



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

HAMILTON CIVIC RECEPTION MORNING TEA

Sunday 3 February 2019

Councillor Mary-Ann Brown, Mayor, Southern Grampians Shire Council, and **Councillors**

Mr Michael Tudball, CEO, Southern Grampians Shire Council

Ms Bev McArthur MLC, Member for Western Region

CFA and emergency workers

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 morning.

My husband, Tony, and I are pleased to join you this morning. Thank you, Mayor – Cr Brown – for your hospitality.

As the Patron of the Tenth Anniversary of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, I am meeting people across the affected areas in these few weeks.

Naturally, the loss experienced in each area differs. The experiences differ. And the responses to the shock and hardship of the fires differ.

Indeed, we are seeing that as the anniversary time is upon us, there are as many individual responses as there are people.

For some, they don't want to – or find it too hard – to look back.

For others, this milestone is important.

It is a reminder to look both backwards and forwards.

To remember the past. But also to remember the progress in the past ten years.

But certainly we can all share in the gratitude to the first responders, to all those who helped on the front line, behind the scenes and in the community, and to all those who have helped to rebuild.

This week we remember the 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 and some 320,000 people.

We reflect on the devastation of houses, buildings, communities and families. Most significantly, we reflect on the 173 people whose lives were lost.

Here, you vividly remember the rapidly spreading fire on 7 February 2009, threatening the township of Coleraine in particular.

Thanks to the CFA and other emergency services, (amongst the 19,000 in the State working that day and during the days and weeks of the fires), it was promptly controlled by late afternoon. Many landowners, with their own firefighting equipment, contributed too.

Not before it had destroyed a house, farm infrastructure, fencing and the much loved Coleraine Avenue of Honour – the magnificent cypress trees planted in 1919.

I am so pleased for this opportunity to acknowledge the bravery, the kindness and the generosity shown by so many at the time of the fires.

But to acknowledge too the kindness and commitment shown by so many throughout the rebuilding since then.

We know of many inspiring examples of community resilience and recovery.

The founding of the Southern Grampians Community Recovery Committee – established to assist with the recovery of Coleraine – for example.

Or the development of The Coleraine Bushfire Recovery Plan – identifying projects including linking various walking tracks, improving signage and developing a multipurpose community building for the township.

And the replanting of the Coleraine Avenue of Honour with Kurrajong trees (native to Australia) instead of Cypresses. (It can proudly celebrate its centenary this year).

Congratulations to you all.

Thank you to the Mayor and the Southern Grampians Shire Council for hosting us this morning.

We will never forget Black Saturday and the 2009 Bushfires, and the devastation and the pain which continues to surface for so many.

We will also never forget how the people of our State and the people of Southern Grampians Shire, came together and of the communities that have been rebuilt.

As Patron of this 10 Year Anniversary, and as the Governor of Victoria, I can say that the affection of all Victorians is with you at this time of commemoration. And admiration for all that you have achieved.

Tony and I look forward to meeting and hearing from as many of you as possible over morning tea.