

MEDIA RELEASE



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FUEL REDUCTION RECOMMENDATIONS WELCOMED

The national organisation representing communities deriving income from forestry, Timber Communities Australia, endorses most recommendations of the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission, particularly the increase in fuel reduction.

“Most of the recommendations are common sense and we concur with the findings. However, fuel reduction burning was one issue that raised the ire of many country residents in the months after the Black Saturday fires, reinforcing a view that not enough had been done by the Government in recent years” explained TCA's Trevor Brown.

“Most people acknowledge that nothing would have stopped these fires because of the weather conditions on that day and the weeks prior. However, there has been enough evidence in previous fire events demonstrating that effective fuel reduction burning will slow a wild fire significantly” he added.

The Royal Commission has recommended that the percentage of public land that has its fuel loads reduced be increased from the current 1.7% to 5% annually. This is one of 67 recommendations made from the inquiry into Australia's worst bushfire disaster and agrees in principle with the recommendations of the Victorian Government's own 2008 parliamentary committee inquiry into fuel reduction.

“Operationally it will be difficult for the Department of Sustainability and Environment to achieve this target. In any one year it will need near perfect conditions and, unfortunately, DSE no longer has the permanent workforce to carry it through. It relies on so-called project firefighters who are employed on a year to year basis with an annual workforce turnover approaching 50%. Continuity of staff and local knowledge is an issue in some parts of the state” said Mr Brown.

TCA also welcomed the recommendation for formation of a national bushfire research centre but viewed some recommendations with caution. “The recommendation for underground high voltage power lines could bankrupt the state at worst, but will make electricity unaffordable for many low income rural communities at best” Mr Brown said.

“We are also a little miffed that there has been scant acknowledgement of timber industry's contribution to the firefighting effort. Much of the State's first-attack capability has been compromised by the shrinkage enforced on the industry by government policy. This will become ominously obvious should former forestry areas such as the Otway Ranges have an outbreak of fires” he added.

There was also little mention made of the fact that Victoria will suffer shortfalls of native hardwood and plantation pine in decades to come due to the fires.

ENDS

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