

Fire Strengthens Partnerships

Over the past weeks, Frankston City Council and the CFA have not only fought fires but have built stronger partnerships within the two organisations.

A grass fire in Seaford Wetlands saw fire trucks attending from all over region with Council staff in attendance to open gates, cut fences as well as prevent people from entering the area.

The CFA was quick to contain the blazing wetlands in the early evening of Monday, 12 January. The following day both Council and CFA officers began the long process of “blacking out”. On-ground Council staff included David Stewart (Municipal Fire Prevention Officer); Andrea Collins (Assistant Park Ranger); Ricardo Simao (Natural Reserves Member); Paul Smitka (Natural Reserves Member); Simon Fletcher (Natural Reserves Member); Marie-Claire Van Besoaw (Natural Reserves Member) and George Hillas (Grader Operator).



The ground remained hot. We were covered in ash and exhausted and our boots almost melting. Some areas proved to be stubborn, continually reigniting.

By this stage walking tracks were well worn. Crushed rock was brought in to support the tracks and entrances into the fire zone. It was soon established that the peat underground was burning, which has the potential to burn and occasionally flare up. The flames above ground had burnt a noxious weed, spike rush (*juncus acutus*), in the area.

It was not until later that afternoon when the Eriksson air crane appeared – a water bomber and a relief – as well as a major attraction and crowd pleaser. The helicopter concentrated near the edges of the burn in an attempt to cool the peat, while the Council grader created a mineral earth break around the edges of the burnt area.

Works continued over the next few days. Emphasis was placed on flooding the area to prevent the peat from continually re-flaring. The result was that dozens of CFA members, both full time and volunteers, Council staff and Melbourne Water staff were both day and night constantly in and out of the wetlands.

On-site meetings were held concerning “the next steps”, while keeping in mind work place safety and the monitoring of park users. Even a week after the flames had been extinguished, Council, CFA and Melbourne Water were engaged in mopping up works that included using infrared cameras to detect hot spots and hosing down hot areas, drafting water, digging and rake-hoeing and upgrading of tracks.



Andrea Collins
Assistant Park Ranger