



Bushfire Homes Service

Proposal

The Bushfire Homes Service (the Service) will be established to assist people who lost their home in the Victorian bushfires of February 2009. It will offer a range of well-designed house plans from which selections may be made, forming the basis of one free consultation with an architect. The house designs will be capable of complying with the new Australian Standard for residential buildings in bushfire prone areas and have a focus on sustainability and amenity. The Service will be offered at no cost to the recipients.

Background

- More than 2000 houses were destroyed during the February 2009 Victorian bushfires.
- Individual architects and architectural practices have offered *pro bono* assistance to people who lost their home as a result of these bushfires.
- The Building Commission has been coordinating offers of volunteer support from the building industry at its 'Built Environment Bushfire Support Roundtable'. This initiative is one of several to emerge from that forum.
- Publication of the revised Australian Standard (AS 3959) relating to the construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas was brought forward by the Victorian Government in readiness for the bushfire reconstruction effort.

Objective

The objective of the Bushfire Homes Service is to offer those who lost their home in the February 2009 Victorian bushfires access to architectural expertise that will add value and facilitate quality housing outcomes.

Precedent

The proposed Service is modelled in part on the *Small Homes Service*, through which the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, in collaboration with The Age newspaper, sought to promote good, contemporary architectural design while helping address the post-war housing shortage. The *Small Homes Service* was significant in bringing modern architectural ideas to a wide audience in Victoria, while providing many households with affordable, well-designed homes.

Agencies Involved

The Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA) will offer the Service, working in association with the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), and the Building Commission.

Operation

- Architects will be invited to submit house designs in response to a brief prepared by the OVGA.
- The brief will allow for a diversity of house types and site conditions and will set out recommendations for design and construction in bushfire prone areas based on current codes and research.
- Designs will be peer-reviewed and an appropriate range selected for inclusion in the Service.
- The plans will be made available through the agencies involved and will also be accessible through the one-stop-shop VBRRA website: <<http://www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au/>>
- Those choosing to build one of the houses can arrange through the Service a free consultation with an architect to discuss the location of the house on their site and any modifications that may be required.

Publicity

The Age newspaper, in light of the historic precedent of their collaboration on the *Small Homes Service* and to assist with the bushfire recovery effort, will provide exposure and publicity for the Service. This will aid its take-up by potential end users and to promote public awareness of the benefits of good design and the value it can add to domestic construction.

Outcomes

- People needing to rebuild their home will have the option of choosing a house design that can meet the requirements of the Building Code of Australia and aims to provide improved energy performance and amenity.
- After selecting a design, the free consultation with the architect will review the appropriate siting of the house and design adaptations.