



VICSES support fire crews to help save heritage listed area

As numerous dangerous blazes are brought under control in Victoria's east, a remarkable story has also unfolded at the opposite end of the state.

VICSES crews have been supporting the CFA in the Budj Bim National Park, after a fire was sparked on December 21st - putting the region's biodiversity and ancient, indigenous structures at risk.

The difficult blaze in the state's far south-west burned through the Christmas and New Year Period and was contained by Monday, January 6th, around 16 days later.

Stephen McDowell, a veteran SES and CFA volunteer from Port Fairy, and Incident Agency Commander for VICSES in this event, says the 6,500 hectare blaze has been the result of two fires merging and VICSES was happy to support the response.

It is understood the two fires began as the result of dry lightning, with the delicate make-up of the area making access extremely difficult. In fact, parts of the fire could only be controlled once it made its way out of the national park into a more open area near Macarthur.

Stephen has also been involved in fire operations between Portland and Nelson, and lead a strike force team further north in the state's South-West.

As part of these operations, the VICSES Incident Agency Commander co-ordinated crucial logistical activities of VICSES volunteers, supporting Victoria Police with road closures, ensuring emergency crews were fed, and making sure bulldozers near the fire front were full of fuel.

While the full extent of the damage is not yet known, locals are being assured that emergency crews and volunteers are doing all they can to save the rich indigenous 'aquacultural' history of the land, and its native plants and animals.

Quotes attributable to from Port Fairy VICSES incident agency commander Stephen McDowell:

"I have put my decades of emergency services experience to work in the South-West, helping to co-ordinate various units across the region, from the incident control centre."

"These fires have been difficult and aggressive, with one near the coast growing from 60 to 150 hectares in size in less than 12 hours – crews have done very well in working to contain those. We were pleased to be able to support them"

"VICSES volunteers have been instrumental in a number of logistical and support-based activities, and they are very appreciated in Victoria's far south-west."

Stephen McDowell has been a VICSES member for 28 years and a CFA volunteer for 35 years. He is happy to speak to media about his experience in South-West Victoria.

For more information, contact:

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