

# CASE STUDY



## CASE STUDY:

### ‘Necessity is the mother of invention’

*Lessons learned following the destruction of holiday parks by wildfire*

#### *Foreword*

*EFCO&HPA represents the holiday park and campsite industry at the European level. It brings together the national industry representative trade associations of 23 countries. Its role in promoting and defending the interests of the sector’s businesses, and the communities they sustain, is twofold: representation to the European institutions and promoting the exchange of expertise and best practice.*

*Two general assemblies are organised each year to bring together the members of the EFCO&HPA. Facilitated by the members themselves, these meetings are also an opportunity to learn more about the development, culture and regulation of the sector in different areas. In addition to representing the industry to the European authorities, EFCO&HPA also allows its members to share their advisory work with national and regional governments and to learn from each other.*

*The Federation ensures constant monitor of threats and opportunities affecting the holiday park and campsite industry, identifying and sharing appropriate, innovative and timely responses. It is in this context that the EFCO&HPA commissioned its Secretary General to research and write a case study report on the response to the wildfire which led to the destruction of two campsites in the Bouches-du-Rhône department, in France.*

# ‘Necessity is the mother of invention’

## *Lessons learned following the destruction of holiday parks by wildfire*

France is the most visited country in the world and Provence one of the jewels in her tourism crown. Climate, geology, and history coalesce to bring the romance of the lavender fields nestled amongst hilltop towns with their markets, wine, gastronomy, and artistic tradition. These same elements also combine to present the greatest risk to the region's businesses: wildfire! This case study considers the wildfire in 2020 which saw eight holiday parks evacuated, and two razed to the ground. Four years later, those businesses are only just starting to get back onto their feet and there are considerable, and wider, lessons to be taken from their misfortune and the convolutions of their journey since.

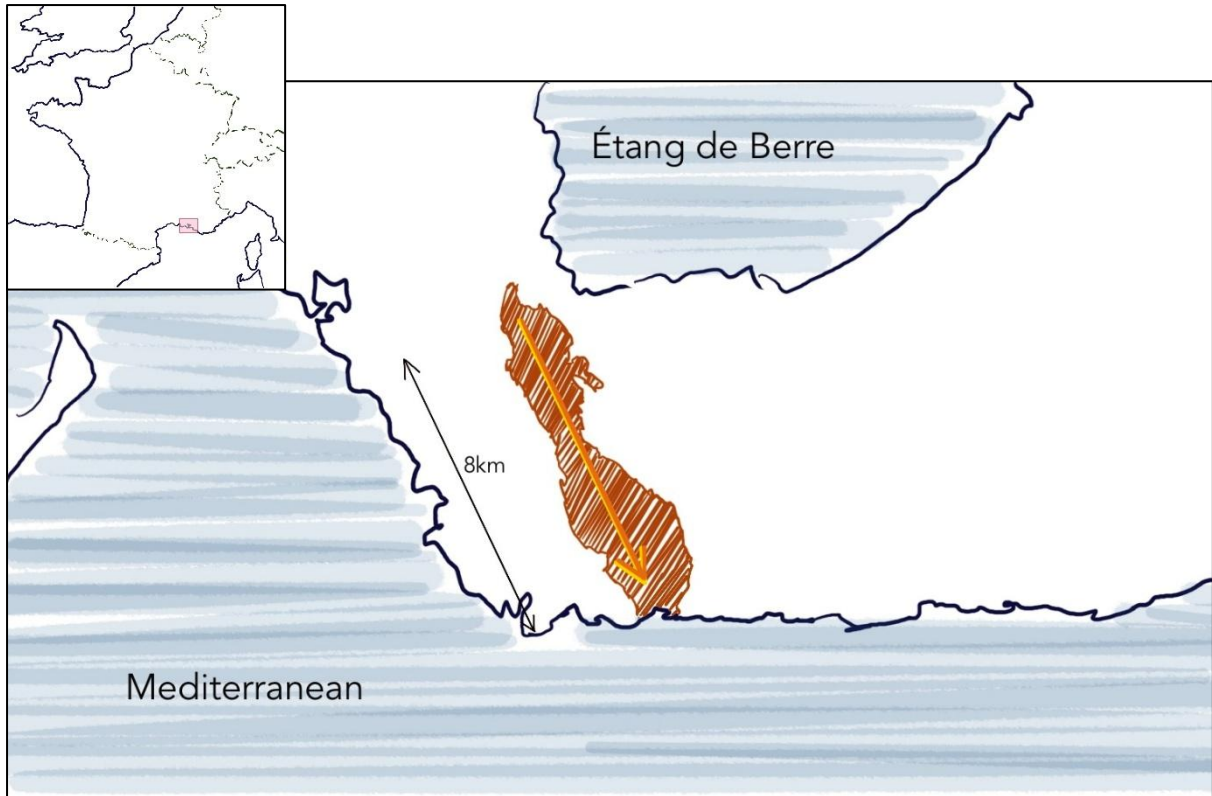
### August 2020

Only weeks after the Covid lockdown restrictions were lifted, holiday parks in the Bouches-du-Rhône Department in the South of France were returning to their new normal. August was the height of what was to be a truncated, but busy, tourist season.

It was Cyril Urios, General Secretary of the industry's trade association, FRHPA Sud who alerted park managers from the neighbourhood of La Couronne of the approach of the wildfire which had started some 8 km to their north. From the smoke plumes he could see, the fire appeared to be progressing southwards towards the holiday parks on the Mediterranean coast in Martigues.

Travelling more than 8 km in just two hours, fuelled by drought-stricken vegetation and propelled by the Mistral wind blowing at speeds of up to 96km/h, such was the intensity of the inferno that it leaped across roads, a motorway and railway on its journey south. It was only the sea which would eventually halt the fire's rampage, despite the valiant work of over 1,800 fire fighters with air support from Canadair fire planes.

Park managers explained their feeling of dread when smoke appeared on the horizon with the news that the destruction was rapidly approaching their holiday business. The need to protect life was paramount and evacuation plans were the priority, all the while hoping that somehow the business could be saved. Eight holiday parks were evacuated that evening, two with customers evacuating into the sea given their narrow access roads were needed by the firefighters. Coast Guard, fire brigade and police boats were joined by fishermen and pleasure boats in then taking the 468 people evacuated into the sea to safety. The evacuation was exemplary since no victims, nor injuries were reported.



An idyllic, calm bay today but that night in 2020 with the Mistral blowing for all its worth, the sea was rough as the evacuees awaited their rescue.

Words are unnecessary to describe the feelings of the owners and their teams when they were eventually able to return to the moonscape which had replaced their holiday park businesses.



## Aftermath

The morning after, the teams returned to the wastelands which were once their two park businesses and exhausted as they were, the clean-up began. This is when they were met by the full force of a bureaucratic labyrinth: it was not a 'simple question' of rebuilding the business from the ashes. First permission needed to be obtained, and this was not deemed to be automatic.



*The following day*

It was here that the unremitting support of the parks' trade association proved crucial. Holiday parks in France are regulated at local, departmental, and national level (and on occasion, also at inter-departmental, regional level and of course, by the EU). There is a margin of discretion accorded to the civil servants working at each level, interpreting and on occasion redrafting, the various regulations. For some of them, a simple refusal to reopening seemed the most straightforward means to risk management - certainly, the least responsibility - irrespective of the impact on the already-devasted park owners who has lost their livelihoods and future. So, with support from their regional and national trade association, the various threads of red tape needed to be unravelled:

To give one example, it was necessary to determine before any other decision whether new permission was indeed required, or if the previous authorisation could be viewed to still be in force given on both holiday parks some elements of infrastructure had escaped the inferno. That initial hurdle took years, not weeks or months, to clear.

It was then necessary to determine how to respond to the prohibition against using gas following the reports of cylinders launching into the air like rockets in response to the intense heat of the fire. On the coast at the end of the electricity line, there was simply insufficient

electricity available to power a holiday park. This was yet another seemingly intractable obstacle for which a practical response was provided through the development and use of fire protections for gas bottles.



The list of bureaucratic barriers was worked through, drawing on the expertise of the trade association in responding to each, aided by the generosity and goodwill of many. For example, learning of the misfortune, a retired architect volunteered to compile the necessary drawings for the replanting scheme which needed official approval before it could commence.

Despite the still-evident scars from the fire, loyal customers returned to lend their support, fully aware of the handicaps faced by the businesses as they reestablished themselves. Neighbouring holiday parks directed customers to support the stricken businesses as they reopened.

Four years later and like phoenixes, little by little, the two parks are now rising from the ashes. Much has been learned and a series of initiatives put in place in response to those lessons.



## The French Eucalyptus

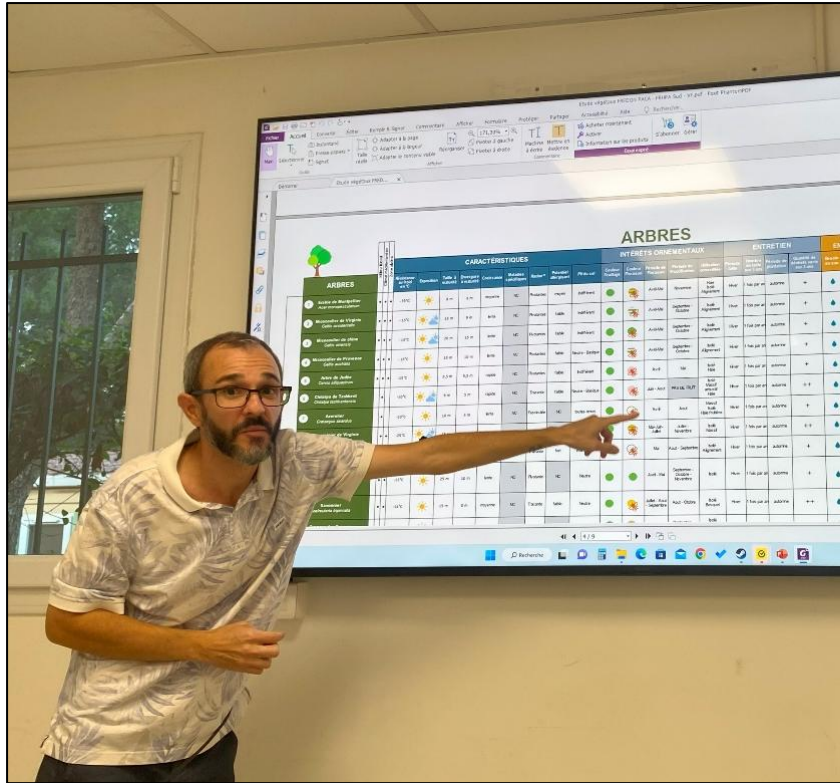
French holiday parks are characterised by their lush planting; This gives them their friendly ambience, breaks up sight lines, provides privacy and is essential in providing shade to enhance customers' holiday experience. Already with climate change, work was in hand to address the best species to plant to minimise the need for water. However, the fire highlighted how some species could sustain and grow on even after such a catastrophe.

Many were already aware that the Australian eucalyptus – an invasive species in Europe - is naturally regenerated by fire; far fewer however knew that palm trees are also able to withstand fire and regrow, quickly and with renewed vigour. Indeed, their bark was charred the Martigues fire as it spread through the holiday parks, but that charring protected the living tree which then grew on resplendently amongst the ashes.

This learning was the catalyst for research avec [Fredon](#) to identify how best holiday parks in areas prone to fire could be planted to be able to reestablish themselves as quickly as possible. Fire resistance data for different species was compiled along with their requirements in terms of soil, water, maintenance, and their ability to give shade so creating a definitive guide for holiday parks in the South of France. So useful was that guide that it has been reproduced for other areas of France which face different risks, climate, and growing conditions: authoritative guidance to landscaping and planting holiday parks sustainably for the future.

*Research of plant species resistant to fire*





Cyril Urios of the FNHPA and FRHPA Sud explains the planting data now available to assist sustainable holiday park landscape planning.

[www.fredon.fr](http://www.fredon.fr)

### ARBRES

ARBRES	CARACTERISTIQUES				INTERETS CONSEIL AUX				ENTRETIEN				CONSEQUENCES ENVIRONNEMENTALES				Remarques
	Porte	Forme	Feuilles	Flors	Interêt paysag.	Interêt écol.	Interêt éducatif	Interêt méd.	Tronc	Branches	Feuilles	Flors	Interêt écol.	Interêt éducatif	Interêt méd.		
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### ARBUSTES

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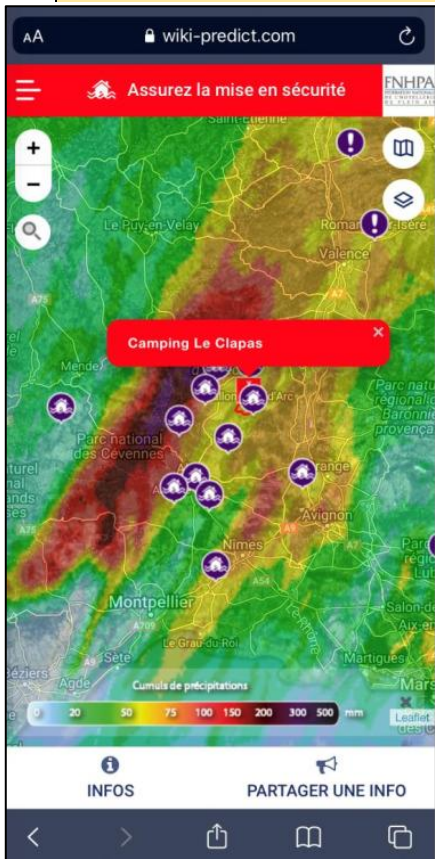
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## Timely, precise information



The Martigues fire was unusual in its severity given the combination of weather conditions that August, but wildfire is by no means unusual below the Olive Line. Sadly, with climate change, it is becoming more frequent. Prior warning is key to managing risk and any incident, and for this constant monitor of meteorological conditions is needed. The French national trade association for holiday parks, FNHPA had already entered into a partnership with the national weather service, Météo France in 2010 to provide a wind and flood monitoring and alerts for members. This service is designed to provide the clear and timely data essential to managing risk and addressing any emergency. Geolocated specifically to the holiday park, the service has been developed to provide real time alerts of rain, flood, and snow.

Following the fire in Martigues, the search was on to provide a similar alert service for wildfires for holiday parks in the Bouches-du-Rhône. The solution came from a group of twenty-four dedicated volunteers who came together in 2021 to form an association provide an innovative service - [www.firechaser.fr](http://www.firechaser.fr) - which given its efficacy today provides essential data to the authorities.

As with many a good idea, the concept is simple. Constant and careful monitor of social media allows the compilation of accurate information on each fire breaking out in the Department. Given many people are constantly sharing information over social media and given the natural fascination with fire, any sightings quickly find their way onto the social networks, with accurate locations and photography providing all-essential data. Fire Chaser's specialists can then analyse the data to advise on combatting the outbreak. It is one thing to receive a telephone report of fire, quite another to receive photographs with accurate geolocation giving an expert the information necessary to determine an appropriate response.



This intelligence is available to all on the Fire Chaser App and a version of this has been developed for the area's holiday parks. At times of fire risk, the park management now receive a daily update indicating the level of risk so allowing appropriate vigilance and

mitigation measures. If fire breaks out within 5km of the business, the holiday park is alerted through a phone call to resolve any doubts and if necessary, to activate the risk management plan. Not only is the campsite management informed of the outbreak of a fire nearby, but by taking into account the wind direction, they receive clear information on the direction of the fire's spread - so allowing the business response to be specific to the risk,

safeguarding life but also preventing the overreaction which would be inevitable in the absence of data. The information allows the business management to address the incident with certainty, rather than responding to undetermined probabilities so saving cost, as well safeguarding life and property.

**VIGILANCE INCENDIE FIRE RISK** Bouches-du-Rhône

**JE RESTE ATTENTIF**  
Je ne fais pas de feu. Cigarette interdite dans les campings en zone à risque incendie.  
The use of fire is prohibited. No smoking in campsites located in a fire risk area.

**JE M'INFORME**  
L'été, les accès aux massifs sont réglementés en fonction du risque incendie. Consultez la carte quotidienne Everyday fire map and forest access

**RISQUE DU JOUR TODAY FIRE RISK**  
Prenez connaissance des consignes de sécurité au sein des campings. Restez informés via les réseaux sociaux de la commune, des Pompiers 13 et de FIRE CHASER 13. Look at the news on social media.

Affiche réalisée par le syndicat départemental de Philatélie de plein air des Bouches-du-Rhône et l'Association FIRE CHASER. Mise à jour quotidiennement.

**BULLETIN DE RISQUE INCENDIE** DÉPARTEMENT : Bouches-du-Rhône

**RISQUE INCENDIE**  
FAIBLE MODÉRÉ SÉVÈRE TRÈS SÉVÈRE

**LUNDI 22 JUILLET**  
Résultat des précipitations du week-end, le risque incendie est globalement modéré pour cette journée de lundi malgré le ventral qui soufflera autour des 60 km/h. Il permettra toutefois une rapide évaporation des pluies. L'humidité relative sera élevée, autour des 45-50% et les températures d'environ 30°C. La probabilité d'ignition pour la journée de Lundi 22 juillet est jugée modérément faible.

**MARDI 23 JUILLET**  
L'eau des Fes sur-Mer - Salon-de-Provence se dissipe rapidement au niveau de la côte, les précipitations de dimanche ayant été plus faibles qu'habituellement dans le département. Le risque incendie est sévère dans les zones les moins arrosées. La vent soufflera à 50 km/h en moyenne. Il sera davantage canalisé sur les Alpilles. L'humidité relative sera autour des 50% et la température moyenne sera de 31°C. La probabilité d'ignition pour la journée de Mardi 23 est jugée comme élevée.

**THÈMES**  
Mars 2024: Modéré, Sévère, Très sévère, Extrême  
Février 2024: Modéré, Sévère, Très sévère, Extrême  
Janvier 2024: Modéré, Sévère, Très sévère, Extrême

**MERCREDI**  
Température: 30°C  
Humidité: 50%  
Vent: NW 50 km/h, 25 en rafale  
Risque très sévère sur le Sud-Est et secteur Istres-Fos. Le massif de la côte bleue est susceptible de passer en très sévère.  
Probabilité d'ignition: 70%

**JEUDI**  
Température: 32°C  
Humidité: 50% sur l'Ouest, 50% sur l'Est  
Vent: W 50 km/h, 30 en rafale. Transition ventral le matin à l'Est de sud au fin de journée.  
Probabilité d'ignition: 60%

**VENDREDI**  
Température: 30°C  
Humidité: 50% au nord, 50% au sud  
Vent: S 40 km/h, 30 en rafale  
Probabilité d'ignition: 70% au nord, 50% au sud



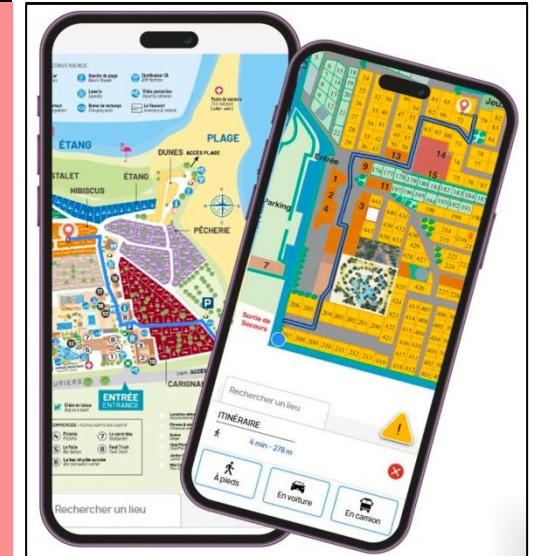
Meeting with Raphael Supplisson, President of Fire Chaser 13

[www.firechaser.fr/](http://www.firechaser.fr/)

## Managing an incident

The Martigues fire also highlighted the information needs of both holiday park management and the emergency services in managing a major incident. This led a group of larger holiday parks to enter a partnership with Operask, founded and led by former firefighter, Anthony Ciravolo and former police officer, Raphaël De Felice. They brought their emergency service experience to developing an IT system to support holiday park management in managing any incident by coordinating information and communication. Its primary objective is to save time which in turn will save lives.

The holiday park is mapped in detail with safety data and locations embedded. Access to this essential information can then be provided to the park and emergency teams seamlessly and quickly. It can guide the emergency services to the exact location of an incident on a holiday park, providing information ahead of their arrival on the access route through the park and the location of support services such as hydrants and firefighting



equipment. The same mapping solution can also be used in normal times to guide customers to their accommodation.

Clear information and communication being the keys to managing an incident, the solution allows park management to communicate with all staff and/or all customers on a holiday park by text message to share safety information or organise an evacuation. It then facilitates the logging of evacuation checks, plotting the location of individual accommodation in real time.

Specifically designed to serve during a major incident, it can also provide a training protocol in simulating the necessary steps and recording the park team's response.

Meeting with Anthony Ciravolo and Raphaël De Felice of Operask [www.operask.com](http://www.operask.com)

## Trauma

Fortunately, no lives were lost in the Martigues fire as all were safely evacuated, nevertheless the trauma of the event cannot be underestimated. A father's report of his fear is particularly striking; he explained how he was separated from his family as his children were amongst the first to be taken to safety from the rough sea into which they had escaped the fire.

The media's focus was rightly on the fire's impact on the firefighters who sought to tackle the blaze, then the residents and holidaymakers who escaped its ravages, yet few considered the trauma experienced by the entrepreneurs whose businesses were obliterated. Those who are born into a family business feel a particular responsibility to their forebears; the experience of the pandemic lockdown underlined their heightened anxiety at the risk of losing the livelihood which they had inherited. Consider then the mental health of those returning to a family holiday park which had been reduced to ashes in a matter of minutes, only then to face an onerous and lengthy battle with red tape.

This is something which the national holiday parks trade association has now addressed with the launch of new mental health services to support members. In June 2024, the FNHPA signed a partnership with APESA FRANCE, an association which provides psychological assistance to entrepreneurs in despair, those who are potentially prey to dark thoughts.

APESA has a large territorial network via the commercial courts, to detect entrepreneurs in psychological distress via "sentinels", and direct them to a network of psychologists specifically trained to arrest a possibly disastrous process. By signing a partnership with APESA FRANCE, the FNHPA, via its regional and departmental branches, is now generating its own network of "sentinels" specifically trained to detect a colleague in distress and provide them with mental health 'first aid.' An alert form can then be drawn up indicating a degree of concern that quickly triggers psychological care and follow-up downstream.

*'Our profession is fortunately rarely affected by these situations of extreme despair, but it happened again recently following a weather event. It seemed important to us to be part of this process of vigilance and to support managers who may be in exceedingly difficult situations and may not necessarily find someone in whom to confide. It is therefore important to be able to count on our own network of "sentinels" who listen to their colleagues,'* said Nicolas Dayot.



*Concerned about the wellbeing of holiday park managers, the FNHPA, represented by its president Nicolas Dayot, signed a partnership with APESA FRANCE, an association providing psychological assistance to entrepreneurs in despair, in June, represented by its president Martine Tiberino Champ.*

## Insurance contract

Time and again in researching this case study, there were reports from those feeling '*abandoned*' by their insurers. The sentiment was genuine, yet at no point was it suggested that an insurer had departed from the terms of the insurance contract.

An insurance policy is a contract between the insurer and the insured which is priced according to the value of the insured items (sum insured) and the likelihood of their loss. Where the sum insured is less than the value of the losses in a catastrophe, then so too the insurance reimbursement will also be less than their value. An average clause may also be applied in some circumstances inevitably compounding the feeling of abandonment, yet the insurer is precisely meeting the terms of the contract.

This underlines the absolute need to ensure a full declaration to the insurer when the contract is put in place and therefore the cost of the insurance may well be higher since it will reflect the full value of the items to be covered. Too often, attention is only given to the terms of the insurance contract after a loss. Yet insurance is a major business expense, and time needs to be taken at the outset, and after any changes, to ensure the insurance cover is adequate so to avoid the feeling of abandonment in the event of disaster.



*'Necessity is' certainly 'the mother of invention' as many of the learnings following the Martigues fire show. Coupled with the research and new systems of information and for managing emergencies, the trade association organised conference information sessions, webinars and training to support their members.*

Perhaps then the most important conclusion to be drawn from this story is the importance of the role of trade associations, in centralising information and expertise, devising solutions and then sharing them across the industry. Whether the task is to manage risk or to respond to the inertia of bureaucracy, there is strength in numbers: so much more can be achieved by an industry which works together, than by each individual entrepreneur battling alone!

Ros Pritchard OBE  
March 2025



*Ros Pritchard OBE  
EFCO&HPA Secretary General*

*With four decades' experience in the holiday parks and campsites sector, Ros has perhaps a unique expertise and insight into the development of the industry across Europe.*

*Since the 1980s, she has worked for European and UK holiday parks and tourism federations, roles that have led her to chart and influence the sector's response to economic, political, climate and societal changes and to communicate the*

*opportunities and needs of industry businesses to governments at all levels.*

*Anglo-Irish, a graduate in psychology and business, Ros was honoured to be appointed to the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in recognition of her services to tourism in the Queen's Birthday Honours List of 2005.*

European Federation of Campingsite Organisations & Holiday Park Associations  
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