



2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

MEDIA RELEASE

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ROYAL COMMISSION REACHES INTERIM STAGE

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission today completed the first block of public hearings into the Black Saturday bushfires.

The Commission will now prepare its Interim Report which will be delivered to the Governor of Victoria on 17 August.

Three weeks of public hearings were held initially in the County Court and the Commission then moved to its new Hearing Room at 222 Exhibition Street in the Melbourne CBD for a further five weeks of hearings.

A total of 87 witnesses, including 29 lay witnesses, have given evidence during 35 days of public hearings.

“The primary focus of this block of hearings was on dealing with issues to give us a better understanding of what happened on the seventh of February and to use this knowledge to help create a safer environment for Victorians before the next fire season,” said the Chair, Commissioner Bernard Teague.

The Interim Report’s recommendations to the State Government will deal with some of the lessons learnt regarding the efficiency of fire-fighting operations; aspects of the “stay or go” policy and warning systems.

Commissioner Susan Pascoe said she had been moved and inspired by the stories of courage and heroism that had emerged from the hearings and she particularly praised the efforts of emergency service personnel.

“We should never forget the efforts of many CFA volunteers, some of whom left their own homes at risk to go and fight fires on that terrible day,” she said. “There were also police officers, and other members of the community, who showed remarkable courage.”

Commissioner Ron McLeod praised the lay witnesses who had given evidence at the hearings. “It took great courage for some of these people to come forward to tell their stories,” he said.

“They provided us with that powerful human element that is such an important consideration for us to keep in mind as we form our recommendations.”

The next block of hearings will start on 24 August and the Commission’s Final Report is due to be completed in July next year.