

Information bulletin



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Australia: Victoria bushfires

Information bulletin n° 1
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13 February 2009

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Australian Red Cross has determined that external assistance is not required, and therefore is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.

Australian Red Cross reported a severe heatwave and wildfire situation in Victoria on 7 February 2009. As of 12 February 2009, the Australian Red Cross reports that more than 180 people are confirmed dead, and this figure is expected to rise. It also reports that more than 400,000 hectares of land are affected and the fires have also destroyed more than 1,000 homes.



The Australian Prime Minister (blue shirt) visited the Whittlesea relief centre which provides relief assistance to many bushfire survivors. (Australian Red Cross/Rodney Dekker)

The Australian Red Cross responded quickly to the disaster with temporary accommodation, first aid and food. Approximately 400 staff and volunteers have been mobilized and AUD 60 million (CHF 45.47 million or USD 39.14 million or EUR 30.42 million) has been raised to date in response to the disaster. Longer-term recovery planning is already underway, with the Australian Red Cross establishing a strategic team to determine the national society's role in the transition from response to recovery in addition to continued support for the next five to seven days and an assessment of volunteer availability for deployment to relief centres in preparation for future recovery programmes.

[<click here to view map of the affected areas>](#)

The Situation

The heat wave and wildfire situation in Victoria has escalated. As of 12 February, Yea and Murrindingi are now on alert as the Western and Eastern side of the Black Range continues to experience active fronts and fire activity due to Southerly winds. The communities of Acheron, Cathedral Lane, Thornton - Taggerty Road, Bulls Lane, Connellys Creek, Crystal Creek, Scrubby Creek and Native Dog Creek could be affected and have been advised to be vigilant.

Up to 20 fires are still burning across the state, with firefighters working hard to construct containment lines around the blazes. Fires in Beechworth, the Healesville area and Bunyip are cause for concern. However, the situation is changing hour by hour.

A Royal Commission into the fires has been announced, and the Chief Commissioner of Police has been appointed to head the Victoria Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

In response to the disaster, Australian Red Cross has activated catering, first aid, registration and personal support volunteers. A total of 9,454 people have registered with Australian Red Cross in person with 1,965 beneficiaries on 11 February itself.

Australian Red Cross currently has approximately 400 personnel and volunteers working in 20 evacuation centres and offices in Victoria in the response phase providing temporary accommodation, food and first aid. Up to 5,200 first aid treatments have been undertaken, and tens of thousands of meals have been served, with approximately 3,500 meals served on 11 February itself.

To date, Australian Red Cross has recruited up to 380 spontaneous volunteers with another 1,200 registering their interest.

A national inquiry centre has also been established, comprising of Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory, as well as a corporate facility in Richmond, Victoria. Up to 15,002 inquiries have been taken to date, with 3,672 inquiries received on 11 February itself, from which 1,972 matches have occurred.

A public appeal has been launched nationwide, in conjunction with the State Government of Victoria. Unprecedented support for this appeal has seen AUD 60 million (CHF 45.47 million or USD 39.14 million or EUR 30.42 million), donated so far.

A strategic planning team is developing the Red Cross role in longer-term recovery and has proposed immediate actions, including continued support for the next five to seven days and an assessment of volunteer availability for deployment to relief centres in preparation for future recovery programmes. The team will also continue to monitor volunteer shift rotations and management as fatigue, dehydration and stress become operational concerns especially for support services. The strategic planning team will also continue to plan strategies for transition into recovery as the wildfires come under control.

The New Zealand Red Cross and British Red Cross have also launched separate appeals for the Victorian Bushfire fund.

Communications/Media

State, national and international media interest has been persistent and continuous throughout the course of the incident thus far. The chief executive officer, director of services and international operations Victorian division executive director, state manager emergency services and the communications department have responded to these media requests.

The Red Cross relief effort and appeal continue to receive strong coverage in national media, with 2,255 mentions from 7 February to the morning of 12 February.

Following warnings that the public should beware of bogus fundraising scams, many announcers and spokespeople are urging people to donate only through trusted sources, including the Red Cross appeal line and website.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

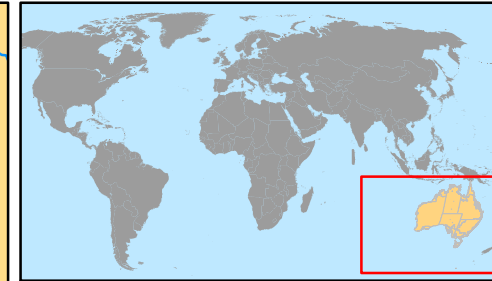
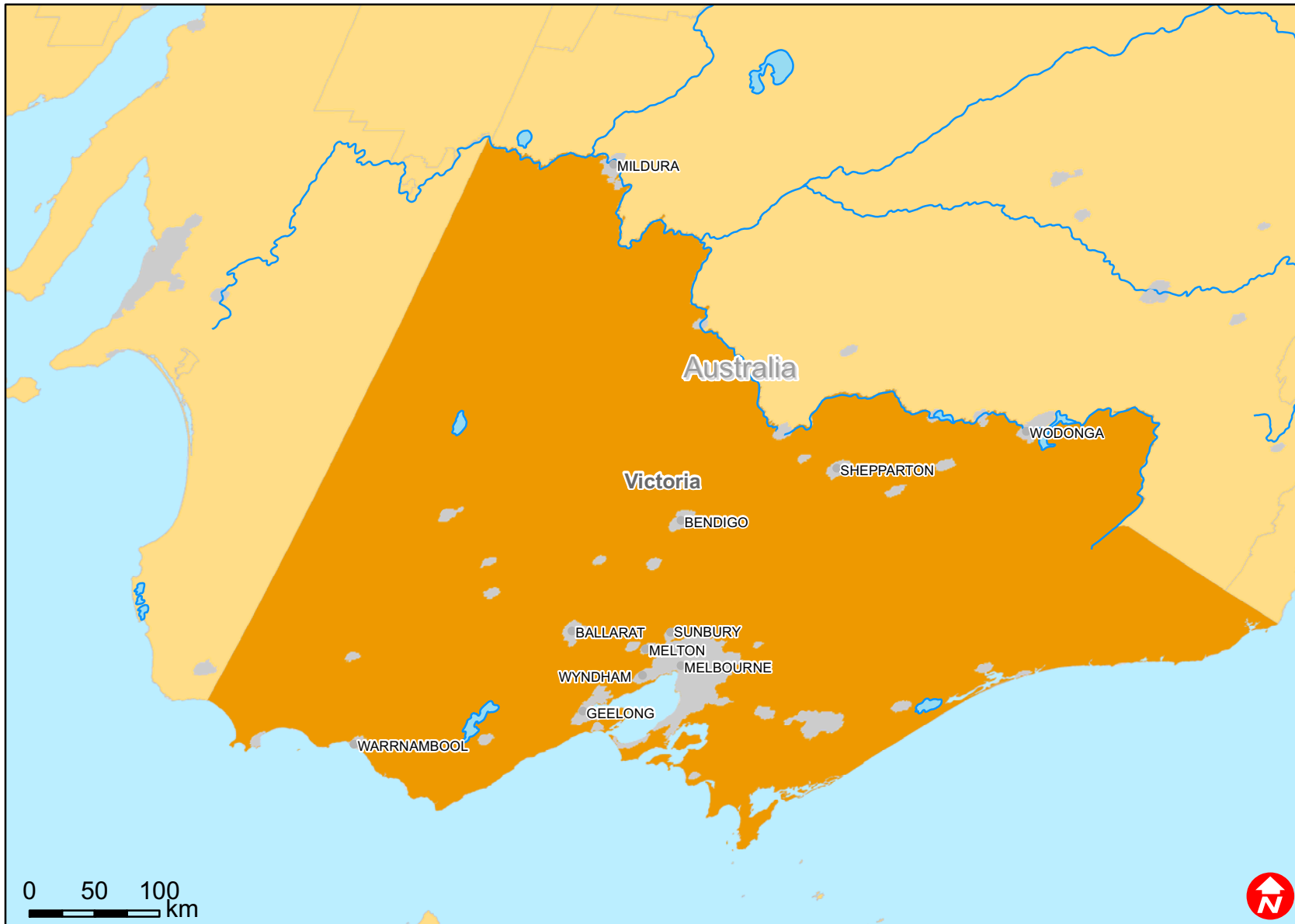
For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- Australia Red Cross Society: John Richardson (National Coordinator-Strategic Development Emergency Services), email: jfrichardson@redcross.org.au or natinfo@redcross.org.au , phone +61 3 93451800
- Pacific regional office in Suva, Fiji:
 - Frank Kennedy (head of regional office), email: frank.kennedy@ifrc.org, phone: +679 3311855, fax: +679 3311406
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- Asia Pacific Zone office in Malaysia:
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 - Heikki Väättäminen (disaster response delegate), email: heikki.vaataminen@ifrc.org; phone: + 60 3 9207 5729, mobile: +60 12 230 7895
 - Jeremy Francis (regional logistics coordinator), email: jeremy.francis@ifrc.org, mobile: +60 12 298 9752, fax: +60 3 2168 8573
 - Penny Elghady (resource mobilization and PMER coordinator), email: penny.elghady@ifrc.org, phone: +60 3 9207 5771. Please send all funding pledges to zonerm.asiapacific@ifrc.org.

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