

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Chief officers visit scene of Port Lincoln fire

Thursday 24 December 2009

Emergency Services Minister Michael Wright has joined the Chief Officers of the State's emergency service organisations to visit Port Lincoln this morning to assess the damage caused by a major fire that started on the outskirts of the town just before 1 pm yesterday, destroying at least 13 homes and nine sheds.

The fire burnt 640 hectares of land, impacting a number of properties, destroying the State Emergency Service (SES) office, and resulting in stock and fence losses. There are no reports at this time of serious injuries or loss of life, and investigations are continuing.

"Having travelled around the area today, it's apparent there is extensive damage, and my thoughts are with the people and families who have lost their homes so close to Christmas," Minister Wright said.

"Yesterday's fire at Port Lincoln is an unfortunate reminder that we live in a climate and a country that is bushfire prone and we must all do what we can to be Bushfire Ready. It demonstrated just how quickly a bushfire can take hold in conditions such as those experienced yesterday, Wednesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2009.

"Bushfires are a shared responsibility and we all have a role to play. We live in a country prone to bushfires and everyone must take responsibility, because to not do so puts at risk the lives of not only yourself, but your loved ones, neighbours and firefighters.

"From the government, a thank you to all of the people who were involved yesterday, you do a great job."

Country Fire Service (CFS) Chief Officer Euan Ferguson praised the efforts of all firefighters and personnel for a fantastic effort working together to prevent the fire from causing further damage to the town of Port Lincoln.

"The loss of property is a terrible tragedy, and we feel for the people suffering today, but a positive is that there have been no reports of serious injury or of lives lost" he said.

"Yesterday's efforts were a great example of an integrated response from CFS, MFS and DEH firefighters, with support from SAPOL, SAFECOM and SES volunteers, I thank all involved for a job well done and a good save."

Mr Ferguson has also taken the opportunity to remind property owners of their responsibility to help with management of vegetation corridors on private properties.

"I reinforce the message that bushfires are a part of the Australian climate, and that land management associated with this is a shared responsibility. This fire in Port Lincoln burnt significant native vegetation fuel, most of which was on private property," he said.

"I remind property owners that they have a legal and moral responsibility to manage the fuel on their property. We have changed the legislation surrounding the clearing of land, to make it easier for property owners in high fire risk areas, so let this be a wake up call that the policy has changed and we need the assistance of property owners to accept responsibility to maintain and prepare their properties in advance of a fire danger season."

For further information please call SAFECOM Public Affairs:

MFS Line: (08) 8204 3770, CFS Line: (08) 8212 9849

SES Line: (08) 8211 6176



Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) Chief Officer, Grant Lupton has commended the bravery of all CFS and MFS firefighters involved in yesterday's fire fight under catastrophic bushfire conditions.

"When temperatures are high and the winds are so strong, it makes for very difficult fire fighting conditions. In all, five firefighters were hospitalised and one remained in hospital overnight under observation, emphasising the dangers involved," he said.

"While it is little comfort, the damage and pain the community is now dealing with could have been much worse.

"The incident also sends a strong message to all country communities and even people living in urban fringe areas of Adelaide that are surrounded by bushland, not to be complacent about bushfire. Everyone must have a plan of what to do on days of severe, extreme and catastrophic conditions."

SES Chief Officer Stuart Macleod says the loss of the local headquarters was a sad outcome for the region's volunteers.

"The crew managed to save the vehicles, the boat and the main shed, but one SES volunteer's car and belongings were damaged. Within the building, the fire destroyed communications equipment including radios and computers, leaving a substantial damage bill," Mr Macleod said.

"The SES plays a major role in supporting firefighters during a fire, and usually this goes well but yesterday it came a bit too close to home. The volunteers are shattered and my heart goes out to the men and women who are doing it tough at the moment, but to their credit yesterday, they immediately put it behind them and got on with the job of supporting firefighters and the community."

***The Port Lincoln fire was one of three fires of significance that burnt across South Australia yesterday:***

**Donovans** – (South East) Approximately 150 hay bales and surrounding stubble and grass was burnt. The fire is believed to have been caused by lightning. CFS crews and farm fire units were able to contain the fire relatively quickly before mopping up and patrolling the area. Crews left the scene at about 5 pm yesterday, with patrolling continuing throughout the night to ensure the area was safe.

**Kingston** – (Near Taratap in the South East) This fire burnt approximately 1350 hectares of pasture and scrub and is believed to have been caused by lightning. The fire was reported as contained at 6 pm yesterday and crews worked overnight to construct a mineral earth break. Crews remain at the scene today to ensure it is safe.

**Port Lincoln** – (Eyre Peninsula) 13 houses and nine sheds were destroyed, including the SES base which resulted in a \$150,000 damage bill. Damage was reported to one home and other property, including cars and caravans. The number of homes damaged or destroyed may rise as emergency service personnel access the fireground today. At the height of the fire approximately 30 tankers and 150 personnel from the CFS, MFS and Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) were committed to controlling the fire. There was some relief from the air, with support from four fixed wing bombing aircraft, two fixed wing observation aircraft, one rotary wing observation aircraft and the Erickson Airplane 'Christine'. Aircraft pilots encountered extreme flying conditions, forcing them to occasionally suspend flight. Wind conditions were such that visibility was extremely poor, hampering the firefighting effort. Power was lost to 6,000 homes and the city of Port Lincoln. The fire was contained at 4:55 pm and crews continue their work today, extinguishing hot spots still burning in the area. The fire burnt approximately 640 hectares, with a 17 kilometre perimeter. Fire Cause Investigators will be on the scene today.

For more information about how to **PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.** a bushfire, visit the CFS website on [www.cfs.sa.gov.au](http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au) or call the Bushfire Information Hotline on 1300 362 361.

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