Effective Communication – Bushfire and Communities: Victoria and Tasmania

Prof Peter Fairbrother, Dr Susan Chaplin, Dr Richard Phillips, Dr Keith Toh
Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work, RMIT University, Melbourne

AIMS

To study 3 communities in each of Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and New South Wales by:

- Examining community awareness & preparedness for bushfires
- Exploring community organisation and mobilisation
- Detailing the different social groupings in selected communities

Selection criteria for case studies

- A traditional farming/rural community
- A tree change/sea change/tourism community
- A rural/urban interface community

All communities will be:

- In a designated bushfire vulnerable areas
- Have a local fire authority
- Have access to bushfire education
- Have a significant population (at least 750 households or more).

PROGRESS

Interviews have been conducted in the Victorian and Tasmanian communities.

St Arnaud (VIC) and Scottsdale-Derby (TAS)
 - Tradition farming/rural community

Anglesea (VIC) and St Helens (TAS)
 - Sea change/tourism community

Selby-Belgrave (VIC) and Kingston (TAS)
 - Rural/urban interface communityc

Kingston, Tasmania

THEMES

1. Community

"we're losing our community, the communities we used to have" (St Arnaud)

We fell in love with the place and that was it. Plus the price was right for the property. We wanted a smaller lifestyle" (Scottsdale-Derby)

"No, I don't think there is a real sense of community, mainly because we've got a fairly high transient population" (ST Helens)

•**Community engagement**
"We have the most amazing grapevine in the hills … People look out for people here" (Selby-Belgrave)

•**Community tensions**
"We seem to have two different mentalities living up here" (Selby-Belgrave)

"You've got to get the greenies of our backs, so that we can cut our trees down" (Scottsdale-Derby)

2. Preparedness

"I probably didn't think it was relevant because we I feel like I live in the city" (Kingston)

"we're actually going to move in a year or so, but one of the reasons is because I feel that we moved there because I've always wanted to live in the bush … and we're destroying it through having to prepare for bushfire" (Kingston)

•**Triggers to leave**
"we would rely on other people to make those decisions (to leave) fir us, if it became absolutely critical" (Scottsdale-Derby)

"Smoke coming over the hill" (Scottsdale-Derby)

•**Tourists and warnings**
"they recently had a fire warning in Anglesea and some tourists [thought] it was a tsunami warning and moved into the bushland" (Anglesea)

"They're down here on holiday – the last thing they want to think of is a bushfire. It's not their primary residence. It's their holiday home. Insurance will take care of that" (Anglesea)

3. Communication

"the more personal and the more local you can make it, the more likely it is to happen [that people will be prepared]" (Selby-Belgrave)

"It tends to be more personal in the bush. Everyone knows who you are so they'll come up and seek information" (St Arnaud)

"We've had five [information packs] in our house. I hope somebody opens one. I put them on the kitchen table … but there still in their plastic" (Anglesea)

4. Shared responsibility

"I think everyone's got a responsibility to their neighbours and other people. If there was an old lady living next door and she was stuck … you wouldn't leave her" (St Arnaud)"

"preparedness it's a whole of community response. It's not just about the CFA … or the council. It's actually everybody doing their bit" (Selby-Belgrave)

5. Role of local government

"the local government and state government and federal government have to realise that they have got to be giving the councils more funds … [we] have only such a small community you have got a small amount of rate payers, the council can't afford to do what needs to be done." (St Helens)

St. Helens, Tasmania