

## **FIRES ARE GONE, BUT SO ARE THE YARRA VALLEY'S FENCES**

While Timber Communities Australia is justifiably proud of its volunteers who have undertaken the Herculean task of refencing properties in the Traralgon South area, the situation in the Yarra Valley looks grim for fire affected farmers.

The famed wine and beef cattle district is suffering from a discontinuation of volunteers compounded by a shortage of skills. This is evident from the lack of progress made in refencing properties, where skilled contractors are at a premium and most volunteers appear to only be available on weekends.

As well meaning and intentioned as everybody has been, the big jobs just are not getting done. Contributing to this is the red-tape that means well-structured farming operations are ineligible for assistance from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund.

All levels of government are playing down the travesty that precludes the Red Cross-operated fund from making payments to partnerships, companies and trusts which is the method which most commercial farming entities operate under.

Donors to the appeal (which raised more than \$330 million) would have been unaware of this tax legality at the time. The only payment available to farmers is \$5,000 for repair or replacement of lost or damaged assets. However, they are ineligible for this payment if they had received a Clean Up and Restoration Grant.

This is where Yarra Valley, and farmers from other districts, differ from those TCA has been assisting at Traralgon South. In Gippsland, all households received a cash payment within a few days courtesy of the Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund which has undoubtedly assisted farmers in getting their fencing rehabilitation underway.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund's website claims that more than \$230 million has been allocated to bushfire victims but does indicate what its intentions are for remaining funds.

Timber Communities Australia's Tasmanian members have led the way in assisting property owners at Traralgon South, Callignee and Koornalla. Perhaps now it is time for other members to form groups, gather up equipment and give Yarra Valley farmers our assistance.

If you think you can help, please ring Trevor Brown on (03) 5962 1874.