

Monday, February 16 2009

VAFI WELCOMES TERMS OF REFERENCE, MORE SCRUTINY NEEDED

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) has welcomed the State Government's announcement of the terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Victoria's Bushfires with a call for more scrutiny into forest management practices.

The broad terms of reference have allowed a large capacity of inquiry into all aspects of the fires, a significant part of which the VAFI CEO, Philip Dalidakis, believes should be directed towards forest management policy and the potential role of the Victorian timber industry in reducing fire risk.

"We welcome the terms of reference with the acknowledgement that a detailed investigation of land management and fire prevention will include an examination of the timber industry's ongoing role in these areas," Mr Dalidakis said.

"Now more than ever it's important to recognise that the timber industry can have a strong role in reducing the severity of bushfires through a range of forest management practices including the reduction of fuel loads, the maintenance of key infrastructure and the presence of skilled fire-fighting personnel."

In calling for further examination into the timber industry's role in bushfire mitigation, the VAFI has requested the Royal Commission focus on the following issues:

- A review of all public land management to ensure integrated and active forest management
- A review of native vegetation requirements and fire planning and management across all land tenures;
- A review of successive State Government policies of 'locking up' forest estate reducing the effectiveness of fuel load reduction as a forest management tool leading to greater bushfire intensity;
- The positive role of the timber industry in building and maintaining key infrastructure (access roads in particular) throughout forest estate;
- The positive role of the timber industry in providing essential fire fighting equipment available for quick response and emergency deployment as well as key personnel to operate it; and
- The role an increased forestry industry can have in helping to reduce the fuel load, reduce damaging carbon emissions from fire while simultaneously using the timber resource in a way that continues to fight climate change through the carbon storage of wood products.

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