

5.2.4 Previous prescribed burns

A number of forest areas in the Mount Disappointment State Forest and Kinglake National Park had been subjected to prescribed burns between 2005 and 2008, as detailed in map 5.1. and 5.2. As indicated on Map 5.2, sites treated with previous prescribed burns west of Mount Disappointment, experienced a high severity Class 2 fire on 7 February.

Figure 5.9 shows one of these areas where crowns were scorched. It was observed by the author that forests in surrounding areas sustained crown consumption. The prescribed burn may have decreased the intensity of the fire but not to such an extent that it would have been controllable given the extreme conditions. Tolhurst (2009) estimates that the average fire line intensity on the day reached 100,000 kW/m whilst Waller (2009) states that the current limit to active suppression (direct attack) is 4,000 kW/m.



Figure 5.9 Fire affected forest treated with a prescribed burn in 2008.
(Photo: Chris Taylor, 19 April 2009)

The previous prescribed burn areas adjoining the north-east boundary of the Wallaby Creek Catchment reveal some small areas of crown vegetation left un-scorched (refer Map 5.1 & 5.2). Of the 1,800 hectares (approx) prescribed burnt between 2005 and 2009 in the Mount Disappointment state forest and Wallaby Creek catchment area, around 90 per cent suffered mostly Class 2 fire impact. This appears to be congruent with the Esplin Report (2003), which found none of the areas within the perimeter of the 2002–2003 North East and Gippsland fires that had been subjected to recent fuel reduction burns remained unburned.

5.2.5 Continuing fire spread and the wind change

The Royal Commission (2009) notes that the fire progressed onto the Whittlesea–Yea Road, just south of the settlement of Kinglake West. The Commission notes spotting was reported at Smith Gully at 4pm, with forests of Stringybark and Peppermint and pockets of Manna Gum, Grey Gum and Mountain Ash, contributing to significant spotting.

The Royal Commission (2009) found the fire was reported to be approximately six kilometres wide by the time it reached the Whittlesea–Yea Road. Spot fires were reported at St Andrews at 5:46pm, with the wind change arriving at 6:01pm. The main fire and the subsequent spot fires then headed in a north-easterly direction, reaching Flowerdale at 7:40pm. The Kilmore East–Wandong section of the fire headed generally north along the Hume Highway, reaching Reedy Creek at 8:00pm and burning through the remainder of the Mount Disappointment State Forest, the Wallaby Creek catchment and the Kinglake National Park (Royal Commission 2009).



Figure 5.10 Panorama looking west from the fire tower on Mount St Leonards showing fire affected areas surrounding Kinglake, Toolangi, Dixon's Creek and Yarra Glen. (Photo: Chris Taylor, April 2009)

5.2.5 Lightning strikes and the spread of fire into the Yarra Ranges National Park

The Royal Commission (2009) noted that lightning from intense smoke plumes and atmospheric interaction with the south-west change triggered other fires in the region. The fire spread into other areas of the Maroondah catchment, part of the Yarra Ranges National Park (See Figure 5.12, Map 5.3). Late in the day residents of Healesville and Chum Creek observed lightning striking the northern slopes of Mount Riddell, east of Healesville (Blair pers comm, Rees pers comm). It ignited fires which proceeded across the north face of Mount Riddell, an area which had been subjected to a prescribed burn in April 2008 (see Map 5.3 and Figure 5.11).

5.2.6 Containment and control of the Kilmore East Fire

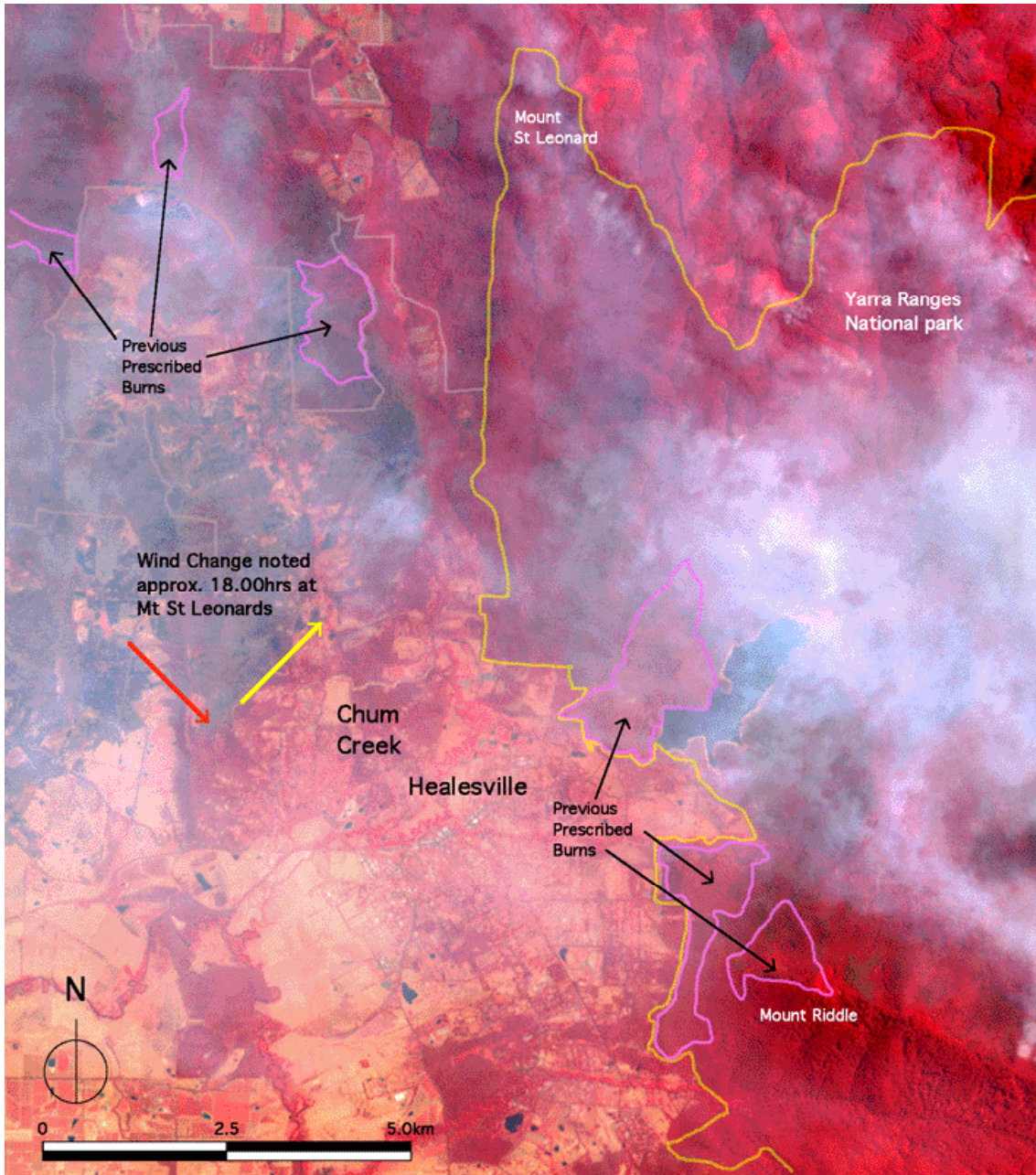
The Royal Commission (2009) notes that the overall fire continued to burn throughout the night of 7 February and in the following days. The fire was progressively secured as it reached grassland. However, containment was difficult in forested areas, particularly in the Maroondah catchment, Toolangi State Forest and Yarra Ranges National Park. In particular, the fire caused considerable concern around Healesville over the next few days as containment works, including back burning, continued. The fire was listed as 'contained' on 16 February.



Figure 5.11 View of Mount Riddell, from Chum Creek being treated with a prescribed burn. (Photo: Sarah Rees, 10 April 2008)



Figure 5.12 View from Mt St Leonards fire tower looking south down Donnelly's Creek with Mount Riddell in the centre distance. (Photo: Chris Taylor, April 2009)



Map 5.3 Fire affected land around Healesville.
 (Image source: Earth Observatory. Image Date: 16 February 2009)

5.2.7 Areas affected by the Kilmore East fire

Using DSE base maps, the author has found the largest area of land tenure affected by the Kilmore East fire is privately owned (42 per cent). This is inclusive of pastoral and agricultural land, built up areas and privately owned native forest. State Forests made up 28 per cent and National Parks, primarily the Kinglake National Park, made up 28 per cent. Plantations fire affected comprised 2 per cent of the area fire affected. These percentages are detailed in Figure 5.13.

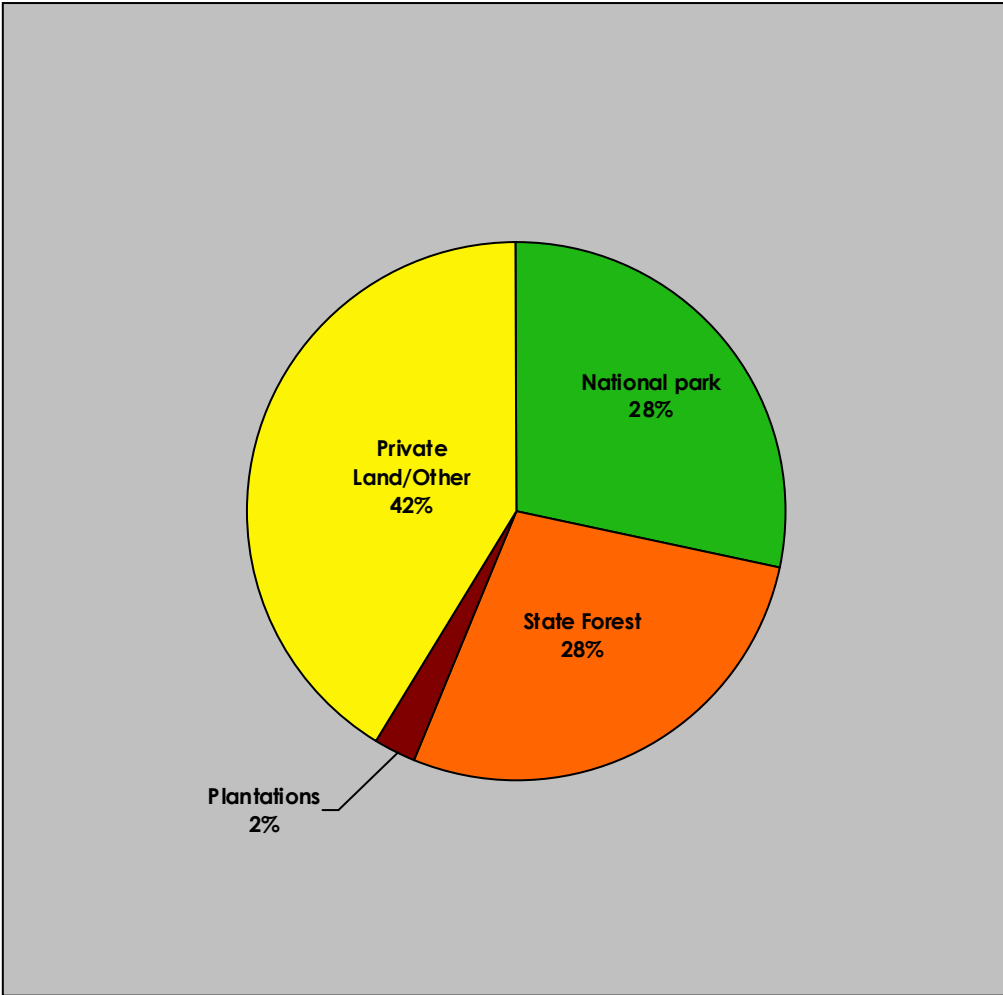


Figure 5.13 Kilmore fire land tenure area affected