

## NEWS



**LOOK OUT:** Forestry Tasmania's Brad Harman keeps an eye on the fire operations. **Pictures: Scott Gelston.**



**SHOW TIME:** Fire rips through the undergrowth.



**PLANNING:** TFS Regional Burn co-ordinator Bradley Williams looks over plans at Hadspen.

# Multi-agency burns lead Australia

BY EMILY BAKER

TASMANIA Fire Service crew and Forestry Tasmania workers armed themselves with drip torches and set bush near Travellers Rest alight on Sunday.

Travellers Rest and Blackstone Heights have been identified as at high risk of bushfire and fuel reduction burns are expected to protect the community for up to 10 years. Sunday's was the fourth meticulously planned burn in the area since 2014 with a fifth planned for Wednesday.

High-risk areas are determined by hi-tech computer software.

"What these computers can do is - they are so bloody sophisticated and powerful - they can simulate lighting up the whole of Tasmania in two kilometre grid squares," fuel reduction program spokesman Ian Sauer said. "They can simulate dropping a match, the weather conditions, fuel loads, topography, and the fire runs through the landscape, then that information is put into a package."

The package is passed on to Fire Management Area Committees that use their knowledge of the area to determine whether the plan will work. Work then begins on identifying the area's vegetation type and landscape, plus the risk to public assets, homes and industries.

People living nearby are notified, the Environmental Protection Agency is consulted, the Bureau of Meteorology provides advice, then, on the day, participants cross their fingers for favourable weather conditions. Testing continues even on the morn-



**LOADING UP:** Forestry Tasmania workers Matthew Fogarty and Brad Harman prepare their drip torches.

ing of the planned burn.

Up to 200 fuel reduction burns are in different stages of planning at any one time.

"You could be held up for weeks because the wind is going in the wrong direction," Mr Sauer said. "These burns are planned to within an inch of their lives I reckon."

The Tasmanian Bushfire Inquiry recommended the government establish a co-ordinated program of fuel reduction burns with a focus on high-risk areas following the devastating 2013 bushfires. Since 2014 the Tasmania Fire Service has worked with Parks and Wildlife, Forestry Tasmania, local government and private landowners to implement the program on public and private land.

"This is the first time in Australia there's been a cross-agency, multi-tenure approach to bushfire mitigation," Mr Sauer said. "Other states in Australia are watch-

ing very closely."

The Fire Management Committee will report back to the government on the success of the program when its \$28.5 million in funding expires in 2018.

"We don't necessarily want the big 'gotcha' moment where a bushfire starts up and starts to puff out," Mr Sauer said. "There's ongoing monitoring and evaluating what's good, what's bad, what's successful, and at the end the committee will make recommendations to the government."

Fire was part of land management in Australia well before white settlers arrived, and Mr Sauer said parts of the landscape thrived after burning. "In two years' or seven years' time a fire may get going in here but it will be controllable. Even under nasty conditions we'll have a better chance of controlling the fire."



**BURNING:** Carrick Fire Brigade member Kim Brundle-Lawrence gets to work on backburning operations behind Blackstone Heights.