Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament d'Interior
Direcció General de Prevenció, Extinció d'Incendis i Salvaments
Divisió Operativa
GRAF

Lo Forestalillo

Nº 95 **22-12-2006**

Catalonian Wildfire Situation Information

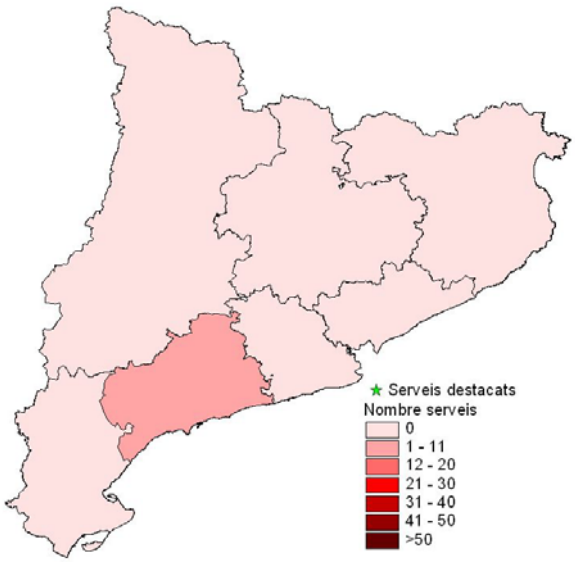
Australia, December 2006.

What we had

Compared trends from the start of the year until:

	21/12/2005	21/12/2006
Nº Fires (VA+VU+VF)	6999	5297
Area (ha)	7245	4394 (*)

(*) PROVISIONAL AREA WAITING FOR VALIDATION



Number of fires (VA+VU+VF) from 05/12 until 21/12/06 that are larger than 2 ha.

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Situation Description

Evolution of the drought (availability of live fuels and large dead fuels)

The drought continues to decline despite the southern half of the country which continues to show concrete areas where the drought is stronger; in fact the rains diminished the drought until the south. Due to technical problems, the DC of this Forestalillo was formed with data from fewer stations than usual; because of this, the report from the Pyrenees of Lleida appears more homogenous because of the interpolation from the few stations that were available.

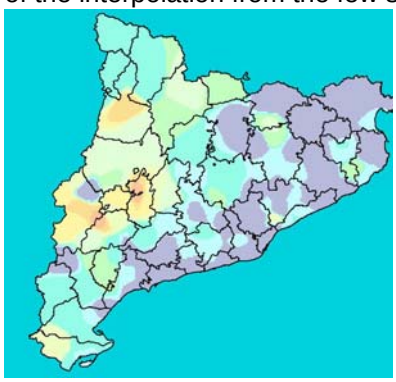


***Fig. 3**. Accumulated Drought (Drought Code Index) del **22/12/05**.*

***Fig. 4**. Accumulated Drought (Drought Code Index) del **22/12/06**.*

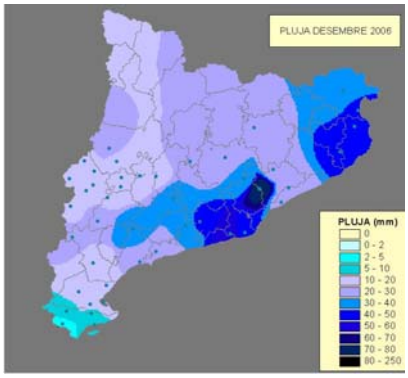
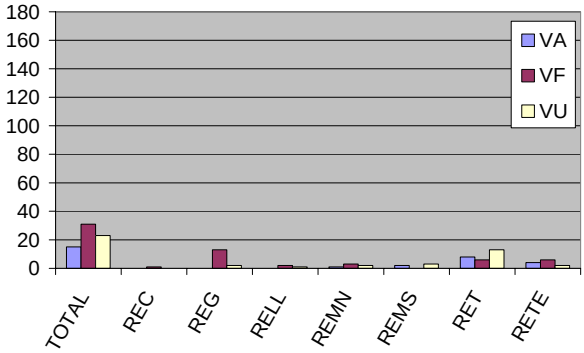


***Fig. 5**. Accumulated precipitation for December 2006. Also reflects the technical problems.*

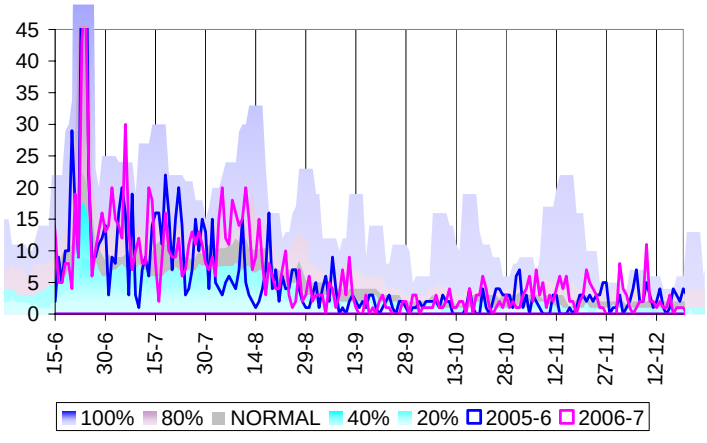
Numbers of Fires (VA, VU and VF)

The graph below shows very low fire counts. Currently the levels are at 40 percent of the last 5 years; that is to say the levels are a little less than normal.



***Graph 1.** Total fire counts and counts for each region according to the type of vegetation from **6 December** to **20 December**.*

***Graph 2.** Fire index Mbs13 (forest fire counts) from 06/12/06 until 20/12/06, compared with the same period in 2005-2006. The graph also compares the trends over the years **with the** normal **number of fires (in grey, the 50th percentile), less than** normal **(in blue) and maximum (in lilac) of the last 5 years**.*



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By region

REG

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

REMN

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

REMS

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

REC

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

RETE

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

RET

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

RELL

There were no significant events to report this last week.
What is forecasted Low activity because of the current states of vegetation and the drought.

Activity Level

Low **Normal** **Medium** **High** **Critical** **Large Wildfire**

Most important points

3.1.- Wildfires in Australia.

Fig. 1. Image of the one of the Australian wildfires in December.

Unfortunate images like those shown in Figures 1 and 2 show the current state of the Australian wildfire season.

This new wildfire season in the southern hemisphere began with the following records:

- For Sydney, 1 January 2006 was the second hottest day in history with 44.2 ºC.
- September and November had been the hottest months in Australia since 1950.
- The state of the drought was the worst on record in more than one century.

Fig. 2. Perimeters of different wildfires in the state of Tasmania, December 2006.

Listed below are some significant details of this fire season.

- In the state of Victoria (southeast), the dense smoke produced by different fires caused the evacuation of a hospital as well as 14 affected houses.
- In the city of Melbourne the airport postponed flights because of the poor visibility.
- In one week in Australia the amount of land burned was equivalent to the size of Luxembourg.
- In Tasmania, on the nights of 12 and 13 of December, 18 houses burned because the number of simultaneous fires was more than the available resources could handle.
- Army and police members, totaling 4,000, lent their support to the firefighters' efforts.
- Fires caused at least one death, 15 wounded firefighters during suppression efforts in the southeast part of the country, evacuation of entire towns, dead livestock and diminished survival of wildlife due to burned habitat.

The area burned at the start of this season was approximately 750,000 hectares. Always, when these episodes occur, there is a moment of reflection to remember a similar event in history. In general most of the veterans agree that since Black Friday in 1939 when 71 people died, there has been nothing similar.

More and more, the urban interface is set up as the main protagonist in these occurrences, becoming part of the wildfire and weakening the suppression efforts in a global emergency.
The years 1986 (December 1985 for Australia), 1994 (December 1993) and 2003 (December 2002) are known in Australia as years with extreme fire behavior, with large areas affected and with fire suppression capabilities constantly exceeded in the majority of the operations. These same years, in our territory, are remembered for the electricity usage peaks during the summer of 2003, the drought of 1994 and the flames surrounding the mountain of Montserrat, as definitively the 3 years for forest wildfires. Thus, relating our difficult fire seasons to the similar conditions of Australia's preceding season makes us pay attention in the face of our next season.

At the start of 2007 the Report from the Intergovernmental Panel for Climatic Change was presented (**IPCC**), drawn up by a group of more than 2500 scientific organizations for the United Nations. In short, this report shows that the temperature will increase 6.3ºC on average until 2100. Without policies to mitigate the changes, it will rain more but without a homogeneous distribution because there will be a decrease in the dry zones (Mediterranean arc, for example).

The gases of the greenhouse effect could be the main culprit of climate change but also have been, in part, the reasons that have made Earth habitable for humans. Regarding the recent episodes of forest wildfires (in Australia and in Catalonia), these are assumed to be the worst that have been seen, except that when comparing them with years that had human losses, the emotional load weighs more. It is certain that the majority of the indicators (the heating of the atmosphere and the oceans or the loss of the glaciers) point out to us some complicated conditions for the future forest wildfire stage. While we think we can construct safety, Australia shows us that simply the reality is only the way we live. Now only we must study it to learn from it.