VAFI

VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF FOREST INDUSTRIES

MEDIA RELEASE

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Royal Commission Recommendations: Good, Bad and Ugly

Victoria's peak independent forestry body, the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) has cautiously welcomed the final recommendations from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The VAFI gave evidence before the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission earlier this year, under the topic of fuel reduction and land management as well as providing a comprehensive written submission last year.

The VAFI CEO Philip Dalidakis has added that the Victorian timber industry strongly supports the commissioner's final recommendation seeking an annual rolling target of 5 per cent of prescribed burning minimum of public land.

"Whilst prescribed burning itself can pose risks to our industry to our industry, the greater good is the safety of rural and regional communities and that must be supported first and foremost," VAFI CEO Philip Dalidakis said.

The VAFI however believes that the Commissioners have failed the affected communities by not strengthening the role the local timber industry can play in both the fighting and prevention of bushfires.

The VAFI calls upon the Victorian Government and Opposition to provide the industry more supporting their response to the recommendations so that we can continue our role in fighting and preventing bushfires.

"If we are to maintain fire tracks, reduce fuel loads and provide important firefighting infrastructure such as vehicles and personnel we need to have an industry presence to do so. The ongoing sustainable management of our forests is an essential aspect in reducing the overall bushfire threat that our state faces ever summer," Mr Dalidakis said.

The role and cost of maintaining vital infrastructures is carried out by the forest industry, but without the industry this cost will fall directly upon the shoulders of over-burdened taxpayers.

Chief Executive of the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI), Allan Hansard, said the Victorian Royal Commission provided a useful and comprehensive evaluation of the devastating impacts and ongoing risks of bushfires in south eastern Australia.

He said there was an imperative to build on these state level findings at a national level and for key recommendations to be implemented as soon as possible and not let lapse.

"NAFI is calling for a national summit on bushfire risk management as a way of ensuring a national approach is delivered. The forest industry is looking for the necessary leadership to promote a comprehensive approach to bushfire risk management and act on its implementation.

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"Bushfires do not discriminate between land tenures or state borders. As such, government needs to coordinate the various land management agencies and jurisdictions to ensure fuel reduction practices are undertaken across the landscape to reduce the risk of large-scale catastrophic fires," he said.

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