

IMPACT OF BUSHFIRES ON TOURISM AND VISITATION IN ALPINE NATIONAL PARKS



Dale Sanders, Jennifer Laing and Meg Houghton

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General Manager, Communications and Industry Extension or Publishing Manager, info@crctourism.com.au

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SUMMARY

This report begins with a brief summary of the literature that was reviewed for the purposes of informing this study and providing the foundations of the research questions that were developed and subsequently explored during the field interviews. It then outlines the methodology employed and follows this with a description of the findings and discussion of results. The report concludes by developing recommendations for the future management of high risk bushfire regions such as the Victorian Alps.

Objectives of Study

This study had three main objectives, to:

- Explore the impact of bushfires on tourism in Victoria's Alpine National Parks and adjacent areas.
- Examine the profiles and views of visitors choosing whether or not to visit these areas following the most recent period of wildfire in 2006/07, in order to determine changes in visitor patterns and behaviour.
- Investigate the responses of selected tourism operators to identify reactions to the bushfires and subsequent implementation (or not) of crisis management strategies.

Methodology

The approach taken was to conduct a qualitative study of the impact of bushfires on tourism and visitation of Victoria's Alpine National Parks. This involved:

- Secondary data analysis of literature and reports to identify research gaps and develop interview questions.
- Conducting long, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 38 participants (13 operators, 15 actual tourists and 10 potential tourists) to explore some of the key issues relating to impact of bushfires on these different stakeholders. These interviews took place at various alpine locations across Victoria, as well as the Melbourne CBD (in the case of the potential tourists to these locations).
- A content analysis of the data, to uncover themes and meaning.

Key Findings

Tourism operators

- Although none reported direct physical loss, all operators interviewed experienced significant negative impact on their operations.
- Most operators felt that media reporting of fires was negative and did not turn around quickly enough.
- Operators were well-informed about emergency response plans but only half were directly involved in marketing activity post-fire, with many preferring to rely on the assistance of others in disaster recovery.
- Few indicated that they received direct financial assistance from government agencies or local government post-fire.
- Timing of distribution of funds could be reviewed to allow for some funding to be spent on future seasons, rather than all in the season of the disaster.
- Most were generally happy with the performance of government agencies across the board in the wake of the fire, but felt that local government could have been more proactive with assistance.
- Only half of operators saw more frequent bushfires as a strong possibility in the future.
- Despite two major fires in the region over the last five years, there is still little attention being paid to forward recovery planning.

Actual visitors

- Most were regular visitors to the high country and all had strong awareness of the specific location, extent, duration and impact of the 2006/07 bushfires.
- The impacts of the fires are not a barrier to future visitation to the high country but this group has high perceptions of risk associated with bushfires.
- Information about the bushfires has not influenced their decision to travel to this region.

- Visitors indicated a high level of satisfaction with post bushfire alpine experiences.
- Visitors also demonstrated a moderate recall of post bushfire media campaigns.

Potential visitors

- Potential visitors demonstrated a high level of awareness of the 2006/07 bushfires in the Victorian Alpine Region; however they were unsure of the specific locations affected by the bushfires or the duration of the fires.
- This group had a low perception of risk and indicated that the impacts of the fires were not a barrier to future visitation to the high country.
- Information about the bushfires would not influence future decisions to travel to this region.
- This group had no recall of post bushfire media campaigns.

Future Action

Suggested future actions include:

Tourism operators

- Clearer communication to the public when closures of areas and roads are lifted, both by operators and government agencies, in order to maximise the incidence of new bookings or entice those who have cancelled bookings back into the region as quickly as possible.
- More proactive media liaison by both operators and the government agencies in the first few months after the fire, through more frequent and informative media releases, actively seeking visits by media agencies and arranging media events, to facilitate more accurate and positive reporting about recovery post-fire.
- Provision of assistance on the ground in the short-term from a dedicated 'recovery officer' who will advise operators on how best to market their businesses during this period and act as an interface between the emergency services, incident control, Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria, other relevant state government agencies, local government, business associations and the community.
- Forward recovery planning, in addition to emergency planning, should be encouraged amongst operators and assisted by the disaster recovery officer, who could run seminars and workshops and work one on one with local businesses.
- Allocation of a proportion of disaster recovery funding towards improving future seasons, based on the assumption by operators that visitors will be slow to return to the region and may not revisit until the following summer when the perception of risk has passed.

Actual visitors

- Satisfied post bushfire visitors should be used in recovery marketing campaigns to offer testimonials as to their positive experience post-fire.
- Leverage the enthusiasm of satisfied visitors by encouraging them to bring additional visitors with them, such as friends and family, through the use of product inducements.
- Support from relevant government agencies for a coordinated summer festival calendar of events.
- Incorporation of bushfire recovery activities/awareness into regional summer event programs.

Potential visitors

- Provision of more specific place marketing, linking particular destinations to activities or events in order to increase their profile and recall as potential summer tourism destinations.
- More comprehensive and high-profile public declarations by the relevant government agencies that the fires are out and it is safe to visit the regions, preferably using television and the internet.
- Broader marketing of summer festivals and events to potential alpine visitors.
- Development of less negative marketing communication messages post-fire (i.e. 'help us recover') and generation of positive alternatives centering on the quality of the individual visitor experience.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Bushfires are a recurring management issue for Australian parks and their impact on tourism needs to be understood in order to develop appropriate strategic responses. This project explored the impact of bushfires on tourism in Victoria's Alpine National Parks and adjacent areas, and examined the profiles and views of visitors choosing whether or not to visit these areas following the most recent period of wildfire in 2006/07, in order to determine changes in visitor patterns and behaviour. In addition, this project investigated the responses of selected tourism related business operators to identify their reactions to the bushfires and their subsequent implementation (or not) of crisis management strategies. This research, facilitated by researchers from La Trobe and Monash Universities, utilised secondary visitor/tourism data, as well as qualitative data gathered from interviews with visitors and tourism operators in Victoria's Alpine National Parks, including Mt Buller National Park and the Alpine National Park. The research focused on the key tourism mountain villages of Mt Buller, Falls Creek, Mt Hotham and Dinner Plain.

This report begins by providing a brief summary of the literature that was reviewed for the purposes of informing this study and providing the foundations of the research questions that were developed and subsequently explored during the field interviews. It then outlines the methodology employed and follows this with a description of the results. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and develops recommendations for the future management of high risk bushfire regions such as the Victorian Alps.

Although some of the international literature refers to wildfires, the term 'bushfires' is more frequently applied in an Australian context. In this report, we will use the terms 'bushfire' and 'wildfire' interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bushfires are a recurring management issue for Australian parks and their impact on tourism needs to be understood in order to develop appropriate strategic responses. Bushfire or wildfire has been the subject of a variety of studies, both from an Australian and international context. This literature review will begin by describing the importance of tourism to the Australian Alps and in particular the Victorian Alpine Region, followed by a brief outline of impacts of the most recent major bushfires. It will then discuss the more general literature dealing with crises and disasters affecting tourism, to set the context for a study of the impact of wildfire on tourism and visitation in national parks.

The Australian Alps

The Australian Alps stretch across parts of Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory and have biological and geological significance including the highest mountain in Australia (Mt Kosciuszko at 2,228 metres) (Pickering, Harrington & Worboys 2003) as well as popularity as a tourist and recreation destination. According to Pickering, Harrington and Worboys (2003), over 1.5 million people visit the Australian Alps National Parks annually. The aggregate recreation use value of the Australian Alps has been estimated at between \$9 billion and \$190 billion; 'most likely somewhere close to \$40 billion' (Mules, Faulks, Stoeckl & Cegielski 2005).

It is acknowledged that protected area agencies involved in the management of the Australian Alps 'have a dual mandate to maintain the natural and the cultural heritage values of protected areas while facilitating public enjoyment of these areas' (Pickering, Harrington & Worboys 2003: 247-248). Maintaining visitor numbers is important in these regions, not just for economic reasons but also the social/health benefits of getting people into natural areas and appreciating nature/wilderness, as evidenced by Parks Victoria's Healthy Parks Healthy People campaign (Parks Victoria 2007a). There is also the educative value of spending time in protected areas, with exposure to nature and interpretation raising consciousness about the need for conservation/protecting the environment.

The Victorian Alpine Region

The Victorian protected areas included within the Australian Alps National Parks encompass 829,750 hectares (Jacobs & Anderson 2007) and economic impact of visitors to the Victorian Alps based on Gross State Product (GSP) has been estimated at \$145.02 million, with 29% (\$42.06 million) occurring in summer (Mules et al. 2005). The Victorian Alps experience a diversity of recreation activities, based on the season in question. Winter activities include skiing and snowboarding, while summer recreation covers a wider gamut of activities (both active and passive) across a broader number of locations (Pickering, Harrington & Worboys 2003) including bushwalking or hiking, fishing, camping, picnicking, horse riding, photography and mountain bike riding.

Motivations for visiting Victorian mountain areas during summer have been explored by Thomas, Triandos and Russell (2005). They found that people visited the Mt Buffalo region during summer largely to enjoy nature and for relaxation. Pull factors included the peacefulness and uniqueness of the setting. Barriers to a summer visit however included a perception of lack of activities/facilities/amenities available to tourists.

The level of snow cover in winter has been a concern for some years, potentially due to climate change (Thomas, Triandos & Russell 2005) and there is a growing focus on the summer season by the tourism industry, building on increased summer tourism in the Australian Alps National Parks over the past 20 years (Hill & Pickering 2002) and the fact that some of these destinations need business during these months to survive (Thomas, Triandos & Russell 2005). Climate change is also having an effect on the incidence of wildfires experienced in Australia and this increase in the number and severity of fires appears to be having a negative effect on visitor levels to Australian protected areas in the wake of some of these fires, including the Alpine Regions.

Bushfires in the Australian Alps

Bushfires are not a new phenomenon in the Australian Alps; however, in recent years, major fires have been occurring more often. According to Ingle (2007:2-3), 'Prior to 2003, the last major fire [in the Victorian Alpine Region] occurred in 1939 over 64 years ago and affected a different generation whereas the 2006/07 bushfires happened while vegetation and businesses were still recovering from the previous bushfires and the resultant perception of risk four years earlier'. This increased frequency has placed more pressure on both the region's fragile ecosystem and the local tourism industry which has been trying to increase summer visitation for the reasons outlined above. During the past five years there have been two significant outbreaks of major bushfires in the Australian Alps and high country, causing severe damage and lasting impacts on residents, tourism operators and visitors.

In 2003, fires ignited by lightning in January burnt for more than seven weeks across an estimated 1.73 million hectares through the Australian Alps including 1.2 million hectares in Victoria (Parks Victoria 2005). In Victoria, no lives were lost as a direct result of these fires; however, around 75,000 hectares of farmland, 41 houses, 200 other buildings, 3,000km of fencing and 110,000 head of stock were destroyed (Department of Sustainability and the Environment (DSE) 2008). The 2006/07 fires were equally devastating. According to Parks Victoria and the DSE, the fires during the summer of 2006/07, lasting for 69 days, were some of the worst on record, burning 'over 1.1 million hectares or almost 5% of Victoria and 15% of the state's total area of public land' (Parks Victoria & DSE 2007: 6). The effect on tourism was equally devastating. Cancelled bookings and reduced visitation led to 'millions of dollars of revenue' being lost, with 'a significant flow on effect with lost revenue to other businesses, particularly in the retail sector' (Parks Victoria & DSE 2007: 29).

Crisis and Disasters

All tourism destinations face the probability of experiencing a crisis or disaster at some time, yet few actively plan for this occurrence (Faulkner 2001; Faulkner & Vikulov 2001). Research is needed to study the impacts of these events on the tourism industry and the type and adequacy of the responses to such impacts. These events can impact on a destination's image and even serve as a 'differentiating factor among competitive destinations' (Peters & Pikkemaat 2005: 11). Faulkner (2001: 136) thus argues that research provides 'an essential foundation for assisting the tourism industry and relevant government agencies to learn from past experiences, and develop strategies for avoiding and coping with similar events in the future'.

There have been a number of high-profile events over the past decade which have adversely affected tourism and have attracted research attention. They include the '9/11' bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 (Beirman 2003; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa 2003; Fall & Massey 2005; Smith & Carmichael 2005); the Boxing Day tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004 (Reddy 2005); panic over the SARS (McKercher & Chon 2004; Dombey 2004; Cooper 2005; McKercher & Pine 2005) and bird flu epidemics (Goh & Law 2002); and the flooding experienced by New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Souther 2006; Gotham 2007).

Faulkner and Russell (2000: 334) distinguish between crises and disasters and use disaster to refer to 'situations where an enterprise (or collection of enterprises in the case of a tourist destination) is confronted with sudden unpredictable catastrophic change over which it has little control'¹. A crisis, on the other hand, describes 'a situation where the root causes of an event is, to some extent, self-inflicted' (Faulkner & Russell 2000: 334). Crises can be viewed as occurring along a continuum, based on the magnitude of the outcome and the number of people affected by the event. For example, Henderson (2007: 5-6) notes that tourism crises range from 'short-lived situations confined to single enterprises to those which involve the global industry over a prolonged period, and the manner in which crises are handled can determine their extent and life'. Faulkner (2001) has also sought to distinguish crises and disasters, with crises induced by an organisation and disasters having a natural or external cause.

Perhaps it is no longer very helpful to distinguish between the two concepts, as Faulkner (2001) goes on to argue that the boundaries between these concepts are blurring due to the increasing complexity of our world, making it more difficult to isolate cause and effect. It could be said that wildfires are a form of natural disaster in many instances but the cause for some could be due at least in part to external human action. For example, Kneeshaw, Vaske, Bright and Absher (2004: 479) observe that wildland fires can be 'started naturally by lightning or by human carelessness'. The latter may include backburning or fire management 'gone wrong' or neglectful campers failing to put out fires. There is also the situation where the deliberate lighting of fires (arson) by a member of the community has led to a wildfire. Recent environmental concerns complicate this chain of

¹ It is noted however that 'even in the case of natural disasters, the damage experienced is often partly attributable to human action' (Faulkner & Russell 2000: 334).

responsibility. If climate change can be partly attributed to human influence, and increased drought can lead to an increased risk of bushfires, due in part to 'more dry and available fuel for fire' (Worboys 2003: 294), then it could be argued that wildfires are not necessarily just 'a natural and periodic event' (Worboys 2003: 294) but have in part a human cause.

Hystad and Keller (2007) prefer to use the term 'disaster' to 'represent a major negative event that has the potential to affect a tourism industry', focusing on the *outcome*, rather than referring to the *origin, responsibility or cause*, which might be a more useful definition in the context of bushfires. Henderson (2007: 3) also notes that disasters and crises are 'connected when catastrophes outside an organisation provoke a crisis within it'. She provides a broader definition of a crisis which does not refer to causation, namely, 'a situation in which an individual or organisation is faced with the prospect of fundamental change, usually sudden and unforeseen, which threatens to disrupt and overturn prevailing philosophies and practices' (Henderson 2007: 12). This change could be a result of external or internal 'threats of crisis', with the former including natural phenomena or natural disasters. In this report, we will refer to fires as either a disaster or a crisis, based on the blurring of the definitions and the multiplicity of events considered.

Natural Disasters and Climate Change

A subset of a disaster is the *natural disaster* and various studies have considered the effects of these 'natural hazards' (Peters & Pikkemaat 2005: 9) on tourism, including disasters such as floods, earthquakes (Beirman, 2003), volcanoes and avalanches (Peters & Pikkemaat 2005) and fire (Murphy & Bayley 1989; Cioccio & Michael 2007). Cioccio and Michael (2007: 1) refer to these disasters from a tourism perspective as 'natural events that disrupt or destroy the physical base for tourism' and thus should be studied due to the adverse consequences these events can have on the 'tourism environment'.

By definition, a natural disaster is a 'crisis which cannot be anticipated' (Peters & Pikkemaat 2005: 10). It is not necessarily outside human control or without human intervention, as discussed earlier. Irvine and Anderson (2005: 48) note that 'it is the interface between man [sic] and nature which creates disaster' and that the latter tend to be exacerbated in poorer places due to lack of resources, including access to relief, even where the origin of the event (fire, avalanche) has no human involvement. 'Nature is more contained in wealthy societies' (Irvine & Anderson 2005: 49).

Some authors have addressed whether there is an apparent increasing frequency of natural disasters in the 21st century. Faulkner and Russell (2000) note that some of the reasons attributed to this phenomenon include:

- Population growth (more people living in or near 'dangerous places' or 'vulnerable areas');
- Urbanisation (see above);
- Global economic pressures (exploitation of natural resources, allied with a decline in public sector investment in infrastructure);
- War as a global pressure (can trigger displacement of populations into 'vulnerable areas');
- Impacts of technology (technology can generate some disasters).

Environmental crises including natural disasters are being increasingly blamed on or linked to climate change (Worboys & De Lacy 2003; Scott, Wall & McBoyle 2005) and there is a growing body of research examining the impact of climate change on tourism. One consequence of increasing temperatures, lack of rainfall and storm activity has been an increase in the occurrence and severity of wildfires (Worboys & De Lacy 2003; Scott, Wall & McBoyle 2005; Gómez Martín 2005; Perry 2006; Scott, Jones & Konopek 2007). Worboys and De Lacy (2003), citing (McLeod 2003: 9) refer to the combination of record high temperatures, lack of rainfall, and below normal levels of humidity and cloud cover, experienced during the 2003 Australian Alps bushfires, which led to 'early advanced curing of fuels across most of Eastern Australia. Although many of these factors were also present during previous bushfire events, the high temperatures in the lead up to the 2002/03 fire season appears to be unprecedented'. Worboys and De Lacy (2003: 4) attribute these high temperatures during the fires to global warming.

Australia's alpine areas have a lot to lose from a decline in tourism that is related to climate change, certainly from an economic point of view but also from a social-cultural perspective, as mentioned previously, with visitors benefiting from environmental education and the wellbeing which comes from being in nature. Alpine parks agencies therefore need to confront the impact fire has on visitation rates and how this can be minimised in the wake of these regular events.

Studies of Bushfires from a Tourism Perspective

There have been some studies looking at the impact of fire from a tourism perspective. Table 1 provides a summary of these studies, including the geographical context, focus of study and the estimated economic impact of fire on tourism where that information has been provided in the journal paper or report.

Table 1: Studies focusing on the impact of fire on tourism

| Reference | Geographical Context | Focus of Study | Economic Impact of Fire on Tourism |
|--|---|--|---|
| Murphy & Bayley 1989 | 1985 forest fires in the East Kootenay region, British Columbia, Canada | Link between tourism and natural disasters and the role disaster planning should play in tourism. | Lost tourism revenue in the prime tourism month of July estimated at CAN\$8 million. |
| Bath 1993 | 1988 Yellowstone National Park fires | Attitudes toward fire and fire management issues. | Unknown. |
| Lichtman 1998 | 1988 fires in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem | The public relations ramifications of fire. | Not expressly stated, however it was noted that the fire may have led to greater tourism in Yellowstone National Park due to the widespread publicity. |
| Franke 2000 cited in Scott, Jones & Konopek 2007 | 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park | Lessons from the fire, including for tourism / visitation. | Seasonal visitor accommodations were closed four weeks earlier than normal. Total annual visits to the park in 1988 were reduced by 15%. Estimated loss of tourism economic benefits was US\$60 million. |
| Jacobson, Monroe & Marynowski 2001 | Florida wildfires in 1998 | Influence of experience and mass media on public knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural intentions regarding wildland fire. | Tourist revenues, combined with lost timber, totalled \$800 million. Tourist impact not quantified separately. |
| Butry, Mercer, Prestemon, Pye & Holmes 2001 | The Florida wildfires in 1998 | Modelling and analysing the economic impacts of these wildfires on this state / region. | Loss estimated at US\$138.2 million (US\$61 million gross loss in hotel revenues and US\$77.2 million gross loss in non-hotel-related tourist spending). |
| Thapa, Holland & Absher 2003 | Fire situations in Florida | To understand tourist knowledge of fire, situations, attitudes towards fire and the effect of fire on travel behaviour. | Not covered. |
| Hystad & Keller 2006 | The 2003 forest fires in Kelowna, British Columbia | The tourism industry's preparedness and response to this fire and its impact on different sectors of tourism. | Destroyed several major tourist attractions (parks and Kettle Valley Railway trestles). The latter is estimated to cost CAN\$15 million to reconstruct. A state of emergency for the province lasted for over a month and mean revenue impact for the three months following the fire was 10% to 20%. |
| Hystad & Keller 2007 | | Long-term study of a disaster (forest fire) and development of a destination tourism disaster management framework. | |
| Cioccio & Michael (2007) | The 2003 bushfires in northeast Victoria, Australia | How small tourism businesses deal with the impact of a natural disaster. | Loss of business within the first month in excess of AU\$20 million. |
| Armstrong 2005 | The 2003 bushfires in Canberra, Australia | Destination recovery after a natural disaster, focusing on the role played by planning. | 50% decline in visitation. Damaged attractions such as several nature reserves and Mt Stromlo Observatory. |
| Armstrong in press | | | |
| Armstrong & Ritchie 2008 | | Destination recovery, focusing on the marketing campaign used. | |

These studies have been a useful starting point for the current research. We can distinguish the current study from the above in that it focuses on the 2006/07 fires in Victoria, which have yet to be the subject of research. In addition, studies such as Butry et al. (2001), Cioccio and Michael (2007) and Hystad and Keller (2006) focus on impacts on business rather than impacts on visitors, including potential visitors. The current study considers both perspectives. A number of these studies deal with 'big picture' concerns, such as disaster management (Hystad & Keller 2007), disaster planning (Murphy & Bayley 1989) or disaster recovery, including the effect of the media or marketing (Lichtman 1998; Armstrong & Ritchie 2008) and the role of planning (Armstrong in press) in this process.

This study on the impact of wildfire on visitation will therefore fill these research gaps. It will:

- Focus on both tourism business and tourist impacts of fire;
- Collect data relating to the 2006/07 fires as well as the 2002/03 fires; and
- Use the Victorian Alps as a context for the research.

Positive Impacts of Bushfires on Tourism

The effects of natural disasters on tourism have been studied in a variety of contexts, including bushfire scenarios. It is essential to note that not all impacts of disasters are negative ones for a destination. These events may be a catalyst for innovation and creative solutions (Faulkner 2001; Faulkner & Vikulov 2001; Prideaux, Coghlan & Falco-Mammone 2003; Henderson 2007). They might lead to revisitation or revamping of approaches or policies, weed out unproductive businesses or encourage community spirit or the development of partnerships between different parts of the tourism industry and government agents such as councils, parks agencies and destination management organisations. In addition, the destination's image may actually be enhanced following media coverage of communities working together and the economic value of tourism. Attractions that were once taken for granted may be more valued (Armstrong in press)

It is also important to recognise that disaster recovery is unlikely to involve a return to the destination's pre-disaster state and that this is not necessarily an undesirable state of affairs, given the potential for starting with a clean slate, approaching things with fresh eyes and the likelihood of a dynamic environment (Faulkner & Vikulov 2001; Armstrong in press). Armstrong (in press) notes, for example, that the ACT bushfires in 2003 'provided an opportunity for a significant rethink of product range and destination management and marketing'.

Negative Impacts of Bushfires on Tourism

Safety and security

According to the literature, a decline in tourist demand as a result of a natural disaster such as a bushfire can be traced to a number of different factors. A primary concern for many visitors both during and after a bushfire is personal safety and security (Centre for Risk & Community Safety & OESC 2003). The level of impact may depend on the personality type of the potential visitor, particularly whether they are *risk seekers* or *risk averse*. When evaluating destinations, 'choices involving gains indicate a risk averse personality whereas choices involving losses indicate risk-seeking behaviour. Risk averse individuals (i.e. psychocentrics) are likely to choose destinations perceived as safe, whereas risk seekers (i.e. allocentrics) are likely to show less concern about choosing destinations based on safety factors' (Sönmez & Graefe 1998: 122).

Some of the safety issues specifically connected with visiting destinations post-fire were noted by Parks Victoria and DSE (2007: 11), namely 'presence of hazardous trees, elevated risk of land slips, damaged road and trail surfaces, presence of hazardous materials such as asbestos and CCA (Copper Chromium Arsenate) ash from treated pine [in huts or other buildings], damaged or absent bridges, signs or structures and an increased propensity for flash flooding after rain'. They note how they manage these risks 'through temporary access closures and notifications, a strict regime of hazard assessment and control, and a formalized re-opening process'. Other safety issues include reduced visibility due to smoke or haze from fires (Franke 2000; Kneeshaw et al. 2004)

Health and aesthetic concerns

There are documented health effects of air pollution which might impact on visitation. Kneeshaw et al. (2004: 479) note that smoke from wildfires can lead to respiratory problems. This can extend beyond the fire affected areas. Parks Victoria and DSE (2007: 29) refer to reduced visitation in the Gippsland Lakes due to 'persistent dense smoke'. Butry et al. (2001: 15) also note that air pollution from fires can lead to an increase of 'respiratory ailments' such as asthma or bronchitis but that this finding can be complicated by 'other factors associated with the kind of weather experienced during droughts, such as increased levels of dust, pollen and fungal spores'.

Fire could negatively affect the natural beauty of a landscape or the scenery (Lichtman 1998), which may impact on visitation (Centre for Risk & Community Safety & OESC 2003). Smoke 'can reduce scenic or aesthetic quality' (Kneeshaw et al. 2004: 479; Shelby and Speaker, 1990). Forest can take time to recover to 'its prefire condition' (Kneeshaw et al. 2004: 480) and blackened, charred trees and groundcover can look unpleasing (Cioccio & Michael 2007). This might affect recreation, such as decreasing photo opportunities (Lichtman 1998).

Loss of attractions and reduced recreational opportunities

Some fires destroy tourist attractions or infrastructure. Parks Victoria and DSE (2007: 25) note that the 2006/07 fires affected some indigenous cultural heritage artefacts and sites, although the fires also led to new sites being unearthed once scrub was burnt away. Eight huts were burnt during the 2006/07 Victorian fires, including the popular Craig's Hut and associated walking track near Mansfield, which was built for the film *The Man from Snowy River*. Armstrong (in press) refers to the damage done to popular attractions in Canberra in the 2003 fire such as Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Cotter Reserve, Namadgi National Park and Mount Stromlo Observatory, including its associated visitor centre, café and shop. Hystad and Keller (2007) also note that loss of the Park and Kettle Valley tourist attractions in Kelowna as a result of forest fires had a significant impact on business post-fire.

Recreation opportunities may be reduced due to fire, as a result of areas being closed, visitors being displaced, campfire bans or restricted activities (Kneeshaw et al. 2004; Hystad & Keller 2007; Scott, Jones & Konopek 2007). This may affect visitation (Scott, Jones & Konopek 2007). Access issues due to road closures may impact on recreation opportunities in or around adjacent destinations which otherwise escaped the fire's path (Parks Victoria & DSE 2007). Recreational appeal may also be affected by fire (Lichtman 1998; Centre for Risk & Community Safety & OESC 2003).

Decline in wildlife biodiversity and reduction in social values

While it has been noted that fire is often a 'natural event in most of the wildlife habitats of south-eastern Australia and most species have adaptations that enable them to recover after fire' (Parks Victoria & DSE 2007: 15), the short-term effect of declining wildlife, both flora and fauna, may affect the visitor experience (Lichtman 1998), such as affecting photo opportunities, and encourage people to postpone visits to the affected areas.

Scott (2003) argues that bushfires may impact negatively on the social value we place on protected areas, given that 'one of the most important features of parks for visitors is the perception of a healthy environment that is being protected in perpetuity'. The destruction or damage to nature through these natural disasters may consequently diminish the importance of our protected areas to the general population, although further research is required to explore whether this suggested phenomenon is in fact a real one. Lichtman (1998) suggests that fire may be seen as a 'policy failure' by government/protected area agencies and thus 'one's trust in the land management agencies was betrayed' (Lichtman 1998: 7).

Management Responses Post Disaster Related to Tourism/Visitation

A number of disaster management responses have been examined in the literature for their efficacy and prevalence in disaster recovery. We will look at some of these in this section and their applicability to a bushfire scenario. These may be particularly relevant when evaluating and benchmarking the response strategies of the National Parks.

Risk assessment and planning

The importance of planning before a crisis occurs was remarked upon by Irvine and Anderson (2005) and Henderson (2007). For example, the impact on businesses affected by foot and mouth disease in Britain was less severe where there were both plans and government support in place. According to Hystad and Keller (2006: 46), following Ritchie (2004), it is important to have a thorough knowledge of the history of the destination in terms of its exposure to natural disasters and potential of future threats. 'Understanding the types of disasters to which a destination is susceptible and the nature of such events is invaluable to the disaster preparedness of communities and their tourism industry'. Disaster planning needs to cover visitors as well as residents (Murphy & Bayley 1989: 38), given that the former is likely to be 'relatively unfamiliar with an area and its local emergency plans'.

Armstrong (in press) argues that there has been a lack of attention paid to disaster recovery planning, 'that is the planning that is fundamental to the recovery of a destination after a disaster has occurred'. Hystad and Keller (2006) found that few small businesses in their study implemented recovery strategies in the wake of a severe forest fire and it was important for organisations seeking to aid a destination's recovery to realise this. 'Many

small businesses have learned to *ride out the storm*, for they have neither the means nor the time to engage in formalising plans for their business's development and growth, let alone for possible contingencies that may or may not eventuate' (Cioccio & Michael 2007: 7-8). This links in with tourism being a 'lifestyle choice', i.e. natural disasters are par for the course in a 'natural setting' (Cioccio & Michael 2007: 9). Small tourism businesses tend to rely more on their 'practical experience' and community efforts after a disaster such as a bushfire. Barriers against disaster planning, according to Hystad and Keller (2007), include lack of funding, lack of education/knowledge about development of a plan, inability to effect change due to the size of the business and lack of cohesion of the tourism industry.

Information/communication

Management responses to disasters include provision of information and public relations. This is important given that creation of destination image occurs through three routes—word-of-mouth, media and government policy (Hall & O'Sullivan 1996; Seddighi, Nuttal & Theocharous 2001). Faulkner (2001) suggests that this type of response should commence in the intermediate phase, once the initial emergency has passed.

There have been a number of attempts in the literature to develop models or frameworks for responding to a crisis. The Crisis Communication Model (Figure 1) covers communication during the phases of a crisis (Fall & Massey 2005).

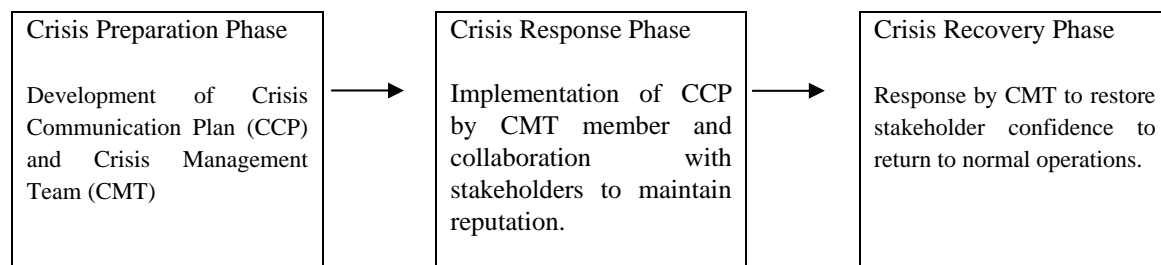


Figure 1: Crisis communication model

SOURCE: Fall & Massey 2005: 80

Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller and Miller (2003: 204) have also developed the Five-Point Communication Plan (Table 2), which 'illustrates five main considerations for responding to crises'. This covers the immediate aftermath of a crisis, when an organisation needs to make an 'initial response' to stakeholders, including staff, the media and possibly the local community.

Table 2: Five-point crisis communication plan

| Point | Action |
|-------|---|
| 1. | Respond quickly. Develop two-way communication with the media to provide accurate information to key stakeholders. This will reduce misinformation and help develop a consistent message. |
| 2. | Give instructing information such as what happened, when it happened, where it took place, and how it occurred. Also discussion of the precautions stakeholders should take and what corrective action is being undertaken. |
| 3. | Consistency in developing the communications plan and key messages including discouraging any unofficial spokespersons. |
| 4. | Openness and accessibility including availability of spokespersons and generating a willingness to disclose information and being honest. |
| 5. | Express sympathy to victims. |

Businesses can benefit by providing information directly to their customers according to Hystad and Keller (2007), 'to inform them about the situation and confirm that they are open for business. Following the 2003 forest fire disaster, this was an important component of tourism recovery'. It also appears to be important to set up a system to gather and communicate information to all stakeholders, with Murphy and Bayley (1989) referring to the benefits of 'a reliable, responsive communications system linking [business] with the local residents and visitors'.

Not all information however has a positive effect on tourist demand (Cavlek 2002; Irvine & Anderson 2005; Henderson 2007). Government warnings may have an adverse psychological effect on potential tourists,

‘creating a major impediment to selling holidays, even to parts of the country still entirely safe’ (Irvine & Anderson 2005: 51). The same might be said for publicising contingency plans to cover a hypothetical crisis, which might scare off potential tourists (Henderson 2007). A balance needs to be struck, to build confidence in the safety or security of a destination but not cause alarm or anxiety (Henderson 2007).

Interpretation may also play a part in communication. For example, Parks Victoria, after the 2003 fires, developed interpretation programs which explained the fires and the impact and reassured visitors ‘on the benefits of fire and the progress of rehabilitation programmes’ (Parks Victoria 2005: 11). The benefits of effective communication in building community engagement and greater understanding between the community and policymakers have also been noted by Parks Victoria and DSE (2007). Provision of information at local meetings after the 2006/07 fires helped to involve the community in decisions and planning post-fire and built trust and a stronger relationship with parks and forests management agencies. Some of this work may flow through into the development of partnerships, such as with indigenous communities (Parks Victoria & DSE 2007).

Media coverage

Eugenio-Martin, Sinclair and Yeoman (2005) note the power of the media in shaping perceptions of a crisis, influencing intention to travel (Sönmez & Graefe 1998; Floyd et al. 2004) and observe that development of an effective communication strategy may even improve an organisation’s reputation post-crisis, while the reverse ‘is likely to instigate belief that the organisation is incompetent or uncaring’ (Eugenio-Martin, Sinclair & Yeoman 2005: 23). Inadequacy of information also affects internal stakeholders, affecting both their decision-making and the quality of external communication and thus leading to a perception of loss of control over the events (Barton 1993; Eugenio-Martin, Sinclair & Yeoman 2005).

Irvine and Anderson (2005: 58) note the damage that exaggerated media coverage, featuring lurid or shocking pictures of a crisis, can do to unaffected areas. Television is particularly prone to ‘perpetuate disaster myths’ (Faulkner 2001: 141). Working with the media ‘to manage the messages going out about the destination region during and after the disaster’ is therefore important, according to Hystad and Keller (2006: 56). This may encourage the media to change their emphasis, ‘from sensationalising to reporting hero and goodwill stories ... helping to limit the negative imaging’. This positive media coverage can lead to visitors being attracted back post-disaster and in effect provides free publicity for a destination (De Sausmarez 2004; Cioccio & Michae, 2007).

It is also important to ensure that information provided to the media relating to the disaster is accurate, to maintain credibility (Beirman 2003; Henderson 2007; Armstrong & Ritchie 2008). ‘Consumers and travel professionals demand a truthful assessment of a crisis situation ... in the longer term false reporting of a situation is easily exposed, calling into question the veracity of the tourist authority and reflecting negatively on the destination’ (Beirman 2003: 15). Information/education may not just be important to restore confidence in the destination but also in the protected area agency and policymakers, given that these events can have political ramifications (Lichtman 1998). Lichtman (1998: 8) suggests utilising a participatory approach ‘incorporating the best available techniques from opinion polls, dispute resolution, and other specialisations’ in order to facilitate ‘more effective participation’ by those directly affected by fire in its management, including potentially the tourism industry and local communities.

Marketing/promotion

The communication process may also involve marketing the destination post-crisis. Henderson (2007: 96) argues that this should only occur ‘once the situation has stabilised and rehabilitation has reached a suitable phase’. Prior to this, it is potentially a ‘waste of resources’ (Henderson 2007: 96). Prideaux, Coghlan and Falco-Mammone (2007) also refer to the importance of marketing to inform visitors that an affected area is now ‘open for business’ and offering ‘some form of guarantee to visitors that they will continue to be able to experience the features of the region that they consider to be most valuable to them, despite any impacts from natural disasters’. Thapa, Holland and Absher (2003) found in their study of travel behaviour changes linked to fire situations that ‘there was general acceptance of the possibility and acceptability of wildfires that are not close to a destination they are travelling to, so emphasising the distance away from wildfires, might be a good strategy to reduce cancellations or destination substitution’.

Faulkner and Vikulov (2001: 343) suggest that collective destination marketing is more effective than individual operator efforts in the wake of a disaster and events should also be considered as a marketing tool. Murphy and Bayley (1989) also refer to the effect of a festival or exhibition in drawing people back to a disaster-affected region more quickly than might otherwise have been the case. Government support for marketing efforts play a part, both in providing valuable resources and spearheading regional or destination marketing post-fire. After the 2003 fires, Parks Victoria developed plans and tools, including a regularly updated website, banners and portable displays for visitor centres, DSE and Parks Victoria offices and information sheets and a new

touring map showing changes to access, to guide future visitors. Newspaper features were developed which highlighted the fire-affected regions and the beauty which can still be found in a regenerating landscape.

Parks Victoria and DSE have also developed a number of strategies in the wake of the 2006/07 fires in Victoria to promote the tourism industry and support local community events through to 2009. Some of the 2007 marketing effort has also encouraged visitation based on the curiosity value of viewing the regrowth of burnt areas (Sunday Herald Sun 2007). On the Parks Victoria Website (Parks Victoria 2007b), it is noted that 'a visit now will highlight the fascinating landscape mosaic of fire recovery mixed with the usual Grampians splendour ... Visit now and visit again—the ancient Grampians landscape changes every season!'

Hystad and Keller (2006) observe that some destinations may capitalise on media attention by increasing marketing, while others provide discounts or reduce prices in the short-term to lure visitors back. Some destinations have also diversified their market, product or image (Hystad & Keller 2006; Cioccio & Michael 2007) or placed a greater emphasis on domestic tourists (Hystad & Keller 2006). 'Some indicated that they were actively searching for a broader range of product offerings to appeal to a wider market, or were adapting their current outputs to pitch to new classes of consumer' (Cioccio & Michael 2007: 8).

Summary

This literature review has revealed that, while bushfires are an increasingly popular area of interest for research, given the growing severity and frequency of this natural phenomenon and their impact on regions used for tourism and recreation, there is scope to conduct additional research to compliment and extend previous studies. In particular, past research has concentrated on impacts of these events on either operators or visitors, but not both, and has tended to be based on quantitative data with an emphasis on the macro rather than the micro-environment. The current study will attempt to fill in some of these gaps, by incorporating an event that has yet to be researched (the 2006/07 fires in Victoria) and utilising a qualitative approach to understanding the impact of this event on tourism and visitation to national parks, with the Victorian Alps as the region of interest.

Previous work suggests that there is very little distinction in actuality between a crisis and a disaster, and bushfires can often be categorised as both, depending on the gravity of the situation and the cause. Both negative and positive impacts of bushfires have been canvassed in this section, as well as proposed management responses to natural disasters, including the importance of planning, provision of information, use of the media and marketing/promotion as techniques or tools to minimise the impact of bushfires on an organisation, region or community. It appears that not all these responses have been either used or introduced successfully in previous disasters, leading to potentially greater impacts on tourism and recreation than might otherwise have been the case. This study will consider the ways in which some of these management responses, such as recovery marketing and media exposure, have affected the perception of risk and influenced future visitation to the regions post-fire.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods were used in this study which investigated the impact of the recent bushfires on tourism in Victoria's Alpine National Parks. Firstly, secondary data was obtained from a variety of sources ranging from international journal articles to the internal reports of several government agencies. The identified literature was then subjected to secondary data analysis to identify gaps in the knowledge and to develop and refine the research questions that were asked out in the field. The second stage of the data collection process involved onsite visits to several alpine locations, including Falls Creek, Mt Hotham, Dinner Plain and Mt Buller, to interview visitors and tourism operators. In addition to the onsite data collection, a number of interviews with potential alpine visitors were also conducted in the Melbourne CBD. A qualitative approach was selected as the most suitable method as it allowed for a deeper exploration of the complex issues surrounding the impacts of bushfires. In addition, by choosing an onsite face-to-face interview process, researchers were able to ask open questions and further probe respondents to elicit more detailed responses. This led to a greater understanding of the recovery situation than would have been possible using less personal techniques.

Sampling and the Interview Process

Participants in this study were selected using random probability sampling (Jennings 2001) from a population of visitors, potential visitors and tourism operators who were present at the field sites on the selected data collection days. As mentioned, all interviews were conducted onsite by the researchers. Interviewees were approached at random and asked if they would like to participate in the study. They were then presented with an information sheet and permission was sought to digitally record their responses. The interviews were semi-structured and designed as a series of open-ended questions which enabled the researchers to prompt for more detail or request additional clarification where necessary. The duration of each interview was between half an hour and one hour.

Qualitative research is generally not concerned with the generalisation of findings and thus does not require large random samples (Kelle & Laurie 1995). Instead, this study was focused on conducting an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon at hand (Kelle & Laurie 1995). Interviews were conducted with 10 potential visitors, 10 operators and 10 tourists, including at least four operators and four tourists from each of the three main mountain locations of Mt Buller, Mt Hotham/Dinner Plain and Falls Creek. At the conclusion of the data collection period, 13 operators and 15 tourists had been interviewed across the three mountains, together with 10 interviews conducted with potential visitors in the Melbourne CBD. This produced a data set of 38 in-depth interviews. This data set was analysed for emergent themes, a process which continued until it was considered that saturation of conceptual categories had occurred, making further collection of data redundant (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Jennings 2001).

The interviews were all conducted on location during the summer and autumn months of 2008. It was considered that interviewing during the warmer months was most important due to two main considerations. First, it was predicted that the type of tourist who visits the alps in the summertime may be different to the winter / ski season visitor who would possibly be less affected by bushfires and, second, it was more appropriate to interview operators during the summer season when the issue of bushfires was at the front of their mind and part of their immediate trading and operating priority. Visits to the Alpine villages to conduct the interviews were conducted approximately one year after the most recent fires in 2006/07 and occurred on the following dates: Falls Creek (19-20 January 2008), Mt Hotham/Dinner Plain (1-2 March 2008) and Mt Buller (April 2008).

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews were chosen as the most suitable method for the collection of qualitative data for this project. This technique allows for more flexibility and the opportunity to explore the complexity of bushfire recovery issues (Veal 2005). It also enabled the researchers to build a rapport with the respondents through a conversational style which made them feel more comfortable about contributing personal opinions and providing additional information. Further detail on the interview questions is contained in Appendices C, D and E.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A content analysis technique was used to analyse the data collected. Content analysis can be defined as, a 'technique for systematically describing the form and content of written or spoken material' (Sommer & Sommer 2002), where the researcher is open to discover what data reveals without being directed or influenced by theory or the biases of the researcher (Jennings, 2001). After the completion of the field interviews, all of the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was source coded to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. This primary data was then entered into a Microsoft® Excel spreadsheet under headings derived from the interview questions. The data was then further sub coded according to the emergent themes. The next part of the textual analysis involved the grouping of these themes according to their similarities and differences. The results of this final stage of conceptual analysis can be viewed in Chapter 4.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that this study has some limitations. The timing of the data collection meant that one full year had passed since the most recent bushfires in this region. This, combined with an intervening good snow season, may have influenced some of the business operators' responses, in that they may have moved on from recovery mode. In addition, the passage of time may have been a factor in regard to some of the direct recall questions, for example the identification of the areas that were most affected by the fires. The responses of those questioned may not represent all views. For example, many of the participants interviewed at Dinner Plain were attending a jazz festival and tended to fall within an older age bracket, compared with the greater diversity of ages found at some of the other sites. However, given the time and resource constraints identified in this study and the fact that, as mentioned above, saturation appeared to occur in relation to recurring themes, it is believed that the findings do adequately represent and capture the essence of the views held by those in the affected regions. Finally, the information provided by the respondents was based on their own personal perceptions and experiences and thus there was the potential for bias. The researchers have taken these limitations into consideration and where possible have attempted to verify information by cross checking with the literature and members of the project's industry reference group.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings based on the data obtained from the onsite field interviews. The findings are presented under three broad headings; tourism operators, alpine visitors and potential visitors. Following a brief demography of participants, the information is presented according to the themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis process. Where applicable, any discrepancies between the mountain locations are identified and direct quotes used to highlight particular responses. The chapter concludes by summarising the overall picture of bushfire recovery responses.

Demography of Participants

Tables 3, 4 and 5 report in summary form the interviews conducted at the various venues. Further discussion is presented on the succeeding pages.

Table 3: Tourism operators

| Mountain | Type of business | Owner/ manager | Years of business's operation | % of business reliant on access to an alpine national park |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Falls Creek | Accommodation | Manager | 20 | 100 |
| King Valley | Food / beverage | Owner | 20 | 90 |
| Falls Creek | Retail | Owner | 22 | 50 |
| Falls Creek | Accommodation | Manager | 20 | 100 |
| Falls Creek | Food / beverage | Manager | 38 | 80 |
| Mt Hotham | Retail / hire | Manager | 10 | 100 |
| Mt Hotham | Accommodation | Manager | 2 | 90 |
| Mt Hotham | Tours / hire | Owner | 6 | 100 |
| Mt Buller | Accommodation | Owner | 12 | 90 |
| Mt Buller | Tours | Manager | 15 | n/a |
| Mt Buller | Tours | Owner | 26 | 0 |
| Mt Buller | Accommodation | Manager | 8 | 100 |
| Mt Buller | Accommodation | Manager | 22 | 100 |

Table 4: Alpine visitors

| Mountain | Age | Gender | Origin | Number of previous visits to Alpine Region |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------------|---|
| Mt Buller | 26-35 | Female | NE Victoria | 50 |
| Mt Buller | 65+ | Male | Gippsland | 11 |
| Mt Buller | 65+ | Male | Gippsland | 400 |
| Mt Buller | 26-35 | Male | Melbourne | 10 |
| Mt Buller | 26-35 | Female | Surf Coast | 5 |
| Mt Buller | 65+ | Male | Gippsland | 0 |
| Falls Creek | 46-55 | Female | Melbourne | 4 |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------------|------|
| Falls Creek | 18-25 | Female | Melbourne | 5 |
| Falls Creek | 26-35 | Male | Gippsland | 20 |
| Falls Creek | 46-55 | Male | NE Victoria | 25 |
| Mt Hotham | 56-65 | Male | NE Victoria | Lots |
| Mt Hotham | 26-35 | Male | NE Victoria | Lots |
| Mt Hotham | 36-45 | Male | NE Victoria | 200 |
| Mt Hotham | 26-35 | Female | NE Victoria | 100s |
| Mt Hotham | 46-55 | Male | NE Victoria | 24 |

Table 5: Potential visitors

| Origin | Age | Gender | Time of year they would like to visit the Alpine Region | Does bushfire information influence decisions to visit the Alps |
|--------------|-------|--------|---|---|
| Melbourne | 18-25 | Female | Winter | No |
| Williamstown | 18-25 | Male | Autumn | No |
| Melbourne | 18-25 | Male | Summer | No |
| Melbourne | 26-35 | Male | Winter | No |
| Melbourne | 26-35 | Male | Early summer | No |
| Melbourne | 26-35 | Female | Spring | No |
| Echuca | 26-35 | Female | Spring | Yes, short term - no, longer term |
| Melbourne | 36-45 | Female | Winter | No |
| Melbourne | 36-45 | Male | Summer & Winter | No |
| Melbourne | 56-65 | Female | Autumn | No |

Tourism Operators

The following findings are derived from interviews with 13 tourism operators across the three mountains of Falls Creek, Mt Hotham/Dinner Plain and Mt Buller (Table 3). The interviewees owned or managed a variety of business types, including accommodation, retail, tours, food and beverage and equipment hire outlets. On average, these businesses have been operating in the Alpine Region for 17 years. Most recognised that 80-100% of their summer business is reliant on access to one or more of the Alpine National Parks. All were operating at the outbreak of the most recent major bushfire fire in the summer of 2006/07.

Impact of the fires

As a group, the operators reported that the 2006/07 bushfires had a significant negative impact on their towns and regions and that the effect was particularly harsh for a region that was still recovering from the devastating bushfires fires of 2003. Most reported a major decline in visitor numbers, with some describing a complete loss of trade from late December 2006 until mid February 2007. The greatest impact appears to have been related to road closures and the lack of access to the mountains during the bushfire period. Some spoke of the negative impact of the media, which was advising people not to visit the Alpine Region at that time. Whilst generally the impacts reported were negative, one respondent was more optimistic, identifying a more positive reaction by highlighting the way in which the bushfire brought the community together in a time of crisis.

The impact was on a positive note – the impact was very good for the community. It brought the community together—for Mt Buller I suppose it made them sharpen their tools a bit and get everything prepared. Because we were very well prepared—we were very well notified everyday of everything that was happening.

With regard to the impact of the 2006/07 bushfires on individual businesses, many significant adverse impacts were reported. Whilst none reported any direct physical loss or damage due to the fire, all reported some negative impact to their operations. This varied from the closure of a business for a few days to a downturn in trade and the cancellation of bookings and functions to the complete loss of all summer trade which resulted in the retrenchment of staff and cancellation of orders. Some operators were forced to reduce their hours of operation and thus staff hours were also reduced, decreasing employment opportunities on the mountains during

the summer season. This would have also further impacted on business as due to the isolated nature of the Alpine Region, staff of one business are often customers of many others. Whilst it was reported that some operators (not those that were interviewed for this report) did manage to trade through the bushfire as they were servicing emergency personnel, for most, the impact was a devastating loss of important summer trade mostly due to the closure of roads which prevented access to the mountains.

We stayed up at night when the fires came very close. We saw debris, burnt twigs and leaves flying through the area but no ember attacks directly. The fire came to about three kilometres towards us. The road was closed off and we had to state our name and the address of our property in order to go past. We were fortunate not to have any fire damage to our property or infrastructure. It took a long time to recover because the people who came up here want to travel into the mountains and because all the mountain tracks were closed there was no possibility to go into the mountains either to drive themselves or for any of the tour operators—like 4WD tours or horse riding tours—they were all cancelled—there was no activity in the mountains. We probably would have 20 or so cancellations of bookings. For many weeks we couldn't take any bookings, we had enquiries, people still wanted to come but we cancelled ourselves because it was just impossible to take guests. This went on for quite some time—the smoke was around for weeks. The first bookings we took were end of January/early February.

Media coverage

Respondents were then asked to recall the impact of the media coverage of the fires on their business operations immediately after the fire then at one month, three months, six months and finally one year after the 2006/07 bushfires. With regard to the operators' perceptions of the impact of the media coverage after the fire, most felt that it was negative. One operator simply stated, "It caused the stoppage of my business." In particular, some operators recalled the perceived influence of the Minister and the Premier's personal advice to stay away from the north-east Victorian region as particularly strong negative media messages.

[The media impact was] negative as Steve Bracks publicly recommended staying away from the entire north-east after the fires had passed here and despite the fact that this area was beautiful.

The business was shut and the media published the Minister's advice that tourists should stay out of the north-east.

Others felt that the media reporting was accurate and actually helped to inform their customers of the immediate dangers of travelling into the high country at the height of the fires.

The media coverage encouraged our decision to cancel and also backed up our decision to customers. In other words, they were not as disappointed when their trip was cancelled as they knew what was going on with the fires.

Some also felt that the media needed to switch to focusing on recovery sooner in the immediate phase after the fire. "Shock tactics were evident in headlines which frightens people whilst no emphasis is given to recovery because it's not news."

One month after the fires, only one operator felt that there had been a slight improvement in the media coverage. The majority of operators reported that the media coverage was still negative and that it was adversely impacting on business recovery. "Yes it did because even at the end of January people still thought that the place was burnt up and it was dangerous and was still going on." Another operator commented that there was an 80% drop in trade right up until Easter (three months after the fires). Whilst some even commented that the previous negative media coverage immediately after the fire was still dissuading people from visiting the area.

Only owners came to inspect impact of fires—not visitors so there were still very few tourists. The media's—previous publicity had prevented people from planning to holiday here.

Between three and six months after the fire is when operators reported that they started to notice a change in the media coverage. They felt there was finally a realisation of the negative impacts and that some efforts were starting to be made to counteract the bad press of the preceding months. "Then the media went into damage control to try to bring people back." It was also identified that this reversal in media messages was taking up valuable recovery time and money.

The media gave the impression that all NE Victoria was destroyed even though we were still open so the impact was still negative. Therefore money and time have to be expended to counteract that publicity.

After the six month stage the Alpine Region entered what was to be a particularly good snow season which the operators identified as turning the media attention away from the negativity of the bushfires to positive stories about good snowfalls.

As time progressed, the media coverage had a lesser impact.

In the last half year or so I don't think there was any mention in the media about the fires. If people come up here they ask the questions—not so much influenced by the media.

We had a great winter last year. Not even a bed vacant in July or August—you couldn't complain about that. It was just the few months after the fires that people were still unsure about it.

One year after the fire, a couple of operators were still expressing caution about the impact of media coverage, however the strong majority indicated that they did not perceive any further negative impacts from media coverage of the previous summers bushfires. Most were reporting that summer business was back to normal and that the media were positively promoting the region as a summer tourism destination. Some even suggested that 2007/08 was a good season, "This is a great summer this year." One even stated, "No negative impact now as this is the best summer since 2000."

Emergency response

Respondents were then invited to consider and comment on the emergency response plans that were in place at the time of the fires. Whilst two operators were not aware of their town's emergency response plans at the time of the 2006/07 bushfires, most operators were well informed and active in their local communities, evidenced by their regular attendance at community meetings. One respondent was a member of the local SES, whilst another spoke of the development a community phone tree to ensure that everyone was kept informed of the latest developments related to the fires.

Every household had private fire plans activated and then we had a phone tree where everyone was in contact with someone else in case of emergency in case there were fires coming in the middle of the night. We had practically daily meetings in the town hall and we were informed what the fire situation was. It was a very good plan and coordination amongst people and authorities.

Overall it seems that operators were well prepared for the 2006/07 bushfires as all but one had previously prepared a formal emergency plan for their business.

Short term recovery

As mentioned earlier, none of the tourism operators interviewed suffered any direct physical loss of property as a result of the fires, however, all experienced a down turn in business trade. When asked what steps they had taken to rebuild their business directly after the fire, a range of activities were identified. Approximately half of the respondents had invested in some form of marketing whilst the remainder did nothing or relied on parent companies or the regional tourism association to market on their behalf.

No—I relied on the tourist body to promote the area. I pay the huge rates and hope for the benefit.

We are part of a big parent company—Mt. Hotham Ski Company which managed those activities.

The Resort Management Board increased marketing to bring people back this summer.

One seemed confused about what marketing incorporates, for example:

No we aren't doing anything for advertising or anything like that. I just put a special on the website—a two day special which was a really good rate.

Others were more proactive in terms of their post fire marketing activities.

As much as we possibly could. Advertising is a matter of your budget so because you have suffered losses the budget is not there. We tried to advertise as much as we could financially.

We advertised rigorously and promoted the fact that we were still there. We sent newsletters to mail order customers reinforcing that we had no physical damage, our fruit was not lost and we were open for business. We notified them that our stocks were still of high quality but that we did not have a 2007 vintage due to smoke damage. We did this on our own.

On the issue of recovery assistance, something that was reported to have been widely distributed to individual operators after the 2003 bushfires, only one operator interviewed for this study reported receiving any assistance after the 2006/07 bushfire. "We received business development support from Tourism Victoria, NE Victorian Tourism the Great Alpine Road tourism committees." Of the remainder four acknowledged that some funds were distributed to local organisations, whilst another was aware of the availability of assistance but chose not to participate. "There were some forums available but I didn't go. This assistance was offered on an individual and wider basis."

When asked if their business had participated in any recovery marketing as an individual or as part of a regional marketing campaign, six said yes, six said no and one was not aware of any marketing activities. Of

those who did participate in regional marketing activities, they acknowledged the strong support of regional organisations, for example:

Regional shires, e.g. Rural City of Wangaratta and Alpine Shire bent over backwards to work through all the issues.

Yes as there was extra promotion for Falls Creek on radio and TV and we participated as part of that group with Tourism Victoria.

No—part of Mt Buller we did. It didn't cost us any money because it was part of their marketing budget. They had quite a few functions over the summer and we helped with those.

Impact of the media on recovery

For this section of the report, operators were asked to identify the impact that they believed the media has had on recovery. Most responded that initially the media has had a significantly negative impact on the immediate post fire recovery stage, but that over time the coverage became more positive as the recovery and regeneration aspects were highlighted.

Horrendously negative, even after the fires and they didn't change the message from "Don't come" to "Do come" when they could have.

They are more positive now though.

Media reports discouraged visitors initially. Later coverage about the Great Alpine Way and the gourmet region encouraged different tourists as the regular tourists had not booked out all accommodation as would happen in normal seasons.

During, and immediately following the fires they were discouraging visitation although now it is finally turning around.

One year after the fire, several operators had quite a positive attitude towards the media, acknowledging that they had a role to play in warning potential visitors of the immediate danger during the fires and that they had been helpful in the recovery effort.

As I've say I think the media was good—our reporting and everything was excellent here. I think they gave it to us as it was and the recovery, I think we've recovered quite well. I think there are still people who think this whole area's still on fire in summer—that will take a lot of time to get over.

My view is they were encouraging. I felt the stories were encouraging to people and highlighted the fact that there were a lot of people doing it tough but that they were reopening for business etc.

One operator felt that the media coverage has not had a positive or negative impact on the recovery effort:

I don't think it had much impact at all. Neither negative nor positive. If the media had a positive influence we would have noticed at increase in tourism (but we didn't). I don't know what kept the people away. It took a long time before all the operators (e.g. horse riding and 4WD tours) could do their usual tours.

Assistance from government agencies

When asked if they felt that the relevant government agencies such as Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria, the local shire and the local tourism organisation communicated effectively with their business about recovery efforts after the fires, operators were again divided with half stating yes and half stating no. Those who responded yes mentioned good communication from the shire, Parks Victoria, the DSE and Tourism Victoria. None mentioned any regional tourism associations.

Yes—better this time than in '03. It would have been nicer to have the road open sooner than three weeks though.

A few emails received—a bit of an effort was made mostly by the shire.” Yes we had emails sent every single day reporting on plans which increased to two per day—one from Parks Victoria and one from DSE. Everyone finds out everything fast in this small community too.

Yes—through their marketing strategies. Parks Vic were clear with the messages about which areas were open and closed. They also had a scheme where they employed tour operators in the recovery process. The shire was represented through the regional tourism association which Tourism Victoria funded. There were a number of different campaigns which regional businesses had the opportunity to participate in.

For the operators who did not feel that there was effective communication, the reasons given included that there was not enough communication, that is was not directed specifically to operators and that promises were not followed through.

No, not great communication, and not enough.

No—there needed to be more direct communication with small businesses.

I didn't really have much to do with them after the fires. There was some interesting times—we were actually interviewed by the Commissioner for Emergency Services and he was going to do a lot of things but I don't think that's happened. Not for us personally, but for the mountain.

One operator acknowledged that there may have been effective communication, however they were not open to receiving it all, "Well I think they probably did but we probably didn't take it all on board."

When asked if they had enough information to advise customers with confidence about the situation on the ground most operators responded that they did.

Yes. Information was given by Parks Victoria and DCS or whatever it is.

Yes. We had a staff member based in Mansfield who was well informed about what was going on. We liaised with him and passed the information on directly to our customers.

Two stated that this was not relevant to their operations whilst one said that they were reliant on information from the media, "No as I only had information from the media."

Long term recovery

When asked if the 2006/07 bushfires had resulted in long term or permanent changes to their business, six or almost half of the operators interviewed clearly stated no, and the remaining seven reported numerous changes including a loss of bookings, a reduction in opening hours and in one case the business being put up for sale.

The cottage is now on the market as well because the business has not completely recovered. The tourism has suffered on a long-term basis so it is not working to the extent and people are not coming up as much. Not as much influx.

Of those who reported no significant changes, some were quite optimistic, suggesting that one year on the fires and the media coverage they generated were good for business and that the post fire marketing campaigns had worked well.

In King Valley there has been a slight positive effect. No one knew where it was and now they do as a result of the national headlines and the visits by national and state leaders.

We resumed as normal. The long term effects are that we are more proactive in marketing at the village level through the Chamber of Commerce and Resort Management Board.

On the issue of the recovery of individual businesses one year on from the most recent fires, there was a range of responses from fully recovered and businesses returning to 60% recovered, to reports that business was still significantly down on previous good summers. Of those who reported being back on track, comments such as "back on track", "fully recovered", and "we have grown over the summer" were common.

This summer we've seen a glimpse of how it should be which we have not seen for seven years. The summer in between the fires was not a great summer but this one is going OK.

For those still recovering, some provided percentages ranging from 60% to 80%, and appeared to be optimistic that they would fully recover:

We are back to 60/70% of our business. By next year we should be back to normal if there are no fires.

This summer is very slow but don't know why particularly. Not as much trade work is being done this summer so we are missing the tradies. We had a great Christmas.

One operator reported that business was winding down, but not due to the fires, whilst only one made a link between marketing efforts and a slower summer season one year on.

I think that we suffered this summer mainly due to last year's fire—so then the promotion has not been done very well because then people might think that it might happen again. We have to spell it out to people very clearly it's like the saying 'we are going to Mt Buller and going down the hill' or say even cooler in the summer. Now people don't understand that, they don't know what it means. You have to say to them that the temperature on Buller in the summer is a maximum of 27 degrees. When you've got 40 in Melbourne come and cool down. So that's exactly the same thing for everything?

The role of government agencies in recovery

For this section of the report, operators were asked to articulate how effective they believed the recovery efforts had been from a number of key government agencies. Four respondents stated that Parks Victoria's efforts had been good, three reported that they hadn't heard from them or were not aware of anything being done, whilst

only two felt they could be doing more and their comments related to the repair of infrastructure and removal of obsolete warning signs.

At Paradise Falls, even after 12 months, there has been no work on the bridge or the road and it is still closed. Ground activities have been lacking.

They put lots of signs up saying “This area has been burnt by fire—be careful” and those signs are still up and should be taken down or updated or remove the problem if it still exists. Parks are meant to be for the people but there are signs up saying “Don’t go in there”.

Most of the operators felt that Tourism Victoria had played an important role in the recovery effort with comments such as, “good”, “proactive”, “really good with marketing after the fire” and “Tourism Victoria were helpful, they backed us up on anything we tried to promote.” Two were not sure or not clear about Tourism Victoria’s recovery responses, whilst only one felt that they did not do enough; however, the following quote indicates that they may have been confusing Tourism Victoria with a local government agency or association. “Although I pay rates to them they didn’t benefit small operators.”

When it came to the role of the local shires, only four operators felt that they were good and effective. “[the shire was] really proactive” “they bent over backwards to help”. One operator felt that they had done an average job but did not wish to elaborate more. One felt that the resort management board did more for the village than the shire whilst another noted that Dinner Plain was a little overlooked as it is located on the border of two shires. “No—could do more for Dinner Plain—we’re on the shire border.” Three operators stated that they did not know or could not recall any specific recovery activities carried out by the shires, whilst only two felt that local government was not effective. “No I thought they wasted the money. T.O. resigned shortly afterwards.”

Approximately half of the operators responded that they felt that NE Tourism were effective in helping to promote the region after the fires. The general feeling amongst these operators was that this organisation was proactive and doing a good job on a limited budget. Three operators reported that they didn’t know or were unaware of NE Tourism’s recovery activities, whilst only two indicated that they felt they had not done anything or not enough.

They don’t do a lot, they are a government organisation and sort of trickle things here and there and everywhere ... Falls Creek and wherever there are fires involved in the tourist areas. But really the big thing that was done for Buller was from our local people—the Mt Buller Promotion Committee.

To conclude this section, operators were asked if they thought that the recovery money was spent wisely and at the right time to encourage future bookings after the fire. Only three operators provided positive responses to this question, indicating that they were happy with the distribution and timing of the recovery moneys.

Yes at the time they did the best job possible.

Yes I do. Any money spent in the area has to be good.

The money given to the resort has been well spent. Used for infrastructure, marketing.

Two operators responded negatively, answering no, but did not wish to elaborate, whilst another two responded that they didn’t know where the money had gone. Others acknowledged that efforts were being made and provided some suggestions on how this aspect of recovery could have been improved.

Don’t know enough about how it was spent but I think a lot was spent straight away and maybe it would have been better to wait. There are still some funds in the community which haven’t been tapped into yet.

Money should have been spent on the following summer rather than trying to retrieve the previous one.

It was too late to help with that time of the year during the fires, but it was good to help with the following year.

Not always—but I think what they did was they tried. It was not all successful but they did try. I think there was probably too many—they seemed to have something every couple of weekends. It was too much—it would have been better to make a big effort for the month and have something.

The future

To conclude the interviews, operators were asked, with the benefit of hindsight one year on, to nominate what they believe could have been done better to encourage a quicker recovery for their towns and businesses. Five operators responded that more positive and accurate media coverage in Melbourne would have been helpful.

Media in Melbourne and major cities could have communicated exactly where the fires were and where they weren’t and encouraged people to go back to the areas when the fires were safely past.

More accurate media coverage rather than blanket fire warnings from the Premier which cover areas not effected. Tourists were getting different stories which create fear. Sensational stories about fire frighten people off unnecessarily.

Three responded that more marketing could have been undertaken:

They could have advertised a bit more that the bush is recovering and that the bush is back to normal, a campaign to bring people back into the region. The snow season last year was good but it ended quite abruptly—that was probably the only time we came close to recovering.

Marketing could have focused more on adjoining areas e.g. Wangaratta and Benalla, to encourage visitation from those areas and to those areas. Public perception was that the whole area was burnt rather than just pockets.

Any marketing campaigns and subsequent funding to the area would have a flow-on effect for our business. I think that Tourism Vic has not really done anything like that and the regional bodies do not have the money to contribute.

One operator suggested that the marketing effort needed to be faster:

There's a lot of things they should have done much quicker and when you think about marketing and promotions and putting money into something and government money it's going to take time to come through anyway. It's not going to be instant—if they have a master plan during the disaster they've got time to plan what they are going to do after...but they don't, they start planning when everything is finished and that's the way it's done here.

One operator recommended that more direct financial assistance be made available to operators:

Direct financial assistance would have been a great benefit. We only received the marketing assistance, but the interruption to the business would have benefited by some direct funding to help pay bills and wages. Some of the staff moved away from the area to find other work which would have had a flow-on effect to the rest of the region.

Another reported that the community was much more prepared in 2007 after the 2003 fires, whilst another was quite supportive of the recovery effort.

I think they did a pretty good job really—it was almost the end of the school holidays by the time it had finished. So you weren't going to get those people with kids up anyway then. So I think we've recovered. There was quite a few things to do in summer to do with the bike riding and the walks and they're getting it out there.

Finally, operators were asked if they believed that major fires were a danger every summer and what, if any, new plans they had in place to assist with quicker recovery after any future fires. Responses to the question of reoccurring fires were mixed with a 50/50 split between those who felt that fires would reoccur more frequently and those who did not think this was likely. Of those who did not believe fires would reoccur with such frequency, many were advocates of burn offs and/or alpine grazing.

No—major fires are very rare. The area needs burning off regularly.

Management of National Parks and State Forests has to be readdressed. The current plan has failed to protect tourism, flora and fauna so the question needs to be asked "What is the resource here and how do we manage it?" Maybe high country grazing would be useful and more firebreaks.

I am a firm believer in Alpine grazing because it keeps the undergrowth down and inhibits huge fires. Should return to this practice. It is wrong for office people to advise on these things as it needs local expertise.

Not every summer. We have been unlucky to have two so close to each other. Perhaps it's because they don't burn off as often as they used to.

Some of those who did think that more frequent fires were also a strong possibility also mentioned burning off whilst others stated that it was just part of the Australian landscape process.

They are a possibility every year and could be managed better. Burning off could help but in a few years time it might happen again—they are a natural hazard.

Yes they'll occur more often because it's part of the Australian climate but I hope not.

Yes I think that's just part of Australian life the fires, and because we've had such a big drought. Recovery—I think it's a hard thing really. It's hard to convince people everything is OK—especially when the fires were so long and so big.

Hard to say but if conditions are right there can be a fire every summer and they will burn where they haven't burnt before. So we might have a fire next season. You need a structure in place because you don't know what the circumstances will be."

Finally, on the question of new plans, one operator responded that they had confidence in the emergency services whilst only one mentioned new plans. This was at Mt Buller where there appeared to be a new enthusiasm for clearing debris that could contribute to a fire.

I don't know—on private level, yes, for us here on Mt Buller (the locals that live here), we would be better prepared because we had a close shave. We have to be better prepared and clean around the houses etc. ??? ... is actually doing a good job by telling people to clean up and they are going to enforce that—I think it is a good thing ... Our job really is to say to them “hang on a minute you slipped up you left some of the places in a mess- you should be going there.

It was a really important finding that despite two major fires over the last five years, there was still little attention being paid to forward recovery planning. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Alpine Visitors

The following findings are derived from interviews with 15 visitors to the Victorian Alpine Region. The interviews were all conducted onsite; in or around the villages of Falls Creek, Mt Hotham/Dinner Plain and Mt Buller. The respondents were of a variety of ages from 18 to 65+ and included a sample of five women and 10 men. All but one of the participants was from regional Victoria. With the exception of one visitor from Gippsland who was in the mountains for the first time, all of the other respondents had visited the Alps on many occasions before the fires and at least one other time after the 2006/07 bushfires. When visiting the high country the visitors nominated a range of locations where they liked to stay overnight. These included Mansfield, Bright, Mt Buffalo, Mt Hotham, Alexandra, Harrietville, Anglers Rest, ski lodges, and camping in the Alpine Region National Parks.

Bushfire awareness

All 15 of the visitors interviewed indicated that they were aware of the 2006/07 Alpine bushfires in north-east Victoria. When asked if they could recall how long the fires lasted, the responses ranged from two weeks to three months. Table 6 below illustrates the responses.

Table 6: Recall of fire duration

| Length of fire | 2 weeks | 1 month | 1-2 months | 2 months | 2-3 months | 3 months |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| Number of respondents | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 |

When it came to identifying the names of towns and areas that were affected by the fires, there was a strong recollection of a large number of place names. These are listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Recall of fire locations

| No. | Place name | No. | Place name | No. | Place name |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----|--------------|-----|----------------|
| 1 | Alps | 2 | Germantown | 4 | Mt. Hotham |
| 1 | Bairnsdale | 2 | Gippsland | 1 | Mt. Feathertop |
| 1 | Benambra | 1 | Glengarry | 1 | Mt. Macedon |
| 7 | Bright | 1 | Glenmaggie | 1 | Myrtleford |
| 2 | Buckland Valley | 2 | Harrietville | 1 | Swifts Creek |
| 1 | Cheshunt | 2 | Jamieson | 1 | The Otway's |
| 1 | Cresta Lodge | 1 | King Valley | 1 | Tolmie |
| 2 | Craig's Hut / High Country Huts | 3 | Licola | 1 | Toongabbie |
| 2 | Dargo | 2 | Mt. Buffalo | 1 | Tyers |
| 2 | Edi Upper | 2 | Mt. Buller | 2 | Toowonga |
| 2 | Falls Creek | 2 | Omeo | 2 | Wandiligong |
| 2 | Freeburgh | 4 | Mt. Beauty | 4 | Whitfield |

Next, the visitors were asked to describe what they had heard about the fires and what the source for this information was. The majority just simply stated that they had heard about the fires on the news but did not provide any further details on the content of the reports that they had seen or heard. Only two provided any descriptions including:

Promoted a sense of panic.

Heard that it was big, and out of control.

Eight of the respondents nominated television as their primary source of bushfire information, eight family and friends, six the radio, four from their workplaces, and two newspapers and two the internet.

From friends, family, newspapers, internet, radio but less from TV because it was so inaccurate.

From all media, DSE websites, personal experience, local community.

Although all of the respondents were very well informed of the bushfires, all but one indicated that this information did not influence their decision to visit the Alpine Region after the fires. "No, didn't influence my decision to visit the Alpine Region. The news dramatised the whole situation too much." One even indicated that the information had a positive influence stating that, "Yes because reassured that there was no problems with visiting the area."

Impact of the bushfire on visitation

When asked if the impacts of the 2006/07 bushfires had influenced their itinerary on this or other trips that they had made to the Alpine Region since the fire only two indicated yes:

Yes—Campsite selection has been restricted. I'm not sure about the safety of the tracks and the risk of dead / burnt trees falling.

Yes—Very soon after the fires I came to visit as we wanted to see the landscape while it was still smoking. We went up to the Dargo region out the back of Cowra.

The remaining 13 visitors stated that the bushfires had not influenced their itinerary or activities whilst visiting the mountains.

Visitors' perceptions of the condition of the region after the fire before they revisited were both physical and emotional. Many identified damage to property, burnt vegetation, erosion and closure of tracks, but interestingly some also noted danger, devastation, sadness and hardship for locals and concern for local businesses.

Burnt out. Bush and property damaged by fire and smoke.

Black. Dangerous. Sad for people who rely on the tourism dollar.

Some pockets would be burned—damage as expected.

Not all perceptions were negative; some were realistic and prepared for the changes to the landscape having witnessed the after effects of the 2003 fires. "I'm used to the impact. It was worse in 2003 at Hotham." Others were quite upbeat, expressing some desire to see the changes created by the fires, or to be reassured that tracks would be reopened.

Fascination—revisiting the trees and landscape.

I was worried about erosion on the mountain bike tracks.

In terms of their motivations for visiting the Alpine Region after the fires, 13 of the respondents indicated that the primary motivation was to visit with friends and or to take part in recreational activities. These activities included attending festivals including the Falls Creek Food and Wine Festival and the Dinner Plain Music Festival. Other popular activities were mountain bike riding, hiking, camping, and kayaking.

We came here today to go Kayaking on the Mitta Mitta.

Main reason was to go mountain biking for two days; Food and wine festival was bonus.

The additional motivations were linked closely to the landscape, scenery and climate.

General interest, I was curious to see what it was like just after it had been burnt.

For the wine, cool climate, venue, festival.

Pure beauty [of the area].

The interviewees were also asked to indicate if the impacts of the 2006/07 fires had affected their satisfaction with any of their post fire trips to the high country. The overwhelming majority indicated that bushfires had not had any significant impact on their level of satisfaction with their alpine experiences. Only one indicated a

decrease in satisfaction due to a perceived loss in amenity. “I’d be less inclined to do a big walk because it’s not as aesthetically pleasing.” Some visitors actually stated that the impacts of the bushfires had enhanced their experience.

Better—it’s a bit eerie. It’s the first time I’ve seen it like that. It’s like a silver forest—it’s beautiful.

Satisfaction with my trips after the fires have increased as it’s been good to see the bush grow back.

Risk perception

Next, the interviewees were asked if they felt there were any risks involved in visiting an Alpine Region after a major fire. The majority of visitors indicated that there would be some form of risk whilst only five felt that there was no risk in visiting the high country after a fire. “None – it’s probably safe because it’s cleared and you can see more.” One indicated that there might be some risk but not in relation to their activity of mountain bike riding, “Not risky apart from debris washed into gullies, rivers, creeks but that does not effect mountain biking.” Of the nine visitors who felt that the bushfires would have created some level of risk, their identification of those risks ranged from falling trees and landslides to contaminated water and unpalatable wine from the local vineyards.

Landslides, bad tasting wine.

The effects on water supplies and erosion.

Many also acknowledged that the environment would be more sensitive and that bushwalkers would need to take more care due to the changed landscape.

Ecological because the ground will be less stable and more prone to human impact e.g. people walking off the tracks because the forest is more accessible.

Falling trees, hot spots (smouldering pockets of bush), people falling through burnt logs when bushwalking.

When asked how long they would wait to visit the Alpine Region after a major fire, four indicated that they wouldn’t wait at all and that they would travel back into the Alps for work or to view the damage.

I wouldn’t wait at all—I’m not worried.

Would visit immediately because there is nothing left to burn.

Some indicated that they would wait for the advice of the authorities. “I would wait until the advice of the local authorities indicated that it was safe to visit.” One suggested two days, “I would wait a couple of days after the main danger has passed and the area has cooled off.” Another stated one week, “I would wait until a week after the fires – not sure why.” One visitor said one month whilst another indicated that two months was appropriate. “I would allow a couple of months for the locals to recover before visiting.” Most visitors indicated that the length of time that they waited to return was linked to the perceived safety and/or the all-clear from the relevant authorities.

Most visitors were confident that fires would not occur every summer in the Alps; however, a couple indicated that they could, with comments such as, “Potentially due to the drought and El Nino effects,” and “Hope not although fires are more likely after 10 years of drought and things seem to have grown back quickly and thickly.” Whilst the vast majority did not think fires would occur as frequently as every summer, many still cautioned that they could still happen more frequently than in the past.

Not every summer but most summers.

No but it depends on what sort of summer we have and the drought.

No. They are quite rare—but if global warming continues it may become more common.

Some were quite optimistic stating that the conditions would not be conducive to another major fire in the near future.

No it will take about 20 years to build up to the next one.

No—they just happen when they happen. There might be better management in the park and state forest now which might stop it being so massive in the future.

No because it was the unique combination of climatic circumstances with the lack of alpine grazing that contributed to the bushfires.

Others indicated that there would be more community vigilance: “There is an increased general awareness of the community as to the risks and their prevention and the likelihood of firebugs.”

When asked if they would continue to visit the Alpine Region in the summertime, 100% of interviewees indicated that they would, with some nominating both summer and winter as ideal times to visit the high country.

I'll continue to visit. If something happens, the authorities will warn you.

First summer visit and enjoying beautiful environment. Particularly enjoyed driving past Bogong Dinner Plains and likened it to Austrian scenes.

First summer visit and certainly—will be back in summer.

I'd come again in summer and winter.

Recovery

Only six of the visitors could recall any media campaigns encouraging people to revisit the Alpine Region after the 2006/07 bushfires. Nine could not recall any campaigns. Of those who could recall a media campaign, only one identified television but could not provide any details. Of the remainder, most remembered local radio and newspaper advertisements.

Ads on the local radio—3TR 1242.

Yes in the papers and local community.

Yes—there was some on ABC radio, but I don't remember much detail about them.

When asked what impact they felt the fires may have had on local businesses in the high country, three respondents were unsure and some indicated that they would have had a positive impact.

It brings the community closer together.

Not a lot because the fires were in the low season.

It would bring people together. Then the practical work of recovery. Short to medium term impact on farmers on resources and energy.

Of the remaining nine interviewees, a range of negative impacts were mentioned, including economic losses, and decreases in visitation, and environmental impacts.

There's been economic loss due to reduced tourist numbers. This has had direct and indirect impact on the local community through the ripple effect to other businesses in the area.

Really bad—shocking impacts. There's been a downturn in trade and tourists are staying away.

Less traffic to the area and to the vineyards which means less tourists. People that live in the local communities will be affected by this.

Big impact on tourism; locals must be saddened by effect on the appearance of environment—compared this to bushfire effects on bushland beside Great Ocean Road.

It would have been a harsh year [though] some places make some money from the fire fighters for food and accommodation."

The future

As mentioned earlier, all participants indicated an interest in revisiting the Alpine Region sometime in summer. In terms of alternative destinations to the mountains in the summertime, the majority of respondents (10) nominated coastal locations including the Great Ocean Road, Wilsons Prom and the Gippsland beaches. Other alternative destinations included Melbourne, LaTrobe Valley, Echuca, Yarawonga, the Murray River, Tara-Bulga National Park and the Grampians. Tasmania, Queensland, south coast of New South Wales, New Zealand and Tahiti were nominated as alternative interstate and international destinations.

In terms of sources of information for future summer holidays, most (12) indicated that their first choice was the internet. Visit Victoria, Australia.com and Lonely Planet were nominated as useful internet sites. Nine respondents found that family and friends or word-of-mouth were a strong source of information about possible holiday locations. Three relied on previous travel experience and two liked to drop in at visitor information centres. One mentioned the travel section in The Age newspaper and another mentioned television.

Potential Visitors

The following findings are derived with interviews with ten potential visitors to the Victorian Alpine Region. The interviews were all conducted in the Melbourne CBD. The respondents were of a variety of ages from 18 to 65 and an equal number of men and women were sampled. Whilst the interviewees had not visited the mountains since the 2007 bushfires, all indicated that they would like to, with half nominating summer or spring and half nominating autumn or winter as their preferred season to travel to the high country. One of the most interesting

findings amongst this group was that although one acknowledged that the media might influence their decision to visit the Alps in the short term, all were unanimous that information about the bushfires would not influence their decisions to travel to this region.

Bushfire awareness

All 10 of the potential tourists interviewed indicated that they were aware of the most recent 2007 bushfires; however, none could correctly identify how long the fires lasted. Half were unsure or declined to answer the question, whilst the remainder identified periods ranging from one week to two months.

Don't remember how long they lasted, maybe about a week.

I know that bushfires went through, they went on for quite a while, for two months? Was it two months? I remember one went on for forty days, I remember they went on and on and it was pretty bad.

When asked if they could recall the names of any of the towns that had been affected by the bushfires, 80% of the respondents could not name any towns or locations. The two potential visitors who could identify places named the following; Falls Creek, Swifts Creek, Omeo, Myrtleford, King Valley, and Corryong.

Next, the potential visitors were asked to describe what they had heard about the fires and what the source for this information was. Whilst two declined to answer this question, the remainder provided a range of responses that included information regarding the size of the fires, the difficulties experienced in controlling them, the loss and damage of property including historic huts, the threat to wildlife, the pollution of water catchments and personal firefighter stories.

Just mainly how much bushland was burnt really, the large quantity of land and a lot of the original huts and the like getting burnt down.

I heard where the fires were and about the amount of effort involved in putting the fires out, the loss of property. There were issues too with moving of cattle. I seem to remember something about livestock having to be moved although I guess there's not a lot of livestock up there. People talked about issues to do with climate change, whether the fires would contribute to the greenhouse levels and global warming. There were water catchment issues, that the fires could reduce catchment or even pollute catchments. Stories about the fire fighters and their issues, personal stories too, about farmers and other people in the area. I work for the DSE and through that I heard about the controversy over fire breaks and the use of fire retardant chemicals and the affect that was having on the natural environment.

Heard on the news and read in newspapers that they were dangerous and the winds were shifting and they were pretty scary and uncontrollable.

There was a lot of property destroyed, lots of houses, that's all I remember about it.

The main source of information about the fires for all participants was the television news. Half of the respondents also identified the newspapers as an important source of information whilst three also nominated the radio. "TV, radio, newspapers, just from the media." When asked if this information would influence their decision to visit the Alps, all stated that it would not. "It wouldn't make any difference to whether I would go, just because there had been fires before." Some even suggested that the fires may have made the region a more attractive destination, indicating a curiosity factor,

We would still go up if there was no fire. We drove through Omeo in October and saw the damage done. It's still beautiful and no more dangerous than any other place.

Visiting the region would be beneficial to the tourist operators. It may influence people to go and see the effects of the bushfire. It could affect my decision to hike there.

Risk perception

The interviewees were then asked if they felt that there were any risks involved in visiting an Alpine Region after a major fire. Half of the respondents indicated that they did not feel that there were any personal risks involved in visiting after a fire, and interestingly four out of these five respondents were female. "I don't think there are any risks. If the fire is over then it is safe to go." Of this group, some did acknowledge that the environment might be more sensitive:

I don't think there's any personal risk. The environment might be more delicate and need time to recover. Perhaps the environment wouldn't be as stable as it once was.

Of the interviewees that did perceive that there would be some risk involved, the hazards they identified ranged from the fire reoccurring to falling trees and dead animals to increased sunburn due to less shade.

The fire recurring if it hasn't been put out. Trees could fall down on you. Loose debris, weakened trees, dead animals. Lack of resources because people are still away from the area, being evacuated, transport of goods being stopped leading to a possible lack of supplies.

Falling trees but there's less of a risk because everything's already burnt out.

When asked how long they would wait to visit the Alpine Region after a major fire, most indicated that they would go up to the mountains as soon as it was declared safe to do so and when the roads had been reopened. "I would trust that they wouldn't be opening the area up unless it was really safe". One indicated that they would wait a month whilst three suggested that they would wait one year until the bush had started to regenerate. "I'd go back after a year when everything's started growing again."

Most potential visitors were confident that fires would not occur every summer in the Alps, however several indicated that they could, with comments such as:

Yeah, I'd say they'd be pretty seasonal. (So would that influence your visitation times?) Yeah it would, if it was a time of high fire danger I'd seek other places to go. I wouldn't go up there and put myself in danger but you can't really ah, can't really predict when bushfires are going to happen.

I hope not. I don't think every summer but I guess it's the trend. I think fires will happen with dryness unless there is some other way to prevent them or some way to minimise the impact but it seems to me, and now I'm talking about Australia in general, I'm generalising, but it seems more commonplace than where I'm from.

That depends on the lightning. Yes it probably could—it's natural.

They could do depending on the climate. Management is better as people are more aware of the danger.

Of those who did not think fires would occur as frequently as every summer, many still cautioned that this was very dependent on seasonal conditions.

No, I don't think fires will happen every summer because there are lots of things that contribute to them. The weather is different each year, lots of fires are started by arsonists and they won't necessarily be there every year. The amount of water around is important too. If there is a lot of water storage they can fight the fires better and if it has been wet the bush won't burn so readily.

Probably not every summer but they are so unpredictable so we don't know.

Recovery

None of the potential visitors could identify any media campaigns that were run after the fires to encourage people to visit the Alpine area, with only one recalling an ABC radio program supporting businesses in Gippsland. When asked what impact they felt the fires may have had on local businesses in the high country, all identified multiple negative impacts. Interestingly, all respondents nominated tourism and a loss of visitation as a serious impact even though they were not prompted in this direction, indicating that it may have been front of mind. The following quote sums up many of the responses:

The impacts on local communities would all be negative. Do you want more detail? (yes please) Okay, loss of property, a lot of people lost property, not just in the bush but in the towns as well. There would be a lot less visitation so there is a downturn in tourism and the area is highly tourism dependent. Volunteers were required for a long time after the fires so there is a cost to them in not being able to return to work and a cost to their employers because their workers can't put in as many hours. There are both social and economic costs here, with the volunteers being away from families and being exhausted. There are disruptions to local communities with road closures etc and there is stock loss.

The future

As mentioned earlier, all participants indicated an interest in visiting the Alpine Region sometime in the near future. When asked what activities they would like to undertake in this region, bushwalking/ hiking and camping were the most common responses. Only two mentioned non-nature-based activities such as wineries, cafes and shopping. In terms of alternative destinations to the mountains in the summertime the vast majority of respondents nominated coastal locations both in Victoria and interstate, with one preferring to travel to the Murray and one indicating that they like to stay at home during the summer. Walking again featured strongly in the list of activities that respondents liked to participate in at the beach, followed closely by swimming and surfing. In terms of sources of information for future summer holidays, most indicated that their first choice was the internet. Some also nominated friends and family or past experience with destinations.

The internet, when I want to do a real search. But I also like to know what people think. Usually people will say, 'Oh I've just come back from Europe' and they'll tell you about it. But it would definitely be the internet.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings with respect to the three categories of participants in this study – tourism operators, alpine visitors and potential visitors.

Tourism Operators

The operators interviewed had on average been operating for a long duration (seven of the 13 participants had been in business for over 20 years) and at least half of their business income was reliant on access to a protected area within the Australian Alps. These operators therefore had a strong stake in seeing visitation affected as little as possible from the impact of bushfires and in improving disaster recovery both for their businesses and for their region as a whole.

With respect to the impact of the 2006/07 bushfires, the short-term effect was particular harsh for these businesses, with some experiencing complete loss of trade for almost the entire summer season, while others were affected by more ephemeral effects such as road closures, closures of the mountains during the fires and cancelled bookings. A positive note was struck by those who indicated that they were well prepared for the event and felt that the fires actually contributed to the building of social capital and community camaraderie, as people were forced to cooperate to deal with the disaster. It would appear that there are opportunities to more clearly communicate to the public when closures of areas and roads are lifted, both by operators and government agencies, in order to maximise the incidence of new bookings or entice those who have cancelled bookings back into the region as quickly as possible.

The impact of the media was also an issue for operators. It was noted that negative and possibly sensationalist media reporting affected business during this initial period, given potential visitors were advised to keep away from the Alpine Region and there was a lack of emphasis about the recovery process being undertaken. This may require more proactive media liaison by both operators and government agencies in the first few months after the fire, through more frequent and informative media releases, actively seeking visits by media agencies and arranging media events to facilitate more accurate and positive reporting about recovery post-fire.

Unlike some of the situations reported in the literature for previous fires, the tourism businesses in the region appeared to be well prepared for this type of event, with almost all having formal emergency plans in place and operators interviewed involved in their communities. They appeared however to be less prepared for recovery once the initial emergency or disaster had passed, with half of the participants in this study failing to actively market their business or relying on others to take up the shortfall. Very few reported that they contacted their customer database or prepared special mailouts or newsletters. These operators may require assistance on the ground in this short-term period (one to two months post-fire) from a dedicated 'recovery officer' on each affected mountain. The role of this individual would be to advise operators on how best to market their businesses during this period and act as an interface between the parks agency, local government and the community. This may be a more efficient use of resources than providing more direct financial assistance to operators.

Forward recovery planning, in addition to emergency planning, should be encouraged amongst operators and assisted by the disaster recovery officer, who could run seminars and workshops and work one on one with local businesses. Face-to-face provision of information and communication directly with operators, rather than the use of email or faxes, will assist operators to understand the current status of the recovery process and to feel more confident advising the public about when to return to the region and what activities will be available to them when they do. It will also help to raise awareness amongst communities of what agencies, including Tourism Victoria, Parks Victoria and local councils, are doing to assist with recovery efforts.

Timing of recovery efforts also appeared to be an issue with operators in this study. A number indicated that some recovery money should be allocated for long-term use, rather than spending the majority or all of it on the initial period after the fire. While it is important to be seen to be assisting with initial disaster recovery, allocating some disaster recovery funding for improving future seasons and advising operators that this is to occur, may alleviate some of this community concern.

Only half of the operators interviewed anticipated more frequent occurrence of fires in the future, even though the scientific evidence appears to be weighted to the contrary. Part of the disaster recovery officer's role

may be to change this perception and encourage operators to prepare for these events by undertaking a combination of emergency and disaster recovery planning in their businesses.

Alpine Visitors

All but one of the intercepted visitors to the Victorian Alps were regular visitors to the high country and this group was very familiar with the tourism product in the region and the extent, duration and impact of the 2006/07 bushfires. The visitors noted that they were well informed about the bushfires, but that this information did not discourage them from revisiting the region after the fires. Most also indicated that the impacts of the fires had not changed their itinerary or the activities they pursued during their trips to the Alps and that the bushfires had not affected their satisfaction with their high country experiences. As regular visitors to this region, it would seem that this group is not negatively affected by bushfire and perhaps they provide an opportunity through word-of-mouth and VFR marketing to help with increasing post fire visitation. Other options to investigate may include product inducements such as 'friends stay or eat for free'.

Another positive finding amongst the frequent visitors was their enthusiastic participation in festivals and events. The interviews for this study were all conducted during major summer festivals on each of the mountains. Although the event was not the primary reason for visitation for many interviewees, all indicated that the event had enhanced their visitor experience. The researchers observed first hand the popularity of these events and felt that there was significant potential to expand and further develop a coordinated summer festival season across the Alps with support from the relevant government agencies. There would be significant opportunities for these agencies to promote their bushfire recovery activities at these gatherings.

Interestingly, the actual visitors were more risk sensitive than potential visitors; however, this had not stopped them from travelling to the Alps, with many indicating that they had returned as soon as it was safe to do so. This is an area that requires more in-depth research to find out why people who perceive less risk don't visit and those who perceive more risk do. The risks perceived by the visitors were both physical and emotional, and the stronger feelings amongst this group may be aligned to the fact that these visitors were from regional Victoria rather than Melbourne, and they were more familiar with the area having visited on many previous occasions. Like the potential visitors, the actual tourists also displayed great confidence in the relevant government agencies and trusted that they would provide appropriate safety warnings.

The actual visitors formed a strong repeat visitation cohort from regional Victoria. Whilst this group, like the potentials, showed a strong preference for the internet as a reliable source of information about future holiday destinations, over half also nominated friends and family as trusted sources. The development of marketing campaigns that tap into this word-of-mouth / viral communication method would seem an appropriate way to grow this particular market. Whilst they are risk sensitive, they display a strong attachment to the high country, indicating that once the challenge of encouraging a first visit is met it should be relatively easier to maintain this summer market segment with some creative communication.

Potential Visitors

Whilst there was strong awareness of the 2006/07 bushfires in the Victorian Alpine Region amongst potential visitors, the results of this research indicates that the impacts of the fires are not a barrier to future visitation to the high country. All of the participants in this study were unanimous that information about the bushfires would not influence their decisions to travel to this region and most indicated a willingness to visit during the non-ski season. The second major finding was that although negative information about bushfires would not deter this group from visiting, none could recall any of the positive media coverage that was run after the fires in an effort to increase visitation.

Although all participants were aware of the most recent bushfires in the Victorian Alps, none could correctly identify how long they lasted, and more than 80% could not name any specific towns or locations that had been affected. This would indicate that whilst potential visitors are aware of the existence of the high country, they are not familiar with its geography or specific destinations within it. These results suggest that there could be opportunities for more specific place marketing, linking particular destinations to activities or events in order to increase their profile and recall as potential tourism destinations. It appears that potential visitors' perceptions of the region's tourism activities are closely linked to the activities of bushwalking/hiking and camping. This could provide further marketing opportunities to highlight other attractions including things such as food and wine, shopping, cultural and adventure opportunities.

This group did not appear to be deterred by any negative bushfire information and expressed confidence in the relevant government agencies that they would advise the public when the area was safe to visit. The main risk they identified was falling trees and most were quite optimistic that fires would not occur every summer. Although difficult to implement, as the risk of fire is always present in the Alps during the warmer months of the

year, some sort of public declaration by the relevant government agencies that the fires are out and it is safe to visit may be useful to reassure these potential visitors. This group was not engaged by other media and marketing activities post fire, thus messages coming from respected authorities may have more positive impact on turning their desire to travel to the region into actual visitation. The preferred mediums to receive such messages by this group would be television and the internet, as most indicated that the main source of their knowledge about the bushfires was the television news and the most popular source of information for future summer holidays was the internet.

This group expressed considerable concern for the welfare of business operators in the bushfire affected regions; however this did not appear to be a strong enough push factor to make them visit. This would indicate that marketing campaigns need to focus less on “hardship” stories and pleading with visitors to “help” them recover and perhaps focus more on the positive “open for business”, “new and refreshed” etc personal benefits that the visitor will attain by travelling to this region after a bushfire.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study investigated both actual and potential visitor and operator perceptions of the impact of the 2006/07 bushfires on visitation to Victoria's alpine areas, including the disaster recovery program, which encompassed the contribution of government agencies and the role of the media in the recovery process. The key findings include the lack of forward recovery planning, the existence of prolonged negative media attention and the fact that all operators appeared to have experienced some impact on their business, albeit to different degrees. It appeared that there was a generally positive opinion of the constructive role of government agencies in ensuring visitor and community safety, and a confidence that these bodies would advise of any potential risks connected to the fires. There is scope, however, for improving the media response by providing them with more timely and positive messages about the recovery process and the introduction of a joint agency disaster recovery officer based on location in each of the affected mountain areas. This person would provide an interface between agencies, including state and local government, and operators on the ground, providing personal assistance with business operations and marketing during the initial recovery period and laying the groundwork for future recovery planning.

Key initiatives recommended to be implemented are highlighted below.

Recommendations

Tourism operators

- Clearer communication with the public when closures of areas and roads are lifted, both by operators and government agencies, in order to maximise the incidence of new bookings or entice those who have cancelled bookings back into the region as quickly as possible.
- This may require more proactive media liaison by both operators and the government agencies in the first few months after the fire, through more frequent and informative media releases, actively seeking visits by media agencies and arranging media events to facilitate more accurate and positive reporting about recovery post-fire.
- Provision of assistance on the ground in the short-term from a dedicated recovery officer who will advise operators on how best to market their businesses during this period and act as an interface between the emergency services, incident control, Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria, other relevant state government agencies, local government, business associations and the community.
- Forward recovery planning, in addition to emergency planning, should be encouraged amongst operators and assisted by the disaster recovery officer, who could run seminars and workshops and work one on one with local businesses.
- While it is important to be seen to be assisting with initial disaster recovery, allocating some disaster recovery funding for improving future seasons and advising operators that this is to occur may alleviate community concern regarding this.

Actual visitors

- Use satisfied post bushfire visitors in recovery marketing campaigns both as testimonials and to expand VFR and word-of-mouth. Investigate product inducements like friends stay for free etc.
- Relevant government agencies support a coordinated summer festival calendar of events.
- Incorporate bushfire recovery activities/awareness into event programs.
- Develop targeted marketing to repeat visitors, encouraging them to expand their travel party.

Potential visitors

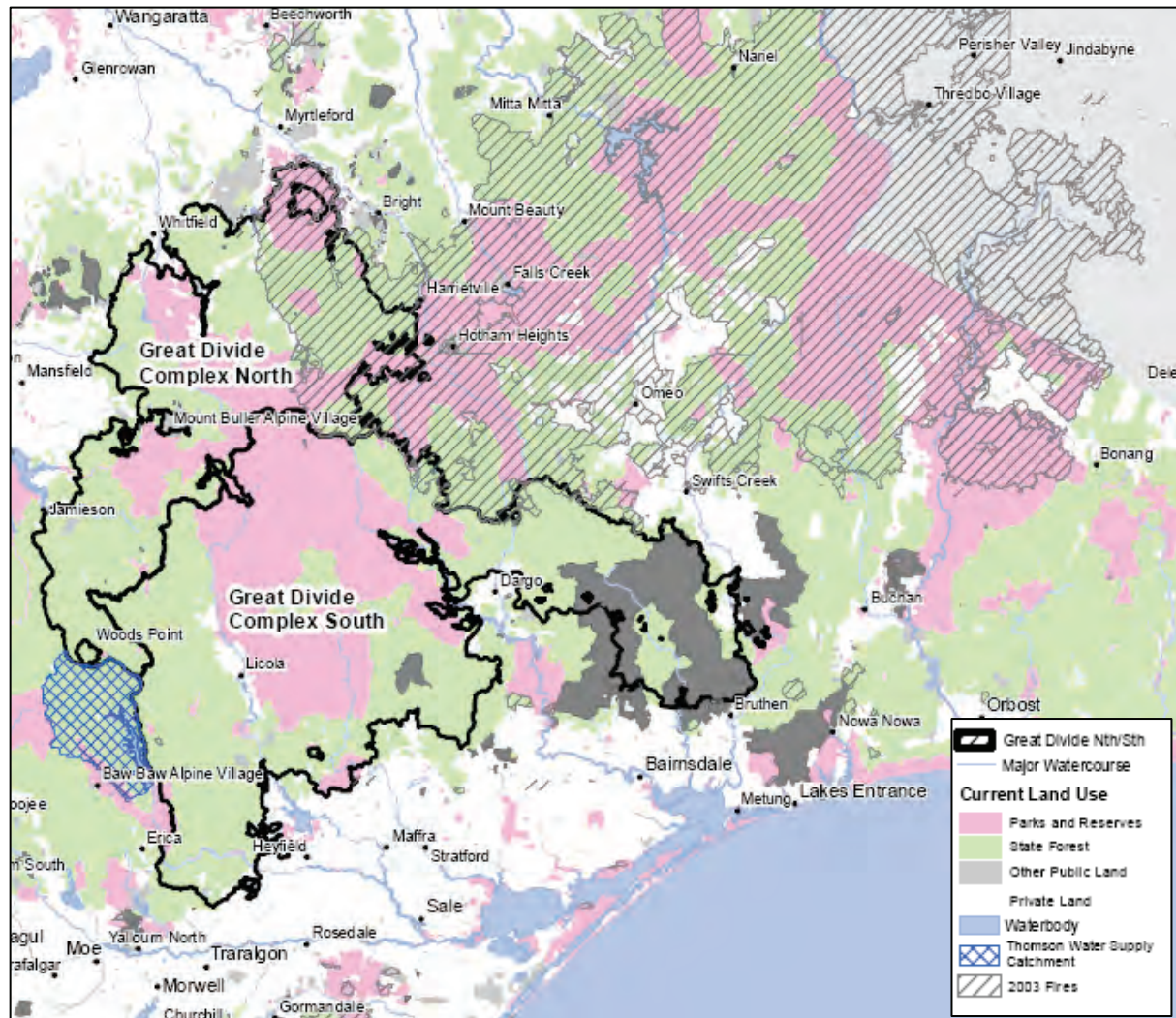
- More specific place marketing, linking particular destinations to activities or events in order to increase their profile and recall as potential tourism destinations.

- A public declaration by the relevant government agencies that the fires are out and it is safe to visit using the media of television and the internet.
- Broader marketing of summer festivals and events.
- Less sad 'help us recover' and more happy 'we are open, come and have a great time' marketing communication messages.

Suggestions for Further Study

- Examination of people's recall of media campaigns post-fire, to consider how effective those messages are in encouraging visitation.
- Undertake a formal study into the timeliness of post disaster recovery marketing campaigns to determine the most effective timeline for implementation.
- Replication of the study with respect to other natural disasters affecting Australian national parks, including flood affected areas in Gippsland or cyclone devastated regions in northern Australia.
- Implementation of a quantitative survey with questions derived from this report immediately after the next fire.
- Investigation of the role of festivals and events in disaster recovery programs in regional events, including their effectiveness and impact on visitation, and development of guidelines for timing, frequency and theme.
- Researching the impact of climate change on the perception of bushfire risk in the Australian Alps amongst visitors and operators and its effect on patterns and frequency of visitation.
- In-depth exploration of the most and least useful activities in the bushfire recovery process to assist in the delivery of more effective recovery services.

APPENDIX A: MAP OF THE 2003 ALPINE BUSHFIRES



SOURCE: Adapted from Department of Sustainability and Environment 2007

APPENDIX B: MAP OF THE 2006/07 ALPINE BUSHFIRES



Source: Adapted from Department of Sustainability and Environment 2007

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—POTENTIAL TOURISTS

Screening questions

- Have you ever considered visiting the Alpine (Mountain) region of Victoria?

[Yes – go to main interview]

[No – would you consider visiting the Alpine (Mountain) region of Victoria?]

[Yes – go to main interview]

[No – thank them for their time]

Main interview questions

- If you were to visit the Alpine Region could you tell me what time of year you might visit and what kind of activities you would participate in?
- Were you aware of the 2006/07 Alpine bushfires in NE Victoria?

[No – go to question x]

[Yes – Do remember how long the fires lasted and could you name any of the towns or areas that were affected?]

- What have you heard about the fires and from whom?

[Prompts – friends and family, TV, newspapers, internet, radio]

- Would this information influence any decision to visit the Alpine Region some time in the future? How and Why?
- What risks if any do you think there are in visiting the Alpine Region after a fire? How long after a fire would you wait before you visited? Why?
- Do you think Alpine fires are going to happen every summer? Why?
- Do you recall any media campaigns encouraging people to revisit the Alpine Region since the 06/07 bushfire?
- What impacts do you think the fires have had on the local communities and businesses in the North East?
- Where would you choose to visit as an alternative to the Alpine Region in the summertime in Victoria?

About the respondent

- Preferred summer holiday destinations
- Where do you source information about possible holiday destinations in Victoria?

[Prompts – Friends, family, prior knowledge, internet travel pages, blogs]

- What kind of leisure activities do you engage in?

[Prompts – swimming, sailing, bushwalking, cycling, organised sports, movies etc]

- What city or town are you from?
- Age 18-25 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65+
- Gender

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—ACTUAL TOURISTS

Introductory questions

- Where are you from?
- Were you aware of the 2006/07 Alpine bushfires in North East Victoria?
- Do remember how long the fires lasted and could you name any of the towns or areas that were affected?
- Prior to today how many times have you visited the Alpine (Mountain) region of Victoria? How many times since the 2006/07 bushfires?
- Where do you stay?
- Have the impacts of the fires influenced your itinerary on this or other trips you have made to the Alpine Region since the fires?
- What were your perceptions of the condition of region after the fire before you visited?
- How have the impacts of the 2006/07 fires affected your satisfaction with these trip(s)? In what way?
- What were your motivations for visiting the Alpine Region after the fires?

Main interview questions

- What have you heard about the fires and from whom?

[Prompts – friends and family, TV, newspapers, internet, radio]

- Did this information influence your decision to visit the Alpine Region on this or previous occasions?
- What risks if any do you think there are in visiting the Alpine Region after a fire? How long after a fire would you wait before you visited? Why?
- Do you think Alpine fires are going to happen every summer? Why?
- Will you continue to visit the Alpine Region in summer or might you choose another time of the year to visit?
- Do you recall any media campaigns encouraging people to revisit the Alpine Region since the 2006/07 bushfire?
- What impacts do you think the fires have had on the local communities and businesses in the North East?
- Where would you choose to visit as an alternative to the Alpine Region in the summertime in Victoria?

About the respondent

- What are your preferred summer holiday destinations?
- Where do you source information about possible holiday destinations in Victoria?

[Prompts – Friends, family, prior knowledge, internet travel pages, blogs]

- What kind of leisure activities do you engage in?

[Prompts – swimming, sailing, bushwalking, cycling, organised sports, movies etc]

- Age 18-25 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65+
- Gender

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—TOURISM OPERATORS

Section 1 – Introductory questions – About your business

- Could you please tell me what type of business you operate and what is your role in this organisation?
- How long has this business been in operation in this location?
- Do you have any previous business experience in another regional location? Where?
- What percentage of this business do you feel relies on direct access to the Alpine National Parks? For your business? For your customers recreational activities?

Section 2 – Impact of the fires

- What was the immediate impact of the 2006/07 bushfires?
 - a) for your town / region
 - b) for your business [prompts – was there any physical fire damage to your property or infrastructure? Did customer numbers decrease? Did bookings decrease? How many cancellations did you have? Did trading cease and if so for how long? Did business increase due to the presence of emergency services personnel? How long did that last? Did you have to alter staff numbers? Did your hours of operation change?
- How did the media coverage of the fires impact on your business operations?
 - a) immediately
 - b) 1 month after
 - c) 3 months after
 - d) 6 months after
 - e) currently
- Were you aware of any emergency response plans at the time of the fire for your town or region?
- Did you have a formal emergency response plan for your business?

Section 3 – Recovery

- Did your business experience any long term or permanent changes as a result of the fires?
- What steps did you take to rebuild your business? [prompts – marketing, price changes, product changes, contacting regular customers directly, networking with other operators?]
- What if any recovery assistance did you receive and from whom?
- Did you participate in any recovery marketing as an individual or as part of a regional marketing campaign?
- What impact do you believe the media has had on recovery? [prompts – do you believe they were encouraging or discouraging visitation immediately, 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, currently] Overall do you feel their messages were positive or negative?
- Did you feel that the relevant government agencies such as Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria, the local shire and the local tourism organisation communicated effectively with your business about recovery efforts after the fires? Why?
- Were you able to advise your customers with confidence about the situation on the ground?
- How effective do you believe the recovery efforts by the following agencies were after the fire in encouraging visitors to return?
 - a) Parks Victoria
 - b) Tourism Victoria
 - c) Alpine shire
 - d) NE Tourism?
- Do you think that recovery marketing money was spent wisely and at the right time to encourage future bookings after the fires?
- To what extent do you think your business has recovered one year after the fires?
- With the benefit of hindsight what do you believe could have been done better to encourage quicker recovery for the town / region and your business?
- Do you believe major fires will occur every summer and what if any new plans do you have in place to assist with quicker recovery after any future fires?

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AUTHORS

Dr Dale Sanders

Dr Dale Sanders is a lecturer in tourism management within the School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management at LaTrobe University. Dale's research interests include sustainable development, indigenous issues, experiential learning, crises and disaster management, events, and regional and niche tourism. Dale has been involved in a number of STCRC projects during the past six years, investigating topics such as visitor satisfaction and community engagement. Dale has degrees in arts and social sciences and her PhD focused on sustainable development in regional destinations. Email: dale.sanders@latrobe.edu.au

Dr Jennifer Laing

Dr Jennifer Laing is a lecturer in the Department of Management, and a member of the Tourism Research Unit at Monash University. Jennifer's research interests include tourism planning and management in protected areas, nature-based tourism, heritage tourism, and health and wellness tourism. Jennifer has been involved in an STCRC-funded study over the past few years examining the benefits of partnerships between protected area management agencies, local communities and/or the tourism industry. Jennifer has degrees in law and business management and recently completed a PhD as an STCRC Scholar on motivations behind frontier travel experiences and implications for tourism marketing. Email: Jennifer.Laing@BusEco.monash.edu.au

Ms Meg Houghton

Ms Meg Houghton has been with La Trobe University and the School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management as both a student and lecturer since 1995. During that period she has taught at four of the University's campuses, delivering a range of subjects. In 2004 she joined the Bundoora Campus and now lectures in undergraduate subjects including hospitality, tourism and information technology. Meg's research interests include wine tourism and wine promotion, festivals, car and caravan touring, and mature age travel. Email: m.houghton@aw.latrobe.edu.au



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CRC For Sustainable Tourism Pty Ltd
Gold Coast Campus Griffith University
Queensland 4222 Australia ABN 53 077 407 286

Telephone: +61 7 5552 8172 Facsimile: +61 7 5552 8171
Website: www.crctourism.com.au
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Introduction

The STCRC has grown to be the largest, dedicated tourism research organisation in the world, with \$187 million invested in tourism research programs, commercialisation and education since 1997.

The STCRC was established in July 2003 under the Commonwealth Government's CRC program and is an extension of the previous Tourism CRC, which operated from 1997 to 2003.

Role and responsibilities

The Commonwealth CRC program aims to turn research outcomes into successful new products, services and technologies. This enables Australian industries to be more efficient, productive and competitive.

The program emphasises collaboration between businesses and researchers to maximise the benefits of research through utilisation, commercialisation and technology transfer.

An education component focuses on producing graduates with skills relevant to industry needs.

STCRC's objectives are to enhance:

- the contribution of long-term scientific and technological research and innovation to Australia's sustainable economic and social development;
- the transfer of research outputs into outcomes of economic, environmental or social benefit to Australia;
- the value of graduate researchers to Australia;
- collaboration among researchers, between researchers and industry or other users; and efficiency in the use of intellectual and other research outcomes.