



Firefighters tackling the Cheltenham blaze last week.

Be aware to stay safe this summer

THE beginning of 2018 is an opportune time to reflect on the challenges of the past 12 months, and those we still need to be aware of, both as the emergency management sector and as a community.

It has been another busy period with a range of emergencies across Victoria.

Emergency services, and the broader Victorian community, need to be prepared for all emergencies during summer.

The key summer safety themes include bushfires, heatwaves, water safety and road safety.

Among the fabulous attributes of Victoria are the coast, the bay and rivers that many enjoy during summer.

That means the roads are busy, so remember to enjoy Victoria but to do so safely. It is important to control the things you are in charge of, including your fatigue and decision-making.

Recently, some communities experienced significant impacts from storms and floods and challenges from heat and fire.

And last week, suburban southeast Melbourne witnessed how quickly fire can move on a warm day with a strong wind. Under those conditions, fires can break out quickly and threaten people and property within minutes.

While an excellent response ensured there were no serious impacts in the Cheltenham fire, it should serve as a reminder that no matter where you are, you need to be aware of your local conditions.

If you're on holiday, know what's happening around you and never rely on just one source for emergency information.

It is a good idea to check your local conditions daily wherever you may be.

Remember, information is critical to help you make a safe and timely decision — you can visit the VicEmergency website and download the free VicEmergency app, then set up watch zones so you receive an alert when there is an incident in one of those zones. It is a practical and essential tool if you are in unfamiliar surrounds.

Climate and population will continue to be two significant factors in Victoria.

A changing climate means more frequent and more intense weather events, bringing the potential of more emergencies impacting more communities



CRAIG LAPSLEY

more often. Our challenge, and the challenge for the Victorian community, is working through how we can be more resilient to these events.

Victoria's population change will continue to challenge all communities in some way.

Suburban and urban communities are growing rapidly, while some remote and rural areas are experiencing the status quo or a decline.

These variances means communities are affected in different ways.

In order for us to better service the Victorian community, we will continue to challenge our approach before, during and after emergencies so we can better plan for the future.

January and February will be monitored closely as temperatures rise and the state continues to dry out. But we stand as a united sector, and we are ready.

One of the strengths in emergency management is our people. I am proud to say they do a fantastic job and we are fortunate to have personnel who maintain so much passion and pride in the service they provide to the community.

Our people, our approach, and the systems we operate are a credit to the planning, response and the recovery expertise that we have built in Victoria.

Our emergency services, along with our community, have done an exceptional job in 2017 and I know this will continue.

My message to all Victorians is to know what your risks are and plan for them. Whether it's the threat of a fire, flood, storm, or any other emergency this summer, stay aware of your conditions and keep in touch with those around you.

Emergency management is a shared responsibility with the community, and we each have a role to play.

There is no doubt we do it best when we do it as a collective community.

CRAIG LAPSLEY IS VICTORIA'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COMMISSIONER

TIME TO FOCUS ON FUTURE

DURING this quieter time of year, surrounded by family, it is a good chance to breathe out, relax and reflect on the year which is almost over and the new one about to begin.

Certainly, 2017 had its share of political dramas — both expected, like the marriage debate, and unexpected, like the citizenship controversy.

But undistracted, we managed to get a lot done, and lay strong foundations as we deliver on our commitment to ensure Australia's security and prosperity.

Our middle-income personal tax cuts and our small and medium business tax cuts are already having a positive economic impact. A total of 383,000 jobs created in the past year, and the longest run of monthly jobs growth since 1994, show that "jobs and growth" is not just a slogan, but a real outcome.

But while our economy overall is growing strongly, and better than most other comparable countries, many Australians are battling to keep up with the cost of living. Unemployment is falling, but we are yet to see stronger growth in average real wages.

And we are determined to ensure that all Australians, no matter where they live, enjoy the benefits of a strong and strengthening economy.

There are, as the Treasurer and Finance Minister outlined in the mid-year economic statement, more signs of stronger economic growth — "green shoots". And if this continues, it will mean a pick-up in real wages as employers invest, expand and compete for labour.

We are also taking action to bring down the cost of family essentials.

In 2017, we have tackled rising energy prices. In the here and now, we have ensured that the electricity retailers are advising their customers if they are not on the best plans.

We are encouraging consumers to use the energymadeeasy.gov.au website to compare offers and get the best deals. Thousands of families are saving hundreds of dollars right now.

The biggest single factor in the recent rise in energy prices has been the jump in gas prices on the east coast.

Too much was being exported and not enough left available for our domestic market. After strong action by my government, the gas industry is making more gas available and, as the ACCC has confirmed, wholesale gas prices have and will continue to come down.



MALCOLM TURNBULL

Longer term, the independent Energy Security Board has presented a new energy policy, the National Energy Guarantee, which will ensure that electricity is affordable, reliable and we meet our commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, as we bring more solar and wind into our energy mix, we will need a lot more backup for when the wind isn't blowing and the sun isn't shining.

The exciting Snowy Hydro 2.0 project will be the biggest pumped hydro scheme in the southern hemisphere when it is completed in 2024 — a giant battery, making renewables reliable.

In doing so, it will put downward pressure on energy prices as the Snowy Hydro company's feasibility study recently confirmed.

In 2018, we will do all we can to put more money into the pockets of Australian families.

We have already done a lot on tax reform, including raising billions more in revenue by introducing the toughest laws to stop multinationals shifting profits offshore.

But our next goal is to deliver more tax relief to middle-income Australians, building on last year's changes without compromising our commitment to return the Budget to surplus.

And 2018 will also see the start of our new childcare package, which will see a million families on lower and middle incomes get more help with childcare costs.

I am especially proud of the extra \$23 billion in reform we have

delivered to Australia's schools. Your local school, wherever you are in Australia, is funded according to need, just as David Gonski intended.

But what we do with that funding matters just as much as the amount — so Education Minister Simon Birmingham's focus in 2018 is on improving the quality of teaching and learning so that all Australian children can get a great education wherever they grow up.

The shocking vehicle attack in Flinders St before Christmas was another terrible reminder of the responsibility governments, the police and our security agencies face in protecting Australians from those who would do us harm.

Our police, paramedics and firefighters responded selflessly and professionally to the second such attack on the city this year.

Our hospitals offered first-class care to the injured as they were ferried in for treatment, many in a critical condition.

And ordinary Victorians, once again, came to the aid of their fellow citizens. Instead of running away, they rushed towards the danger to help the injured and offer comfort.

Once again, the whole nation was inspired by Melbourne's strength, compassion and resolve.

There is no place for "set and forget" in national security.

The establishment of the new Department of Home Affairs will bring together all our federal domestic security agencies, including Border Force, the AFP and ASIO, so that collaboration and co-ordination is even more seamless.

Security is the foundation on which our free society is built.

It enables us to seize the opportunities of these remarkable times and continue to secure a safe and prosperous Australia for our children and grandchildren.

MALCOLM TURNBULL IS PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

