

NSW taskforce to assist in Victorian bushfire emergency



NSW Premier Nathan Rees today announced the deployment of a major taskforce to assist Victorian authorities facing the worst bushfires in the State's history. "We have all woken up this morning to the terrible news of the tragedy that has affected so many families in Victoria," Mr Rees said. "Our thoughts and condolences go to all those who have lost loved ones and their homes and possessions in this terrible firestorm.

"We are deploying firefighters and other specialist personnel from the Rural Fire Service (RFS), NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB), NSW Police Force and NSW Ambulance Service to assist in the response to this emergency.

"NSW and Victoria have a proud history of going to each other's aid in times of great need and we will provide whatever resources the Victorian emergency services require as swiftly as possible."

Mr Rees said the NSW Government was invoking the State's Employment Protection Provisions to safeguard emergency services volunteers taking part in operations in both NSW and Victoria from discrimination in their workplaces.

Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said strike teams of firefighters were being deployed from both the RFS and NSWFB.

"The first of more than 250 firefighters and 50 tankers in 10 strike teams from the two NSW fire agencies have already arrived in Victoria," Mr Whan said.

"These include more than 200 firefighters and 40 tankers in eight teams from the RFS and another 10 tankers and 50 officers in two teams from the Fire Brigades.

"We anticipate that in addition to these strike teams, an extra 20 lightweight striker units may be required to assist with operations in inaccessible terrain.

"We have also offered 25 specialist Urban Search and Rescue personnel from the Fire Brigades to assist with search activities and damage assessment.

"NSW firefighters are among the most respected in the world because of their expertise, training and dedication and we are always ready to share these resources with other states, when required."

Mr Rees said the NSW Police Force was providing assistance to Victorian Police following the deaths as a result of the bushfires.

"A team of nine NSW Police officers, trained in Disaster Victim Identification, have been tasked to assist their Victorian colleagues.

"Five paramedics from the NSW Ambulance Service are already on site with another four on standby to accompany any Fire Brigades USAR personnel who may be deployed."

Mr Rees said more than 500 firefighters and 40 aircraft were fighting more than 50 bushfires still burning around NSW.

"The majority of these fires are contained or controlled, with five fires still active on the Central Coast, Hunter Valley and Far South Coast.

"NSW has been preparing for the forecast hot weather all week and have staged resources around the State accordingly."



NEW COMMUTER CAR PARK FOR WOLLONGONG

Premier Nathan Rees announced a new commuter car park will be built at Wollongong rail station.

The Premier, joined by Transport Minister David Campbell and Wollongong MP Noreen Hay, visited Wollongong station to make the announcement.

"This upgrade to Wollongong station parking comes as part of the Government's \$56 million Commuter Car Park program announced in last year's Mini-Budget," Mr Rees said.

"When the program was announced, Noreen and the local community put forward a strong case outlining why Wollongong should be one of the recipients of the extra car parks.

"I am pleased to announce that the number of parking spaces at Wollongong station will more than double by the end of 2010, with an estimated 250 additional spaces to be built."

Mr Campbell said the Government will undertake a detailed investigation of potential sites to determine the scope of works before tenders are called for construction.

"Work on finding a suitable site and preparing an application for project approval will start straight away, with construction expected to begin later this year," Mr Campbell said.

"It is expected that people will be able to use the car park in late 2010."

Member for Wollongong Noreen Hay welcomed the announcement and said it would benefit the local community.

"The announcement provides the local community with a new facility that addresses current and future commuter car parking at one of New South Wales's busiest stations," Ms Hay said.

"The new car park spaces will alleviate existing congestion and enable more people to access public transport services.

"The Premier and Transport Minister have listened to the community and this new car park will be delivered."

Mr Campbell said this is another example of the Rees Government's commitment to providing greater services and facilities for rail commuters.

New body to regulate migration agents

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, today announced the establishment of a new body to regulate migration agents after a review found dissatisfaction among consumers and potential conflicts of interest under the current arrangements.

Senator Evans said that from July 1, the new Office of Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA) will undertake the regulatory functions which have been operated under statutory self-regulation by the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) since 1998.

"The current arrangement has the industry association managing the regulatory function of its own members – which includes the handling of complaints – and this has caused serious concerns among consumers and stakeholders," Senator Evans said.

The 2007-08 Review of Statutory Self-Regulation of the Migration Advice Profession, which was undertaken to

assess the effectiveness of the regulatory scheme, recommended that the government consider establishing a regulatory body separate from the MIA to address the concerns.

"Unprofessional, incompetent or unethical behaviour by migration agents affects the lives of consumers, challenges the integrity of Australia's visa program and brings the entire profession of more than 3700 migration agents into disrepute," Senator Evans said.

"It is therefore in the consumers', the government's and the profession's collective interests to address the serious concerns raised in this review.

"As migration decisions are life-changing and involve considerable financial and emotional investments on behalf of prospective migrants, it is important they have confidence in the professionalism and integrity of their migration agent.

"The changes we are making will provide greater confidence to the con-

sumers of migration advice services and remove concerns about potential conflicts of interest."

The new MARA will be supported by an advisory board, which will include a nominee from the MIA, a nominee from the Law Council of Australia, a consumer representative and a community representative. The office will receive administrative support from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Senator Evans said that the establishment of the new body is the first step in the implementation of a range of recommendations made in the review.

The 2007-08 Review of Statutory Self-Regulation of the Migration Advice Profession is available at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/general/review2008-report.htm>

*Media release Senator Chris Evans
Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Immigration and
Citizenship*