

## Amateur Radio Service

A radiocommunication service for the purpose of self-training, intercommunication and technical investigation carried out by amateurs; that is, by duly authorised persons interested in radio technique solely with a personal aim and without pecuniary interest.

## Wireless Institute of Australia

The world's first and oldest National Radio Society  
Founded 1910

Representing

**The Australian Amateur Radio Service**

**Member of the  
International Amateur Radio Union**

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## Editorial

Peter Freeman VK3KAI

## Our country

As I write this Editorial, I note that the news media for the past week or two has been full of stories about a couple of the natural features of our climate – floods and fires.

In the tropical regions to the north, we see that “The Wet” has well and truly arrived. Ingham and surrounding regions are experiencing floods, with the likelihood of further rains to come.

In the south, Victoria has had scorching temperatures and raging bushfires.

Whilst I personally have not been directly impacted, the local area has suffered from two major fires.

### The Gippsland fires – some comments from early on

Much of the following account is based on some comments that I posted to the vk-vhf email reflector on Monday 9 February. I sent the account as I had received some telephone calls and emails enquiring if all was OK. Why were the questions being asked of me? An arsonist started a fire on the south-eastern edge of my home town of Churchill at around midday on the Saturday. At the time, the temperatures were in the mid 40s and there was a strong gusty wind from the north-east. The local ABC radio station had been giving updates of the spread of the “Bunyip Ridge” fire complex well to my west – that fire had started a day or two earlier and was now spreading fast.

I decided to send this response to a message from one of my regular 2 m contacts from Canberra to the reflector, to give others an update on the local situation in Churchill.

*All is OK here - the fire started near the SE corner of the town of Churchill, but out of town. The strong NW winds drove it rapidly to the south and SE. It certainly looked spectacular from in*

*town. The fire rapidly spread to the SE, spreading through the native forests and heading toward Balook. The situation was made worse by the smoke plume blowing in from the fires around Bunyip Ridge, which was rapidly spreading towards Drouin and Warragul. By about 1700, lights were needed inside the house, because of the smoke plume from the NW.*

*The intensity was high, driven by high winds. The fire spotted to the south of the Stzrelecki range, and started fires in the region near Yarram - particularly at Devon North.*

*Around 1700 the wind changed direction - around to from W & SW. That drove the fire to the east, into Jeeralang North, Jeeralang, Jumbuk, Koornalla, Le Roy, Callignee and places beyond - close to Gormandale.*

*From what I have heard to date, most amateurs in the region are OK. There are some that we do not hear from often - I guess that time will tell.*

*Ralph VK3WRE and others who work*

*locally for BAE Systems have been very busy all weekend - tending to RF systems, installing extra repeaters for the emergency services and such like. Yesterday Ralph was taken to Mt Tassie by helicopter to check on things. He checked all that he could and then had time to repair the 146.800 Mt Tassie repeater. Ralph's comment last night was that the ground was burnt to within 1 m of the cabinet housing*

*the repeater. The local “Channel 10” TV station was also restored. All the transmitters on the Broadcast Australia (BA) site at the summit compound are all off air - no mains power and the backup generator was significantly damaged by the fires. (The BA site is the major regional transmitter site, with*

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# Our Country

## Editorial

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*ABC Radio and TV, SBS, Seven and WIN (Nine) networks all originating from the site.)*

*Ken VK3ALA at Jindivik lost the shed that housed his shack, but had most of the radios in the car. The shed contained "a lot of memorabilia". He lost all the hay he had recently purchased, some other sheds and also a stallion. The houses are basically OK (he has two houses in the area). The West Gippsland UHF repeater will have been lost - it was in Ken's shed. The Jindivik area was impacted by the spread of the Bunyip Ridge fire.*

*The fire went close to the QTH of John VK3ZR (Traralgon South), but his house and all the family are OK. Henk VK3CAQ (not very active over the last couple of years) had a very tense weekend - the roads to his location were cut, as was power. He and his partner had planned to stay and fight, but the fire did not end up too close - probably about a kilometre away.*

*I am sure that more news will come out in the coming days. My thoughts are with all that may be impacted by these fires - I am sure that there will be many in other areas of Victoria.*

*Further afield, I can report that Fred Swainston VK3DAC, the WIA RTO principal, is on watch at his property near Healesville - fire came within 500 m before a wind change. He is still on alert.*

*I am not sure about Doug VK3UM - the Kinglake fire was threatening Glenburn from the west and the Murrindindi fire was close to Doug's location according to the Saturday fire map. I tried to ring Doug this morning, but it sounds as if the local exchange is out of action. The DSE map of the Kinglake complex this morning has the burnt area as very close to where Doug is located, if not around it.*

*Amateurs have been active with RECOM, assisting the Red Cross with registration records of those evacuated. One of the RECOM operators is Rob VK3EK, who was busy most of the weekend with the registration traffic.*

*WICEN Vic was activated late yesterday to assist with communications at Kinglake and Alexandra.*

*Other amateurs have also been*

*busy through their associations with other community based organisations, including CFA, SES and Ambulance Victoria. I will not try to start listing them as I am sure I am only aware of some of the individuals at present.*

*All of this comes after having the Delburn complex fires close to my SW - that fire came to the edge of Yinnar, only 8 km away. In that fire, Stan VK3PSR at Boolarra lost some sheds, tanks, pumps and irrigation pipes and a car. His house was saved.*

*During the fight of the Delburn complex, the CFA set up its operations centre at the University campus here in Churchill - in the car park that we use for GippsTech. Things have been unusually busy at the University all last week, and will continue to be so for a while longer. The onsite catering firm has been providing up to 650 meals a day for fire-fighters and associated emergency services staff.*

*It has been an interesting week or so, to say the least!*

*Thanks to all for your thoughts for everyone impacted by and/or involved in any manner with these fires.*

*I am sure that there will be more assistance required as the pictures become clearer over the coming days with the various fires.*

*Cheers,  
Peter VK3KAI"*

*Now that more details have become available, we are all aware that the fires mentioned above have had devastating impacts on property and lives. In addition, there were several other fires started on the same hot, dry windy Saturday.*

*I was wondering about one particular friend, not an amateur, as he and his family live in Callignee, south of Traralgon. The fire destroyed 57 out of 61 houses in Callignee! My questions were answered during the News coverage on Monday night - they were on camera at the Traralgon Evacuation Centre. The people were safe, but the house is gone!*

## News of other amateurs

*Early on the afternoon of Tuesday 10 February, this report was distributed by Doug Friend VK4OE, again on the vk-vhf reflector:*

*I have just spoken to Bev and Doug McArthur on the telephone, being the first landline call they have received in*

*four days due to local phone services being down. For those who are not aware, the severely affected towns of Kinglake and Strathewen are really only over one heavily timbered range to the South from them, and Marysville is only about 2 km away in the same valley.*

*Doug and Bev are fine but very tired due to minimal sleep, and all their sheds and equipment are still intact, but that is even amazing because of the amount of ash and other hot/flaming debris that has bombarded their area recently. Doug has been manning fire tankers and Bev has been assisting with local UHF CB communications. Doug inspected his big shed just recently and everything inside is covered with grey ash.*

*Doug appreciated my call and wanted me to post this message, reminding everyone that he and his community are not yet out of danger. Visibility there is presently only around 50 metres as there has been a wind change and another fire front is now approaching from the South, originating in country already burned in the last few days! Whether it comes past their place is presently beyond the realms of prediction.*

*I assured Doug that the thoughts of many of us are with him and the many other people affected by the recent events.*

*Very best wishes,  
Doug Friend VK4OE,  
Brisbane.*

*The fires are continuing to burn, with crews working hard to bring them under control. The media have reported new instances of arson in the north-east of Victoria. WICEN Victoria has been active in providing communication support, primarily to municipal operations as recovery efforts commence, from what I have seen to date.*

*Given the huge areas impacted by these fires, other amateurs are likely to have been directly impacted. I am sure that all amateurs extend their best wishes to all such amateurs, as well as to all others who have suffered from both fire and flood.*

*At least one amateur repeater in the north-east has been impacted. As I noted above, my local club has also lost a repeater - VK3RWD. There is the potential that individual amateurs may have lost everything, including their homes.*

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## Editorial

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Even in the toughening economic climate, our countrymen are showing their generosity – several organisations are calling for donations, and funds are rushing in to those appeals. Such support is not surprising, given the devastation – Victoria Police are predicting that over 200 lives will have been lost, and the impacts of properties has been massive.

As further information comes to hand, I am sure that there will be some requirement for action from some or all of us in some form. Perhaps providing assistance: to individuals, through WICEN or other agencies, or even simply contributing to one of the relief appeals.

I am sure that we are all wishing the best to all who have been impacted by these events.

## Closing remarks

Enough reflection on the past few days.... This Editorial is already far too long!

Perhaps it was best that I decided against attending Wyong – it was much easier being at home and considering the actions that I might take if the wind direction had changed to bring the fire towards the town. From all accounts, the event went well. I look forward to some reports in due course.

At the WIA Office, preparations are full steam ahead with all the paperwork for the AGM to be held in May.

Again, I ask that you write up that latest project as an article for AR. Our stock of articles is dwindling, so the turn around time between submission and publication should be shorter than average.

73

Peter VK3KAI