

# From The Chief Officer.....



Number 85

*"Our mission is to protect lives and property"*

4<sup>th</sup> August 2013

## Our Community Engagement Challenge:

Last weekend, we saw the third CFA sponsored **"Community Engagement Forum"** held at Bendigo. To put things into perspective, let's reflect on the words of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission who said: ***"The Commission considers that community and government complacency can place some people at risk of death when bushfires occur."*** The stark reality is that, whether it is in the home dwelling or bushfire environment, **the sum total of our efforts at preventing, mitigating and engaging about fire, along with our readiness and response actions mean the difference between life and death for some people.** Neil Comrie, in the Annual Report of the Bushfire Royal Commission Implementation Monitor expresses *"serious concern"* at the *"growing evidence of a state of complacency about bushfires in the Victorian community"*. Mr Comrie goes on to talk about the *"major challenge in securing the involvement and commitment of Victorians to meet their responsibility..."* He concludes: ***"These disturbing findings illustrate that there is still a great deal of work to be done to address the prevailing levels of public complacency"***.

## The Road To Safer Communities – Are we there yet?:

This was the third such Forum, following previous Forums at Macedon (2011) and Creswick (2012). At Bendigo we saw over 300 delegates from 160 Brigades participating. (With the growing popularity of this Forum, we may need to book the MCG in a few years time!). The Forum was focussed on local CFA and community leaders coming together to share their passion and ideas and to network. The theme this year was **"The Road To Safer Communities – Are we there yet?"** **Cass Alexander (Rushworth Brigade) and April Himmelreich (The Basin Brigade)** did an outstanding job as M.C.'s. Topics covered included:

- **David Webb-Ware** (Glenburn) spoke about the journey of engaging with CFA members first, then the community, using practical fire preparedness.
- **Ali Martin** led a practical session about how to include the "Community Safety Coordinator" role into the Brigade Management Team (a significant change arising from the Brigade Classification Project).
- **Dawn Hartog** provided "do's and don'ts" and tips for delivering Fire Safe Kids programs.
- **Kim Stanley-Eyles from Dereel** described the difficulties faced with dealing with community apathy and the work done through strategic fire conversations with the Dereel community.
- **Bruce Jewel (Drouin West)** gave examples of recruitment and building capacity in a brigade.
- **Owen Gooding** spoke to the CFA publication on "Landscaping a Garden for Bushfire".
- **Chris Barber** gave us a fresh look at factors that can lead to home fire fatalities.
- **A Slice Of Vanilla In Merbein:** **Steve Russell** presented on how Merbein had capitalised on the community's Vanilla Slice Competition as an opportunity to engage with the community. They ran out of vanilla slices, but estimate that around 10,000 people interacted with the community that day.

This Forum has showcased the energy, enthusiasm, initiative and commitment of our members in community education. These members are our front line in taking up the challenge identified by the Bushfires Royal Commission and by Neil Comrie. This is essential, valuable work. Thank you to all who took part. Special thanks go to **April Himmelreich, Brian West, Bruce Jewell, Cass Alexander, Daniel Eshuis, David Webb-Ware, Diane Lawson, Elissa Jans, Fiona Macken, Gaybrielle Burgess, Jeremy Maidment, Julie Ettery, Lindsay Pritchard, Nick Waldron and Tracey Mastropavlos.** Finally, to our Member Engagement Team, led by Jamie Devenish and Erin Bulmer: ***Thank you – Job Well Done!***

***"Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand."***

- Confucious

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