

Timber Communities Australia Volunteers Help Rebuild Fire Ravaged Community

The locality of Traralgon South in Victoria's Latrobe Valley was one of the hardest hit in the February bushfires, resulting in the loss of eleven lives and more than 180 homes. The farming and lifestyle communities of Callignee and Koornalla were almost completely destroyed as well as many homes and properties around the Traralgon South township.

TCA's Tasmanian State Manager Barry Chipman responded to requests from members to assist in Victoria in anyway possible. Victorian board member Helen Hoppner had offered accommodation at her family's hotel in Cowwarr, some 40 minutes away. Cowwarr had suffered badly from bushfires in December 2006.

South East Regional Manager Trevor Brown looked at various options where TCA members could assist bushfire victims. The most obvious need that could be readily addressed was refencing rural properties. Helen Hoppner's offer and the fact that the Traralgon South (or Churchill as it was known) fire had received little media coverage and the needs of victims was perceived to have been overlooked made the decision to concentrate volunteer efforts in the Latrobe Valley.

When news of TCA's intentions became widely known support from Tasmania steamrolled with companies such as Gaffney's Machinery, Toll Shipping, TT Line and Mannway Logistics all assisting in getting the first crew, their vehicles and equipment to Victoria.

Rotary in Tasmania also joined in the effort as a partner and since the first crew from Bruny Island arrived in March a further thirteen crews have assisted in reconstructing more than 120 kilometres of fences. More than 80 volunteers have enjoyed the hospitality of the appreciative Traralgon South community, the Hazelwood and Traralgon Rotary Clubs and, of course, the Cricket Club Hotel at Cowwarr.

The Bruny Island TCA branch returned for a second working stint in May and many others have also done repeat journeys.

While winter is starting to slow down the program, we are committed to keep it going through the spring to help the fire victims get their lives to some form of normality.

Should you and a group of friends wish to participate in this fulfilling volunteer program please contact Trevor Brown on 0428 489 362 or email trevor.brown@tca.org.au for more details.