

March 2, 2010

Forestry Industry Represented at Royal Commission

Victoria's peak independent forestry body, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) last week gave evidence before the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, under the topic of fuel reduction and land management.

In a detailed witness statement presented to the Royal Commission on behalf of the industry, VAFI Deputy CEO Lisa Marty explained that prescribed burning is one of the most cost and risk effective methods for mitigating potential bushfire risks.

"Broad area prescribed burning changes a number of a fuel characteristics that will result in reduced rate of spread, reduced spotting, reduce flame heights, reduced fire intensity and increased ease of suppression for a period of time following the burn" explained Ms Marty, VAFI Deputy CEO in her witness statement to the Royal Commission.

The VAFI also expressed their belief that the contraction of the native forest industry has impacted on fire management and suppression through a reduction of readily available equipment, a depleted skilled workforce.

"The forest industries have made and can make very positive contributions to fire suppression efforts. These include in-location equipment such as bulldozers, skilled machine operators with local knowledge, experienced crews for fire fighting, revenue for access roads and tracks in State forest areas and knowledge of those networks."

Ms Marty said it was also important that all Victorians understand the vital job forest industry workers perform in fighting fires and reducing the fire risk through their many roles across rural and regional Victoria.

"Despite less than 1% of Victoria's public native forests being subject to timber production each year, the native forest industry, along with the plantation industry, provides significant and readily available resources for fire suppression across the Victoria."

The VAFI believes that there are opportunities for the industry to contribute further to protecting public forests and private land from fire as part of an integrated approach to fire and forest management across the landscape. In particular, industry resources could be utilized for mechanical removal of fuel hazards and forestry equipment could be modified to improve its fire suppression effectiveness.

"The Victorian forest industry is vital if we are to maintain fire tracks, reduce fuel loads and provide important firefighting infrastructure such as vehicles and personnel. The ongoing sustainable management of our forests is an essential aspect in reducing the overall bushfire threat that our state faces ever summer and protecting our forests, flora and fauna for all users."

The VAFI was granted leave to appear after delivering an initial detailed submission in May of last year. The VAFI also represented the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) at the Royal Commission.

The commission delivered its interim report in August of last year, and is expected to hand down its final report in July.