

QUESTIONS RAISED BY AUSTRALIAN WILDFIRES REQUIRE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

By Mayor Bill Beamish

“Twelve days since power went out and nothing much has progressed. Road access is still closed to public, some parts of town have power restored from large diesel generators (but not ours, of course!) And in the meantime, the unleaded petrol rationed for ‘generator use only’ was about to run out, when fuel tanker promised at 11th hour for tomorrow.”
As reported to me by email on Saturday, January 11th by Rick and Angie Cooper of Mallacoota, a small town on Australia’s Sunshine Coast struck by recent wildfires.

While it is important to note that there are many differences in Australia’s climate, geography, vegetation and protocols, local residents have not failed to recognize the potential for a similar wildfire event on our own Sunshine Coast.

Are we ready? What plans do we have to protect our communities, to evacuate residents and tourists at the height of summer up or down our coastal highway? What do we need know and do as residents to ensure that we (and our guests) can successfully evacuate or stay in place until the emergency has passed?

On a governmental level, the Sunshine Coast Regional District has received a grant to undertake a risk assessment and to develop a plan for addressing risks of interface fires and emergency evacuation. This project includes opportunities for each of our communities to participate in consultations and discussion of preventative and preparatory actions that we need to take, both individually and collectively.

There are also things we can do personally. Read the *BC Fire Smart Guide*, available online, at Town Hall or at the SCRD, and implement the suggested strategies to reduce wildfire hazards around your home. The SCRD also has a great deal of information on its website (www.scrd.ca/emergency-program). Please take some time to get familiar with standard emergency procedures and to develop a plan for your loved ones, in case of disaster.

In the meantime, we will continue to grieve the losses of – and offer help to – communities like Mallacoota and the Australian people at large. Their devastation is shared by all global citizens and must serve as a further reminder that urgent action is required if we are to prevent similar events elsewhere.

(email update: January 12th – “Hello Bill – Thank you for your kind thoughts and offer of help... We can see our towns have some similarities and if by sharing our experiences we can assist your community to be better prepared, then we will feel we have done some good. Good news is that power...has been restored. Progress!)

To comment on this, or any other topic, please feel free to email me at mayor@gibsons.ca.

