



UNVEILING OF THE REMEMBRANCE RAILS

Saturday 2 February 2019

Councillor Mark Radford, Mayor Horsham Rural City Council, and **Councillors**

Mr Bernard Gross OAM, Former Mayor of Horsham Rural City Council

Ms Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan

Mr Sunil Bhalla, CEO, Horsham Rural City Council

CFA and other Emergency Service Representatives

Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

My husband Tony, and I are pleased to join you this afternoon at this beautiful ANZAC Park for the unveiling of the Remembrance Rails.

I would like to thank the Mayor of Horsham Rural City and the people of Haven for their hospitality.

As the Patron of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires 10 Year Anniversary, I have welcomed the opportunity to meet with many of you throughout the day and to see firsthand the rebuild and recovery of this tight knit community.

As we reflect on the 10 years that have passed, we can understand why milestones are important.

They remind us to look both backwards and forwards.

To remember the past. But also to remember how far we have come.

It provides an opportunity for people to come together. It is inevitable that memories of sadness and loss are revisited.

It is inevitable too that the effort of first responders and the subsequent efforts of the community to rebuild will also be remembered with gratitude and fondness.

Of course, we remember those ferocious fires that swept Victoria, burning 400,000 hectares of land, including native forest and animals and thousands of homes and businesses, affecting more than 78 communities in 21 local government areas, and some 320,000 people.

We reflect on the devastation of houses, buildings, communities and families, most significantly on the 173 people who, tragically, lost their lives.

We reflect on the more than 19,000 CFA members, and other emergency services, involved in frontline firefighting, incident management and support behind the scenes.

In Horsham, you faced a fire which spread rapidly within the first hour, affecting both Vectis and Haven.

It was a particularly difficult fire to fight because of its multiple fronts.

The fire destroyed houses and many other structures, livestock and hay, and burnt across several thousand hectares.

Of course, the figures never tell us that the houses lost were in fact homes.

That community buildings that were razed, like the beloved Horsham Golf Club, which we have just toured, were in fact meeting places, in many places the beating hearts of their towns or regions.

And that the land that was burnt was not only old and beautiful, but a thriving habitat for thousands of animals, birds and insects.

And that is another thing that figures alone can never tell us. That is, the extraordinary courage of those who fought the fires. And the deep gratitude that is felt for their bravery.

And then there is the generosity and kindness of those who rushed to help. And those who have stayed the course to help rebuild.

We know it was thanks to those who fought so hard that you were able to save the general store, town hall and school.

We know of the many inspiring examples of community resilience, rebuilding and recovery.

We saw just one example this morning.

How the Wimmera River Improvement Committee and volunteers rehabilitated the Yanga Track Walks after the fires – and again after the floods.

And this, now we see the fruition of this Remembrance Day Rails ‘project’ which I will unveil shortly.

And they are just examples of the huge body of work, time, effort and volunteering committed by many.

None of us will ever forget the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, the devastation and the pain which continues to surface for so many.

We will also never forget how the people from around Horsham have come together and of the homes, community buildings and lives that have been rebuilt.

Tony and I congratulate you on all that you have achieved.

Congratulations on the vision for and the execution of this clever idea of the Remembrance Rails.

I know they will be not only a memorial to the 2009 Bushfires, but also a place to recognise significant events and relationships within the community.

Tony and I are delighted to have the honour of placing our locks there shortly.

I know they will be joined by thousands more, capturing the spirit of your close community.

Congratulations to everyone (alongside Sue and Mandy) involved. You can be proud to see your vision realised.

It gives me great pleasure to officially unveil the Remembrance Rails