required. Where evidence becomes available that this is the case, the Advisory Panel will endorse a change in the estimate, although this will not impact on a person's ability to access it. All eligible people who apply will receive the gifts they are entitled to.

Appeal Fund Distribution



Number of Payments



The balance of the money after any re-estimation is then directed towards other gifts. The Advisory Panel adjusts estimates and reallocates money, while at the same time making decisions about new gifts. This process may mean that in the future, the Advisory Panel will make downward adjustments to the total worth of gifts endorsed at that point in time, but to date this has not been necessary.

Category	Allocation \$ million	Disbursed \$ million
Initial Emergency payments	30.7	30.7
Rebuilding and recovery payments	189.4	166.3
Support payments	75.0	35.1
Grand Total	295.1	232.1

For details of individual gifts under the various categories please refer to page 8. For detailed financial information, please refer to page 23.

Assistance to Bushfire affected Communities

More recently, the Appeal Fund shifted its focus to community rebuilding projects, including those priorities identified by individual communities as part of the community rebuilding process overseen by VBRRRA. The Appeal Fund allocated \$56 million to the recently released *Rebuilding Together – A Statewide Plan for Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery*.

Distribution of the payments across affected regions

Payments to individuals within communities reflect the level of devastation each of those areas and their populations experienced.

For example, in the Murrindindi Shire, where 94 people lost their lives and more than 1200 properties were destroyed, the Appeal Fund has paid more than \$123 million in total to individuals³. Individuals in other badly affected areas, such as Nillumbik (\$15 million), Mitchell (\$14 million), Yarra Ranges (\$17 million) and LaTrobe (\$20 million) have also received significant support from the Appeal Fund. These payments are assisting individuals, families and communities to rebuild.

For complete details of all individual payments per region, please refer to page 24.

³ Figures do not include school holiday program, psychological support or financial support provided by other agencies.



The future

Distributing in excess of \$389 million in donated monies to people and communities in need as a result of the 2009 Victorian bushfires has been an enormous undertaking for everyone involved.

The unprecedented generosity of Australians and people from overseas has meant that people from the 78 communities directly impacted by the bushfires in February have received financial support that is helping them to rebuild their lives, neighbourhoods and communities.

The task of identifying what was required and the assistance that could be provided has been an ongoing role for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund's Advisory Panel.

The Panel initially focussed on emergency support, such as helping people dislocated from their homes and assisting bereaved families. It then gave aid to people to rebuild or repair destroyed or damaged homes, and provided financial security for bereaved children. It has also assisted farmers and supported families who are still without a home.

The Appeal Fund is now providing longer term psychological support to members of the community still dealing with the trauma of 12 months ago, and providing students with higher education scholarships and school holiday programs.

Communities have also received funding from the Appeal Fund for projects that will contribute to their strengthening and rebuilding. That funding, as with some of the other longer-term programs, will continue well into 2010 and beyond.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund's Advisory Panel has oversight of how all donated monies to the Fund are distributed. The ongoing governance structure of the Advisory Panel will be examined in the coming months to ensure the intent of all donors and the needs of people and communities affected by the 2009 bushfires continue to be met.



Appendices

Payments to Individuals, Families and Communities

Split by Gift

Payments to Individuals and Families	Current allocation \$ million	Funds disbursed \$ million	Number of payments number
Initial Emergency payments			
Compassion & Bereavement	1.74	1.77	175
Emergency Tools of Trade	1.50	1.50	380
Initial home Dislocation	27.50	27.45	4259
Initial Emergency payments Total	30.74	30.72	4814
Rebuilding and recovery payments			
Emergency Household Repairs	2.36	2.75	919
Essential Services for Temporary Accommodation	11.00	1.69	8
Primary producers Repair and Restoration	7.00	4.81	633
Rehousing & Recovery; Damaged Properties	154.00	146.53	6534
Rural Property Recovery Assistance	9.00	7.85	1643
Safe Removal of Hazardous Trees	6.00	2.68	788
Rebuilding and recovery payments Total	189.36	166.31	10525
Support payments			
Bereaved Children & Children of the Permanently Impaired	8.00	2.57	74
Exceptional Hardship	0.80	1.26	206
Gift for Skills and Education	3.00	0.00	
Psychological Counselling (Phase 1 and 2)	12.90	0.28	322
School Holiday Programs (Primary & Secondary)	5.00	0.88	5
Severe Injury	1.20	1.29	171
Severe Injury Transition to Home	2.00	1.70	35
Support for Boarders to Rehouse	0.25	0.41	85
Transitional Support for Home Owners	23.00	16.58	1609
Winter Needs	8.00	8.31	4185
Compassionate Financial Support	10.85	1.8	74
Legal support – PILCH	0.04	0.04	1
Support payments Total	75.00	35.08	6766
Total for Individuals and Families	295.10	232.11	22105
Community payments			
Community allocation	46.00	0.00	
Local Government Disaster Assistance & Recovery Services	9.10	8.73	25
Community Winter Events	1.00	0.64	163
Memorial and Commemorative Events	0.58	0.58	19
Community Summer Events	0.29	0.05	6
Community payments Total	57.01	10.04	214
Grand Total	352.11	242.14	22319

Appendices

Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Payment Estimates to individuals (grouped by Local Government Area)

As at 1 February 2010

Figures provided are estimates only, and exclude payments administered by other agencies. Figures do not include payments for psychological support, School Holiday programs, winter and summer events, tools of trade or rural properties.

Figures provided account for 93 per cent of total individual payments to 1 February 2010 (\$233m).

Individual payments (grouped by LGA)	Total Est. Amount of VBAF Payments	Total Est. Number of VBAF Payments
Alpine S	\$770,014	88
Banyule C	\$19,500	3
Baw Baw S	\$5,367,010	550
Bayside C	\$6500	1
Cardinia S	\$117,000	5
Casey C	\$647,016	63
Corangamite S	\$61,130	11
Darebin C	\$202,000	8
East Gippsland S	\$1,002,530	63
Glenelg S	\$20,000	3
Greater Bendigo C	\$6,573,167	354
Hepburn S	\$189,160	31
Horsham RC	\$1,692,957	219
Hume C	\$7000	1
Indigo S	\$1,500,998	130
Knox C	\$131,660	14
Latrobe C	\$19,771,597	1288
Macedon Ranges S	\$140,000	11
Mansfield S	\$5000	2
Mitchell S	\$14,280,969	910
Mornington Peninsula S	\$18,500	2
Mount Alexander S	\$858,699	64
Moyne S	\$27,000	2
Murrindindi S	\$123,416,986	7391
Nillumbik S	\$15,195,640	828
South Gippsland S	\$321,059	55
Southern Grampians S	\$190,963	18
Wangaratta RC	\$15,000	6
Wellington S	\$1,838,510	169
Whitehorse C	\$8000	1
Whittlesea C	\$3,908,902	251
Yarra Ranges S	\$17,212,897	1303
Grand Total	\$215,527,364	13,845

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