

Bushfire Recovery Community Update – 19 May 2009

This is Melbourne Water's first community update on what we're doing to help our water supply catchments damaged by the recent Victorian bushfires recover.

Melbourne Water is owned by the Victorian Government. We manage Melbourne's water supply catchments, remove and treat most of Melbourne's sewage, and manage rivers, creeks and major drainage systems throughout the Port Phillip and Westernport region.

We are continuing our recovery efforts within water supply catchments damaged by the fires and keep a watchful eye over fire affected areas.

Melbourne Water personnel have been assigned to recovery work that focuses on stabilising soil, opening roads, assessing waterways and damage to assets, constructing and repairing infrastructure, and protecting the quality of our water. We're working hard to build relationships and reconnect with landholders and agencies in fire affected areas.

There remains no impact on water quality as a result of the bushfires.

Catchments

Most of our water comes from uninhabited mountain ash forests high up in the Yarra Ranges. These water supply catchments catch, hold and filter rainwater as it flows across land into streams and then reservoirs.



Melbourne's water supply system

Around 30 per cent of Melbourne's catchments have had some degree of bushfire damage. Most of this is in the O'Shannassy and Maroondah catchments.

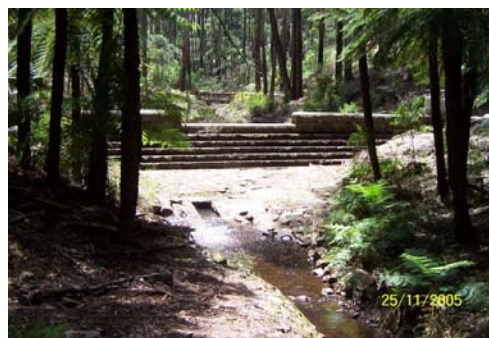
Our two most important water storage catchments – the Upper Yarra and Thomson – were protected and not affected by bushfires.

We recently completed an assessment of Melbourne Water infrastructure damaged by the bushfires within these catchment areas and found:

- Damage to water supply infrastructure was limited to minor things such as weir gates.
- The Maroondah aqueduct system escaped major damage but has been experiencing blockages in places by fallen trees and landslides.
- Some movement of soil following the rains since the fires, particularly in the Wallaby Creek area. This is usual with high intensity fires.
- Wallaby Creek sustained considerable damage in burned area & infrastructure.
- A number of buildings have been lost, including the historic Wallaby Creek Quarters complex.
- Silt traps installed in the Maroondah / O'Shannassy catchments are working well.

This assessment has allowed us to prioritise the works needed to repair or replace assets. We also continue to watch over fire affected water supply catchment areas to ensure:

- roads are kept open and drained, and free from fallen trees;
- channels and drains are kept clean;
- newly constructed silt traps and firebreaks tracks are maintained; and
- structures placed in road drains to catch debris are maintained and free of blockages.



Wallaby Creek before the recent bushfires



Wallaby Creek after the bushfires

We are also working with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the Country Fire Authority in the recovery incident management team at Woori Yallock, to plan and implement bushfire rehabilitation works and assist in the development of the Rehabilitation Plan.

Water Quality

There remains no impact to drinking water quality as a result of the bushfires. Over the next six months we will manage the potential for increased runoff and reduced water quality up stream of the reservoirs with:

- rehabilitation work to reduce erosion and sediment runoff; and
- increased monitoring of water quality.

Melbourne Water's recovery plans are using the Melbourne catchment assessment work compiled by the Burnt Area Emergency Recovery (BAER) teams arranged by the DSE and Parks Victoria and made up of experts from the US.

Waterways

As caretakers of rivers and creeks throughout the Port Phillip and Westernport region, we have identified actions to support the recovery plan for waterways affected by bushfires across the Yarra River and Western Port (Bunyip-Tarago River) catchments. Around 940 km of waterways were affected by the bushfires - about 16.5% of the Yarra River and 8% of the Western Port (includes Bunyip/Tarago) catchments were burnt.

We are working closely with relevant agencies to help ensure a co-ordinated response to recovery along the waterways. For example, we're discussing actions to prioritise and co-ordinate weed control works along waterways and within catchments with Parks Victoria.

We continue our site inspections to observe the waterways and tributaries and are working with Waterwatch Melbourne to conduct an autumn frog census program where we will focus on bushfire affected areas. We're also working with private landholders through the Stream Frontage Management Program to rebuild and repair riparian (land along or near the bank of rivers and streams) fences and stock watering facilities. So far, we have started working with 23 of the 211 SFMP properties in fire affected areas and have had a further 20 landholders join our program.

Waterwatch Melbourne

Melbourne Water and Waterwatch Melbourne, the river health education program that supports community, schools and businesses to be involved in monitoring and protecting the health of our rivers and creeks, are working to develop a monitoring plan for fire affected catchments.

There is also significant scope for Waterwatch groups to help communities heal by documenting and publicising what they have discovered through their monitoring.

Contact

For more information, contact Melbourne Water's Customer Service Centre on 131 722.