

To The Editor,
Latrobe Valley Express

The Victorian Government is so pleased to be trotting out its "new" DC10 fire bomber with its unprecedented 45,000-litre water capacity. What it fails to say is the cost of the aircraft for just one summer is roughly equivalent to DSE's annual fuel reduction budget - around \$10 million! While it acknowledges this is a "trial", this type of aircraft has never been used on anything other than remote forest fires in the US. Government spin is portraying this aircraft as a potential saviour of houses - if houses are designed to withstand 45 tonnes of water being dropped on them! In the early 1980's the Forests Commission trialled a system known as MAFFS in RAAF Hercules aircraft. With 11,250 pressurized litres payload it proved cumbersome and, with too long turnaround times, unsatisfactory for Victorian use. Yet the Government states the DC10 as the first time such a large aircraft has been trialled here. It may yet prove of some value but only if dropping mixed retardant as straight water is likely to dissipate too quickly. The quantity of retardant required to service such an aircraft, though, is way more than currently can be mixed effectively, stored and pumped to ensure fast turnaround times. In other words, if the DC10 doesn't prove effective on dropping its first load then it's too late to worry about a second drop. Ask any experienced DSE firefighter whether they think leasing this aircraft is a good idea or good use of money. I have not found one experienced person that does not shake their head when asked this question. Once again, the Victorian Government has placed more importance on fire suppression than fire prevention. I suggest we send Mr Brumby a shiny new firebug drip-torch next autumn to place beside his photo of his shiny white elephant, the DC10.

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