



2016 VICTORIA BUSHFIRE DEPLOYMENT NEWSLETTER NO. 4

Wednesday, 13 January 2016

New Zealand Taskforce Alpha/Bravo Update

International comradery

Previously deployment taskforces have worked independently, however, the 2016 Victorian Bushfire Deployment has taken a different approach and combined the New Zealand and Australian (Hume) Taskforces.

This approach has proven to be very popular, as the crews have been sharing skills and stories (and possibly a bit of banter and a few un-P.C. jokes for good measure).

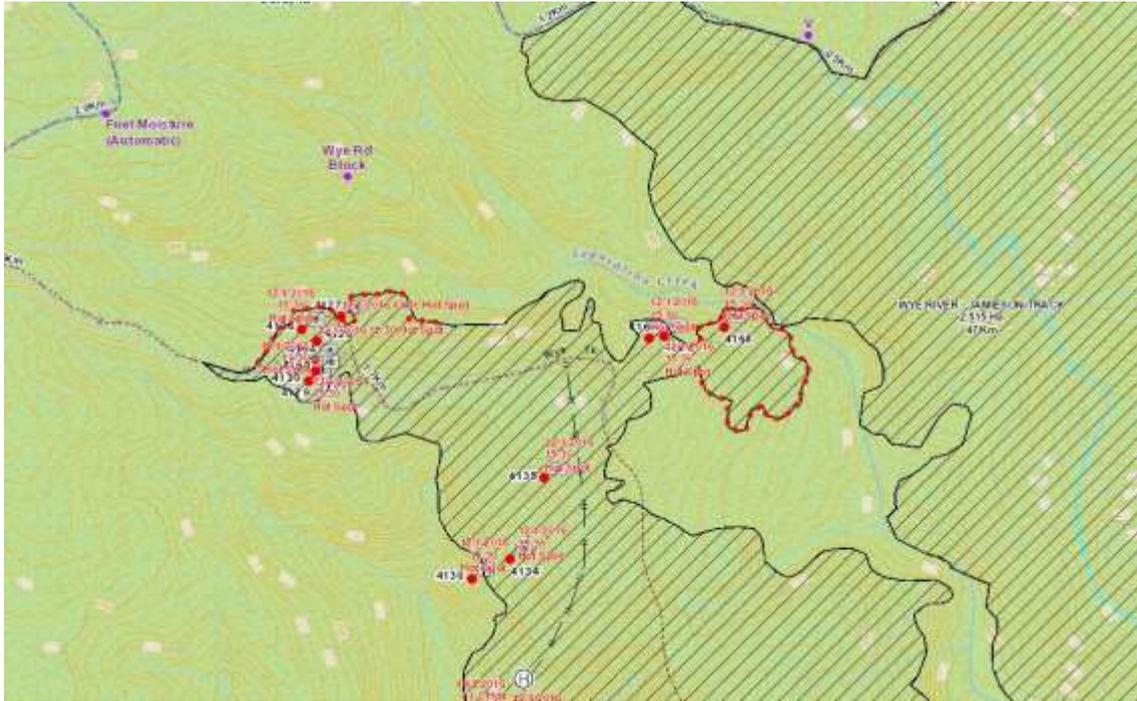
The local crews have been very impressed with the skills and work rates of the New Zealand crews, which has spurred them on in what has already been a long season.



Photo: South Island crews and Hume crews

The fire remains uncontained on the western edge with hot spots on the perimeter where Taskforce Alpha were reassigned on Friday.

Access to this area is via ridgelines down into steep valleys. This means after a long drive into the fire-ground there is a long walk down into the valleys, made even slower by access, also requiring trees to be assessed along the way, and removed if there is a risk they may fall.



Map: Location of where NZ Taskforce Alpha were assigned Friday, 8 January.



Photo: Lance and the crew from Auckland / Great Barrier (Waiheke crew if you want to wind them up). Some of this country is steep enough crews are putting in steps for access.



Photo: Once crews are on the perimeter they are finding large old dead logs, and deep burning roots, which need to be cut / dug up to be extinguished with minimal if any water as demonstrated by Patrick and Nicki from the Whangarei FPS Crew.

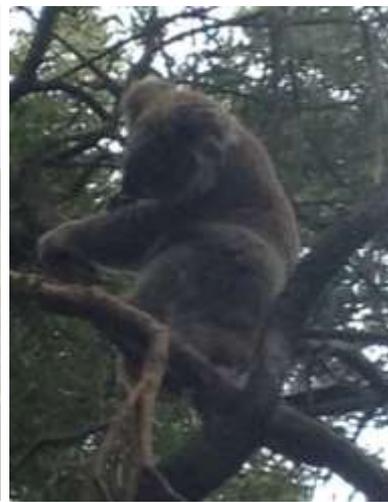
Alpha take R&R

The Victorian's have learnt that fatigue management is very important for these long duration fires, so Taskforce Alpha had two days recovery in a small, very pleasant, coastal town called Apollo Bay.

Apollo Bay is on the edge of the Otway National Park, which offers some very popular bush walks, but for some reason the team did not take to the bush, and opted to wash some clothes, clean the vehicles, and hang out on the beach.

Some of the more energetic team members played a round of golf, and took a tiki tour out to see the Twelve Apostles.

The Canadian 'Heli Attack' lads, who had been on the ground 'too long' headed to a place with zip lines through the tops of the tall eucalypts trees.



Photos: Taskforce Alpha R&R in Apollo Bay.

Leaving Apollo Bay and heading back toward the fire-ground was interesting, as the beaches were busy with people swimming and having fun, while behind them had burnt trees and houses.

Although the locals are obviously hurting from their losses, they are also actively welcoming visitors and tourists back, as the area is dependent on tourism, and keeping the place busy, helps people to get back to some form of normality.



Photo: Wyre River – a full beach directly below the aftermath of the fire. Note the burnt houses amongst the burnt forest.

New Zealand Taskforce Bravo arrive

NZ Taskforce Bravo arrived on Monday (11 January) evening, with almost all of their luggage.

One of the team can blame the luggage handlers in Auckland who did not transfer his bag to the connecting flight (all now sorted after a bit of running around).

However, someone else left their bag in the customs handling area, which by some miracle, did not result in activation of the bomb squad. We will let you work out who the forgetful one was, and in the meantime we will make sure he does not forget about this incident for some time!

After resting up for the night in a motel near the airport, Taskforce Bravo headed to Altona for the briefing about the typical conditions faced in Victoria, to ensure they are able to work safely and effectively. After briefings they were allocated vehicles and equipment.

Appliances, or any vehicles with capacity to carry water for firefighting, are scarce at the moment, so the team have only been given Utes and SUVs with a selection of hand tools. Contrary to common belief, a firefighter who knows what they are doing can be extremely effective without hose and water.



Photo: The classroom style briefing is a bit hard for keen action focussed people, but it is necessary to make sure that people from various parts of the country are all clear on what they are in for.



Photo: Scott and Kevin organise the troops and the troops organise the tools.



Photo: Team photo before they head off toward base camp at the Birregurra footy fields.

Crew introduction - Waimea (Taskforce Alpha)

The team is led by Dave Seeley, who won't tell us how long he has been in Rural Fire. Dave resides in Murchison, and works for DOC covering the Nelson Lakes area.

Russell Eltham, is a painter by trade, and has been with the Tasman Fire Force for over ten years. Russell's expertise, amongst other things, is driving rural tankers.

Matt Page, is a new father, and is another from DOC, with experience working on track and hut maintenance, this makes him a great asset when it comes to our rake hoeing, as he has a great understanding on how a good rake line should be.

Riley Neame, is also the proud father of a four month old child, and is a member of the Tasman Rural Force which he has been a member for around five years. Riley enjoys hard physical work.

Mike Gillies, from Murchison, also works for DOC as an asset manager covering Nelson Lakes. Mike has vast experience in controlled burning.



Dave Seeley
(Crew Leader)



Mike Gillies
(Crew)



Matt Page
(Crew)



Russell Eltham
(Crew)



Riley Neame
(Crew)

Southern Crew – (Taskforce Alpha)

The Southern Crew is led by Warren Heslip, who runs a contracting business, which does largely silviculture, but picks up other back-country work, such as track work and pest control, for the Department of Conservation.

From his contracting business Warren also brings with him two humorous hard working Fijians, Vuni and Gus, then there is Neil 'the captain' Gardyne who is a site foreman.

Completing the team, is Grant Tremain, who works for DOC in Te Anau as the Principal Ranger.



**Warren Heslip
(Crew Leader)**



**Grant Tremain
(Crew)**



**Vuni Qoro
(Crew)**



**Naipolioni
Qasevakatini
(Crew)**



**Neil Gardyne
(Crew)**

State Wide Situation

The main bushfire of significance remains the Wye River – Jamieson Track. However, yesterday (Tuesday, 12 January) there was also a small (140ha) breakout from a pre-Christmas fire previously believed to be under control.

There was also a fire in Melbourne where an area of tyres (about the size of a rugby field and up to 4m deep) caught fire, causing a significant smoke problem, for part of the city, and occupied two of the Skycrane heavy lift helicopters.



Photo: Tyre fire in Melbourne Suburbs receiving water drop from Skycrane.

Outlook

The forecast for today (Wednesday, 13 January) is for an increase in Fire Danger tomorrow, with some regions reaching Extreme, and a wind change in the afternoon.

Thursday (14 January) is predicted to bring a belt of rain across the state, which will temporarily reduce the fire danger.

DISTRICT	Wednesday 13 Jan	Thursday 14 Jan	Friday 15 Jan	Saturday 16 Jan	Sunday 17 Jan
Mallee	E	VH	H	L-M	L-M
Wimmera	E	VH	H	L-M	H
Northern Country	S	VH	H	L-M	L-M
North Central	S	VH	H	H	VH
North East	VH	H	H	H	H
South West	E	H	H	H	VH
Central	S	H	H	H	H
W & S Gippsland	S	H	H	L-M	H
East Gippsland	VH	H	L-M	L-M	L-M

Fire Danger Rating

- CODE RED (CR)
- EXTREME (E)
- SEVERE (S)
- VERY HIGH (VH)
- HIGH (H)
- LOW-MODERATE (L-M)

Out Planning

Date	NZ Taskforce Alpha	NZ Taskforce Bravo
13/01		Commence Work on fire-ground
16/01	R & R at Apollo Bay	
18/01	Return to work on Fireground	R & R at Apollo Bay
20/01		Return to work on Fireground

Regards

Graeme Still & Rory Renwick, NRFA - Liaison