

Media Release

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Vic RFA post-bushfire review calls for active forest management

An independent review of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreement regions after the devastating 2019–20 bushfires has backed forest industry calls for active forest management across all land tenures.

The Commonwealth and Victorian Governments agreed to undertake a Major Event Review to assess the impacts of the fires and identify future action. [The report](#), overseen by an independent panel and informed by science, Traditional Owner knowledge and public consultation, highlights the need for active and adaptive forest management, Deb Kerr, CEO of the Victorian Forest Products Association (VFPA), said today.

The report recommends the Governments “*further investigate the mechanical thinning of dense regrowth forests, as a strategy to restore forest landscapes to a more open forest structure in order to enhance the resilience of forests to more frequent occurrence of severe bushfires.*”

Several recent peer-reviewed scientific [studies](#) that have shown forest thinning – as practised in Victoria’s sustainably managed timber production forests – significantly reduces bushfire severity.

Other key findings of the report, which includes 37 recommendations for improvements to how we manage Victorian forests are:

- “Mechanical thinning of regrowth forests
- active forest management and forest resilience to repeated high-intensity bushfires
- outcomes for Traditional Owners through empowered active involvement in forest management
- research, data, and information on Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) values and bushfire impacts
- preparation for future Major Event Reviews.

Deb Kerr said Victoria’s forest industries were already doing their part to improve conservation outcomes following major bushfires.

“This report is part of a broader discussion about the loss of biodiversity due to major bushfires. Forestry already responds to these risks, for example through a dedicated [Greater Glider Conservation Strategy](#) put in place by VicForests in 2019 as well as additional

Media Contact:

Ulrike Andresen-Nikolai - VFPA Public & Media Relations Manager
(m) 0437 559 360 (e) ulrike.andresen-nikolai@vfpa.com.au

protection of endangered species. This [approach](#) is consistent with the conservation advice for recently upgraded EPBC Act listing of the Greater Glider,” Deb Kerr said.

“At the same time, increased bushfires put additional pressure on timber supply. The report finds that Victoria’s privately-owned softwood and hardwood plantations were also significantly impacted by the 2019–20 bushfires, with a total of 8,354 ha worth an estimated \$75 million destroyed.

“The increasing impact of bushfires on plantations presents an escalating threat to wood-processing industries in Victoria. We have some of the most sustainable forestry practices in the world – and this report underlines the need for active forest management rather than a ‘lock up and leave’ approach that some demand,” Deb Kerr said.

Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) CEO Ross Hampton said the report echoed the findings of the Commonwealth’s State of the Environment report card released this week.

“These reports confirm that we need a rethink about how we manage our vast native forest estate, particularly the tens of millions of hectares that have been set aside for permanent conservation yet are failing to stem the decline of our native species,” Mr Hampton said.

“It is clear that the tiny fraction of area harvested each year for timber production and regenerated by law is not the culprit. Australia’s sustainable forestry operations are regulated to the highest standards in the world for forest management, and its our forestry workers who are on the frontline fighting bushfires saving lives and homes,” Mr Hampton concluded.

AFPA released a report after the Black Summer bushfires calling for a national mechanical fuel reduction program, [Using Fire and Machines to Better fireproof Our Country Towns](#).

View VFPA’s submission to the Major Event Review [here](#).

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