

Annual Report for CRC Extension Projects

2011

Program:	Communicating Risk		
Project Title	Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire		
Project Leader	Prof Peter Fairbrother	Lead End User	John Schauble
Researchers	Dr Richard Phillips	Dr Sue Chaplin	
	Dr Keith Toh	Dr Bernard Mees	
	Dr Meagan Tyler	Dr Yoko Akama	
	Prof John Fein	Alison Hart	
	Julie Stratford		
Research Assistants	Geoff Berry	Ben Reynolds	
PhD Students	Peter Nightscales	Andrew Hamilton	
	David Barton	Marco De Sisto	

Project Outline

The project aims to assess the most effective ways for local people to learn about bushfires and bushfire preparation and so manage their risk more effectively. Working across four states (Vic, Nsw, WA and Tas) and a variety of different localities, it will identify appropriate communication strategies, preparedness education programs, messages and delivery modes that enable local people to manage their bushfire risk more effectively. An outcome of this project will be to increase community resilience to bushfires by shaping these strategies and programs to increase bushfire preparedness. The project will also generate critical knowledge and theory of effective strategies and options for communication in bushfire risk communities.

The project focuses on the intersection between community, agencies and organisations in relation to bushfire communication. In this context, 'communications' includes TV and radio announcements, pamphlets, booklets, DVDs, information sessions, community education programs among others. The project is particularly interested in community networks and how they may facilitate understanding of and response to these communications.

Key Activities for the Period (Project Leader)

Key activities undertaken by members of the “Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire” project over the past year have included:

- Setting up the project
- Establishing processes and procedures
- Appointment and integration of new staff
- The establishment of several PhD projects
- The planning and completion of major community case studies, interviews and focus groups
- The planning and completion of state-level government and fire agency interviews
- The planning and building of a communications “grid” to document and analyse a variety of communication artefacts from governments and fire agencies
- Undertaking further research in Western Australia
- The establishment of a joint project based in Tasmania
- The preparation and production of a number of publications and conference papers

SETTING UP THE PROJECT AND ESTABLISHING PROCEDURES

The “Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire” project proposal was finalised in May 2010 and the project official began on the 1st of July 2011.

The research staff – Professor Peter Fairbrother, Dr Keith Toh, Alison Hart, Julie Stratford, Professor John Fien, Dr Bernard Mees, Dr Yoko Akama and Dr Meagan Tyler – established the initial operating procedures and planning for the project.

A decision was taken to begin research in Victoria as several researchers had greater experience in this area as a result of prior work on bushfires and Community Fireguard. Although this previous work provided insights for the new project, it was a different and quite distinct piece of research.

One of the first actions taken was to establish ethics approval for the fieldwork (primarily community and state-level interviews and focus groups). After the team received ethics approval, three case studies in Victoria (St Arnaud, , Anglesea and Selby / Belgrave) were organised and conducted, in addition to state-level agency and government interviews.

This initial period was also used develop interview schedules for further fieldwork and research in New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania as well as establishing a relationship with our lead end-user John Shauble from the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner in Victoria. The team also established connections with other CRC projects and end-users, including convening meetings of the Bushfire Researchers’ Network which have allowed for collaboration and regular research exchange in Melbourne (see “Conferences and Meetings” for further information).

In February 2011, the contracts for Alison Hart and Julie Stratford came to an end and both researchers subsequently took up positions elsewhere. New research positions were advertised in February and after a rigorous and competitive interview process new appointments were made in April 2011.

NEW STAFF AND PHD PROJECTS

The “Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire” project now comprises a dynamic group of researchers with differing academic backgrounds, including: education, historical studies, sociology, political science, public health, information systems and communications. Currently, the project includes nine researchers and four PhD students.

Dr Sue Chaplin and Dr Richard Phillips were appointed as Research Officers to the project in April, 2011. Sue holds a PhD from La Trobe University and has a research background in Public Policy and Public Health. Richard holds a PhD from Edinburgh University and has a research background in Public Health and Community Capacity Building.

Ben Reynolds and Geoff Berry were appointed as Research Assistants to the project in June, 2011. Ben is conducting an international comparison of approaches to bushfire preparedness in the USA, Australia and Greece while Geoff is undertaking a comparison of the 1939 and 2009 Bushfire Royal Commissions in Victoria.

Also, after an appointment to School of Social Sciences and Psychology at Victoria University (VU) in December 2010, Dr Meagan Tyler was able to re-join the project in August 2011, on secondment from VU. She is based in the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work 3-days a week and has a particular interest in researching gender and bushfire.

Peter Nightscales, Andrew Hamilton, David Barton and Marco DeSisto also joined the project this year as PhD students. Peter Nightscales is looking at the relationship between the CFA and communities. Andrew Hamilton is analysing the CFA as an organisation. David Barton is exploring residents’ experiences of the Black Saturday fires in Marysville and Marco DeSisto's is investigating the complex interactions in bushfire risk management.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS

The community case studies and interviews have now been completed for both Victoria and Tasmania. A total of 132 community-based interviews have been conducted at this stage. In Victoria the fieldwork has involved interviews and ethnographic data collection in St Arnaud, in the Grampians region, Anglesea on the southern coast and Selby / Belgrave at the urban-rural interface of Melbourne’s east. In Tasmania the localities involved are Scottsdale, north of Launceston, St Helens on the northern port of the east coast and Kingston which is just south of Hobart. The case studies and interviews for New South Wales are underway and have been completed in Ku-ring-gai, just north of Sydney, and are planned for Deniliquin and Shoalhaven. Planning for the fieldwork in Western Australia is ongoing.

Several case study reports have been written-up following the data collection process. Each participant, and each local council involved will receive copies of these reports.

STATE-LEVEL INTERVIEWS

Between April and July 2011, Dr Richard Phillips conducted a total of 23 interviews across Western Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales with members of state-level fire agencies and government departments. Interviewees included a range of men and women involved in policy-making, bushfire management, media and communications, bushfire safety and education and bushfire response. The NSW interviews are ongoing.

COMMUNICATIONS GRID

Dr Keith Toh has lead work on the development of a communications grid which will document a variety of forms of information and communication, predominantly from fire-agencies, about bushfire available in all Australian states. This involves the collection, recording and management of information in a variety of forms including electronic (e.g. websites, DVDs), hard-copy (e.g. pamphlets and posters) and live (e.g. public speeches). At this stage the grid is being populated with information and communication artefacts from each state (Victoria is completed). After the data collection stage is completed a tagging system will be designed (this will include input from end users) and implemented so that the artefacts can be sorted and analysed.

The aim is to use turn the grid into a “workbench” or data management system that will allow other researchers and end users to access the information and compare communication strategies about bushfire across Australia. This tool should prove invaluable to many bushfire researchers and hopefully will work to improve the current situation where most agencies and government departments experience only very limited and ad hoc collaboration across state borders. It should also help agencies pool and share ideas in regard to bushfire communication as well as aiding in the reduction of message duplication.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In February this year, Dr Meagan Tyler was invited to assist with the research development and data collection of the “Human Behaviour Under Stress” CRC project. This involved the development of interview questions and carrying out community-based interviews in the Lake Clifton area of Western Australia, which had recently experienced a bushfire. As a result of this collaboration the “Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire” team have secured ethics approval to analyse the data collected during this field-work.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IN TASMANIA

In September this year, while conducting community-based interviews, Dr Susan Chaplin began discussions with the Huon Valley Council in Tasmania to collaborate on the development of an Innovation Demonstration Project for “Facilitating Community Adaptation to Bushfire Risk as a Result of Climate Change”. As a result of these discussions, the Huon Valley Council (through the Southern Tasmanian Councils Association) has provided \$20,000 of funding to RMIT through the Bushfire CRC. This project will primarily involve the development of a bushfire adaptation tool kit by RMIT researchers in collaboration with member of the Council.

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

Professor Peter Fairbrother, Dr Sue Chaplin, Dr Richard Phillips and Dr Keith Toh all attended the AFAC conference in Sydney this August and presented three posters detailing the team’s latest research and preliminary findings. The presentations included: “State-level initial findings: Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia”. “Community Findings from Victoria and Tasmania” and “Bushfire Communications Schema: Tracking sources, modes and audiences”. These were very well received and the team made significant contacts with other bushfire and emergency management researchers.

Members of the “Effective Communication: Communities and Bushfire” team have also convened a special panel on sociological approaches to bushfire at The Australian Sociological Association conference, due to be held in Newcastle in early December. Professor Peter Fairbrother, Dr

Meagan Tyler, Dr Richard Phillips and Dr Susan Chaplin have all written papers for the conference and the panel will also include a collaboration with CRC researcher Dr Blythe McLennan, from the "Community Expectations: Sharing Responsibility" project.

Professor John Fein presented a paper titled: "Breaching the Urban Contract: Dividing walls into the resilient city at the International Conference on Building Resilience: Interdisciplinary approaches to disaster risk reduction and the development of sustainable communities, in Sri Lanka in late July. This paper outlined John's research into resilience and recovery in post-disaster contexts.

Several of the researchers based in the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work also attended the CRC Bushfire Research Advisory Forum, held in Canberra in October to present the latest research findings from the project and provide an overview of research progress to date.

In addition, the new research team has convened several meetings of the Bushfire Researchers' Network. A meeting now occurs approximately once every two months and often includes a seminar for a CRC researcher to present and discuss their recent work. The meetings also allow for collaboration between the various CRC projects based in Melbourne and between researchers and end users.

PUBLICATIONS

Four publications have been submitted to the CRC for approval: two discussion papers and two Firenotes. For further details, please see chart below. In addition to this, a paper on community and a paper on gender have been submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Further publications have also been planned, including a series of discussion papers on the state and power, the urban-rural interface, education, resilience and knowledge management. It is anticipated that these discussion papers will also be published as working papers through the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work and will form the basis of more peer-reviewed journal articles.

Project Status and Emerging Risks and Opportunities (Project Leader)

A significant amount has been achieved this year, especially given the delays caused by a change in project staff. The project proceeds in a satisfactory way and the new research staff have settled in well. The interviews and other fieldwork are continuing on schedule and the publications record is becoming established. Further literature reviews / discussion papers are now underway, which will lead to journal article publications and the team will contribute to several conferences in the coming months.

User Engagement for the Period (Lead End User)

While the project has taken a little longer than anticipated to get underway, it is now progressing in apace and in a satisfactory manner. Although the deliverables to this point have been less evident than might have been hoped, a strong data gathering and modelling basis for the rest of the project has been established. Good interaction with other CRC research groups has also been established. The administrative arrangements in relation to the End User have been altered to reflect the funding source. The project is now aligned to the Fire Services Commissioner (Victoria) rather than the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner.

Publications and reports submitted

Date	Author/s and Titles
August 2011	Phillips, R. Mees, B., Chaplin, S. Fairbrother, P. Toh, K. and Tyler, M. Discussion Paper 1 - <i>The Question of "Community": International debates and implications for bushfire research and policy in Australia.</i>
September 2011	Phillips, R. Mees, B., Chaplin, S. Fairbrother, P. Toh, K. and Tyler, M. Firenote - <i>What is Community? Debates and implications for bushfire policy.</i>
September 2011	Tyler, M., Fairbrother, P., Chaplin, S., Mees, B., Phillips, R. and Toh, K. Discussion Paper 2 - <i>Gender Matters: Applying a gendered analysis to bushfire research in Australia</i>
September 2011	Tyler, M., Fairbrother, P., Phillips, R. Firenote - <i>Gender and Bushfire: Insights from international research on women and disaster</i>