



2016 VICTORIA BUSHFIRE DEPLOYMENT NEWSLETTER NO. 2

Wednesday, 6 January 2016

New Zealand Taskforce Alpha Update

Incident control and base camp

Shortly after New Zealand's Taskforce Alpha arrived at the [Wye River – Jamieson Track Fire Incident Control Point \(ICP\) in Colac](#) on Monday, 3 January they received a briefing from the Incident Controller.

After the briefing, the team went to Birregurra where their base camp is situated on the local [Birregurra footy fields](#).

The team reports they have settled in well at 'tent city', and have been well looked after at the Birregurra camp, with good meals, comfortable accommodation, and tidy ablution blocks.

The camp is a 'dry camp' (no alcohol), which the team is happy with, as it helps keep things quiet and allows them to get good rest for the following day.

Taskforce Alpha has been split into two groups, with each group paired up with an Australian Taskforce member from Hume.

There has been quite a bit of media interest in the NZ deployment, with TV interviews at the airport and again at the base camp.



Photo: Part of the Birregurra 'tent city' base camp setup.

The eager Kiwi's get to work

At this morning's (Tuesday, 5 January) briefing Taskforce Alpha were assigned to the Benwerin Sector on the Wye River - Jamieson Track Sector (see attached map).

Their task (and probably for the next few days) is to patrol and strengthen rakehoe lines (hand cut fuel breaks) in preparation for a hoselay, and then latter back burning operations when the weather is suitable possibly in a week.

The fire danger is currently 'very mild' with very little fire activity, but this work is necessary to contain the fire that is currently burning in remote country, from where it would likely flare up, and brake out when the fire danger increases. An outbreak could easily reach the township of Lorne should the weather change for the worst.

The layout of the land that Taskforce Alpha are working on is very steep and rocky (Otway Range rises steeply from the ocean). However, the NZ crews have a reputation of being experienced and effective in this type of terrain.



Photo: Vulnerable communities in the area.



Photo: Crews receiving their morning briefing.



Photo: Handling construction.



Photo: Terrain of the fire – note the brown tinge in the distant hills is the scorched canopy not grass paddocks.

About the Area

A bit of background that may be of interest to our audience back home:

- Birregurra is mainly a farming community, which is now supported by tourism.
- Colac is just 15 minutes from base camp (on the Great Ocean Highway).
- Forestry is a major contributor to the economy (both soft woods and hard woods).

- Lorne, Wyre River, and Apollo Bay are coastal communities with quite a bit of holiday accommodation and tourism, both of which have been severely impacted by this fire through the loss of about 130 houses, areas evacuated for an extended period, and the loss of services, such as roads, power, sewage etc., at the busiest time of year for these areas.

Since the Black Saturday fires of 2009 the Victorian Authorities have developed an integrated approach to the recovery efforts, and it's been very interesting to see how they work together to address large scale community disruption.

Crew Introduction - Great Barrier / Auckland

All but one of this crew is from Great Barrier Island.

Led by Lance (Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer), they have seen plenty of steep coastal land like where they are currently working (if only they could have bought some of the 100 mm plus of rain the island recently received).

Being 'island folk' they are very independent multi skilled people. Billy Torpey is from the 'almost island' of Awhitu Peninsula, and is a Fabrication Engineer by trade, so has a few extra hand skills if needed.

Lance reports his team are very happy having had a couple of good days of hard, but productive, work on the hand tools.



**Lance Dixon
(Crew Leader)**



**Manuka Davenport
(Crew)**



**Nick Yates
(Crew)**



**Wayne Anderson
(Crew)**



**Billy Torpey
(Crew)**

State Wide Situation

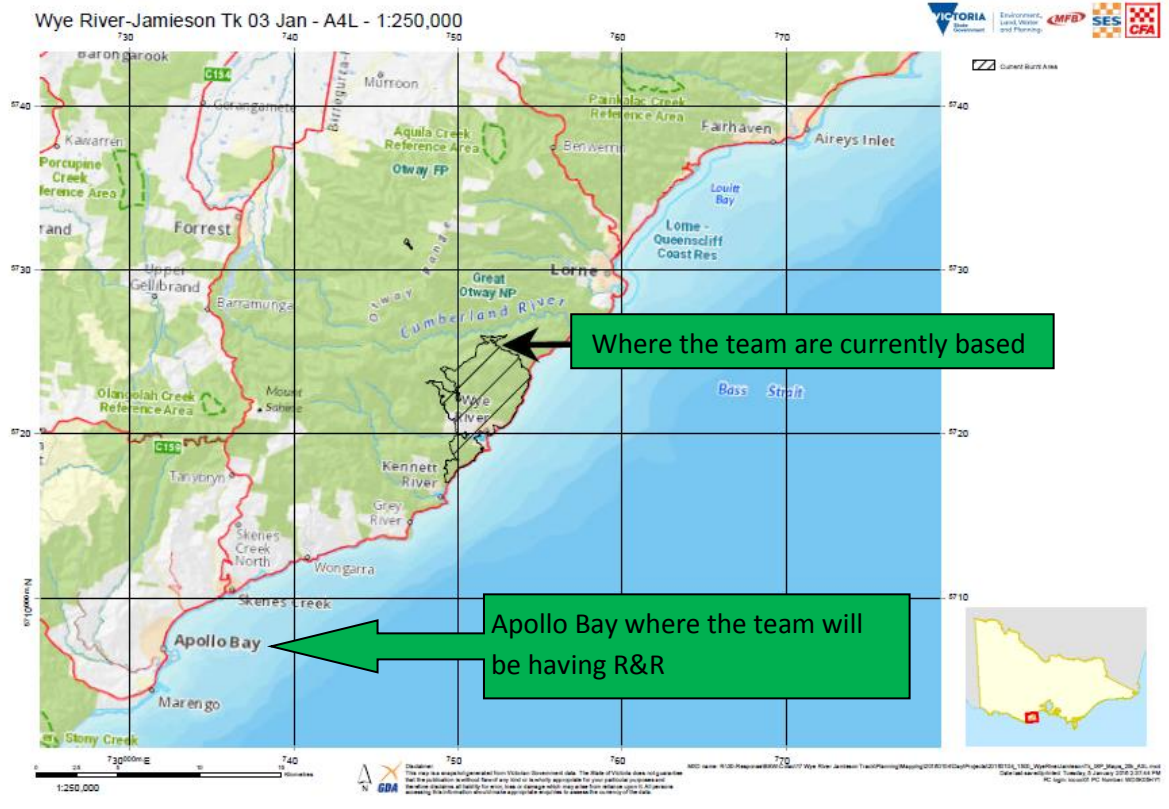
The main fire of significance remains the Wye River – Jamieson Track fire.

The fires to the east (known as Gippsland) have not had crews on them due to rain, so they are still classified as 'going', but this is likely to change once crew or aircraft are able to get into them.

Outlook

There is a possibility of further lightening Tuesday / Wednesday in the western part of the state with current mild conditions.

Where the crew are based



Out Planning

Date	Action
9/01/2016	NZ Taskforce Alpha have planned R&R at Apollo Bay
11/01/2016	NZ Taskforce Bravo arrives in Melbourne

Regards

Rory Renwick
National Rural Fire Authority Liaison