

January 8, 2013

## Tasmanian bushfire claims pass \$42m as insurers brace for heatwave

Preliminary data collected by the Insurance Council of Australia shows more than 410 claims have been received from policyholders affected by the southern Tasmanian bushfires, with losses estimated above \$42 million, as at 9am today.

And as insurers start sending assessors into bushfire-affected communities, general insurers are preparing for the impact of dozens of bushfires across New South Wales and Victoria on one of the highest bushfire-risk days since Black Saturday.

Insurance Council of Australia CEO Rob Whelan said he expected insurers would receive more claims from southern Tasmania this week as policyholders returned to their properties.

Mr Whelan said the Insurance Council's catastrophe declaration had been extended to other bushfire-affected areas of southern Tasmania, including Bicheno and Lake Repulse. Further expansion of the declared areas is possible given the ongoing nature of the fire situation.

He said ICA and insurance company staff were at recovery centres in Sorell and Dunalley for several days to assist policyholders with any insurance-related questions.

"The Insurance Council is regularly liaising with the Tasmanian Government, Tasmanian Fire Service, state and local government agencies and community groups such as the Red Cross to identify and resolve issues," Mr Whelan said.

"Further, some insurance companies are proactively contacting their customers to see if they will be making claims and require assistance.

"The positive news for policyholders is assessors are starting to enter some bushfire-affected areas where no risk is present. However, many areas remain under threat, and it could be some time before assessors are able to enter these communities."

The ICA has received several dozen calls on its disaster hotline - **1800 734 621**. The hotline helps people affected by the Tasmanian bushfires who are not sure which insurer they are with, or who have general inquiries about the claims process.

Mr Whelan said dozens of bushfires were known to be blazing out of control across NSW and Victoria, and several were moving rapidly and may pose a risk to properties.

"We hope that the actions of firefighters will help protect lives and properties, but experience shows us that bushfires and grass fires are unpredictable and cause widespread damage," Mr Whelan said.

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“All community members should heed the advice of emergency services until the danger has passed.

“Insurers have anticipated that this summer will pose widespread bushfire, cyclone and storm threats and are well prepared. Call centres are standing by to handle inquiries from policyholders affected by these natural disasters.”

For general advice about preparing for bushfires visit:

<http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au/for-consumers/consumer-tips/bushfire-preparation>