

FIRE AND FLOODS A DOUBLE MENACE

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Victoria has been hit with multiple flood warnings at the same time that towns in East Gippsland are under threat from out-of-control bushfires.

Firefighters will continue to battle two blazes in Briagolong and Sport Loch as emergency services welcomed forecast rain overnight on Tuesday.

The Briagolong fire broke out at Duffy Rd, with an emergency warning advising residents in Briagolong, Cobbannah, Culloden, Moornapa and Woolenook to seek shelter indoors as it was too late to leave.

The second fire started at Lakeside Track, within the Gippsland Coastal Park, with coastal towns Seacombe and Loch Sport and residents issued the same warning. A “leave immediately” warning was also given for Fernbank, Glenaladale, Iguana Creek, Lindenow South, Stockdale, Walpa, Woodglen and surrounding areas.

The seek shelter warnings were downgraded to watch and act on Tuesday afternoon.

Country Fire Authority chief officer Jason Heffernan said the fire in Briagolong grew from 5000 hectares on Monday to 17,500ha on Tuesday.

“I’m very confident that the firefighters are doing everything they can to stop the progress and contain that fire. They are very much going to be assisted by the rainfall,” Mr Heffernan said.

“We heard yesterday the predictions overnight of those hot northerly winds, particularly fast and gusty winds, that prediction came to fruition and at about 2am to 3am this morning.

“It’s going to take a couple of weeks to clean it up ... but in terms of protecting communities, in terms of looking after property, due to increasing winds and fire behaviour, the risk is certainly rapidly decreasing.”

After the Loch Sport fire grew from 600ha on Monday to 3000ha on Tuesday, the conditions were expected to ease as heavy rain began to hit

parts of the fire grounds.

Mr Heffernan said private burns and unattended campfires had contributed to the fires in the past couple of days.

About 650 firefighters are on the ground, up from 500 deployed over the weekend.

One home has been burnt in the fire, with no reports of any further property loss and no known injuries or deaths.

“We are seeing changes in climate. We are seeing the fire season start a lot earlier, go a lot longer. But the other thing I would point out, it’s spring and spring in Victoria can be very erratic,” he said.

The bushfires come as 20 flood warnings were issued by Victoria Emergency – including for the Goldburn, Murray, South Gippsland, La Trobe, Tambo and Broke Rivers.

Senior meteorologist at the Bureau of Meteorology Christie Johnson said a severe weather warning for heavy rainfall that could lead to flash flooding was in place for most of the eastern part of the state. She said a low-pressure system would develop over the east of the state on Wednesday, with a risk of flash and riverine flooding.

“Some of the areas that are probably most in the firing line are along the northern slopes of the ranges and on the ranges obviously up on the peaks, and then possibly some parts of Gippsland where particularly if we see thunderstorms or we could see some high rainfall rates,” Ms Johnson said.