

# SAVED

## BY DSE FOREST FIREFIGHTERS



## THANK YOU TO VICTORIA'S FIREFIGHTERS

On behalf of The Australian Workers' Union in Victoria, I would like to thank our specialist Forest Firefighters for battling this State's worst ever bushfire emergency.

I am sure that all Victorians who have had their lives, property or beautiful bushlands saved by the Forest Firefighters of the Department of Sustainability and Energy will join me in paying tribute to their heroic achievements that were well beyond the call of duty.

The highly skilled work of Victoria's Forest Firefighters is not adequately often recognised because they work behind the scenes and all year round in preventing, controlling and extinguishing bushfires.

Unfortunately this lack of recognition means that problems affecting the safety, equipment, training and staffing of our Forest Firefighters are going unnoticed. These elite crews are also the lowest paid firefighters in the State.

Just last week two of our members injured when their tanker rolled over while putting out fires near Eildon – the fourth serious safety incident in recent months.

**So the AWU says thanks to Victoria's Forest Firefighters and joins with them in asking for a new deal to better protect our State from the bushfire menace.**



I am proud to say AWU members across the country have raised money to help victims of the Victorian bushfire tragedy.

We are also proud of the AWU heroes who rose beyond the call of duty to protect the community and their neighbours on Black Saturday.

Our union is supporting AWU members and their families who lost homes and possessions to the fires, giving a \$5000 cash handout to Victorian AWU financial members who lost their houses. We've asked financial members who need help to contact the union.

I was stunned to hear about members who were out there fighting the fires while on the home front they lost all their possessions during the onslaught.

We too often glibly talk about heroes – but the stuff our members at the Department of Sustainability and Environment did during the fires was ridgy-didge heroic.



Yours in Unity

Cesar Melhem  
Victorian State Secretary  
The Australian Workers' Union



Yours in Unity

Paul Howes  
National Secretary  
The Australian Workers' Union

## BLACK SATURDAY'S NEGLECTED SAVIOURS



Specialist Forest Firefighter Rod Lynn, who is Work Centre Coordinator for the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Powelltown Depot, has been managing field staff throughout Victoria's bushfire emergency.

Rod tells how some of his workmates saved members of the public who were trapped in the deadly Kinglake blaze on Black Saturday:

*"Some of our members were out on patrol closing off parks because of Black Saturday when they came across some*

*members of the public – including some campers in the forest."*

*"They looked at trying to get them out one way, but that was closed. They then tried to get them out another way but that had just been blocked off as well."*

*"So the only way they could see to protect everyone was to hop in the river. So they gathered together all the members of the public, some of them women and children, and escorted them into the river."*

***"The hardest part in a situation like that, when you've got fire all around you, is when you have women and children with you. As a firefighter, it gives you that extra incentive to make sure you survive to protect them."***

*"If there hadn't been any of our members there, I would hate to have seen what the outcome could have been."*

## RIVER HERO LOST HIS OWN HOME!

Rod Lynn says one of the Forest Firefighters who helped in the river rescue at Kinglake (see above) had his own house destroyed by the onslaught on Black Saturday.

*"One of our blokes from the Toolangi Depot who was in the river with the campers lost his own home at Kinglake at the same time."*

*"I spoke to the young bloke and he's a bit devastated because he'd put a lot of effort into being meticulous in building the home and making sure everything was done nicely. He'd only recently finished his home and now it's all burnt."*

*"When they were in the river they were just focusing on the women and kids to make sure they were safe and the fire went over the top of them."*

*"Communications were jammed in many areas on the day and they were concentrating on what they had to do at the time, and that was to look after themselves, their colleagues and the members of the public who were trapped."*

## SAFETY REVIEW NEEDED FOR FOREST FIREFIGHTERS

Victoria's catastrophic 2009 bushfire season killed more than 200 people and injured even more, including some 56 Forest Firefighters employed by the Department of Sustainability and Energy.

Serious injuries range from one Forest Firefighter who was paralysed by a falling tree late last year, to head and back injuries sustained by a Firefighter whose water tanker rolled over in early March.

The DSE Forest Firefighters and The Australian Workers' Union have proposed that the Department join with the AWU to conduct a thorough safety review of current fire management systems.

Such a review should examine equipment standards, training and staffing issues to improve safety outcomes.

The AWU will not rest until Victoria's Forest Firefighters have the best possible conditions so they can continue protecting the whole community with the minimum potential risk.

