

Media Release: For Immediate Release

4 November 2024

Victorian forestry growers brace for dire fire season

The Victorian Forest Products Association (VFPA) has today warned the outlook for the fire season in Victoria, particularly in western Victoria, is looking particularly dire, with record low rainfall and low soil moisture readings creating ideal conditions for bushfires.

“All the Bureau of Meteorology’s predictors in the western part of Victoria are showing a drier than usual lead up to the fire season, with soil moisture low, and a high fuel load ringing alarm bells for the next few months,” said Andrew White, CEO of the VFPA.

“Record low rainfall in the western part of Victoria combined with dry conditions in winter, means we have a ‘green drought’ in some areas, where the risk to our plantations and Victoria’s vital timber assets used to build new homes and create export income for local communities is extremely high,” Mr White said.

“Our terrestrial AI-powered fire cameras in the western part of the state help with early detection, but there is still ‘blind spots’ where we don’t have funding to put cameras in place.”

“Our members are particularly worried about the potential impact on these vital community assets, as plantations are vital supply lines for timber going into Victorian homes and exported plantation products create employment for local staff and contractors,” Mr White said.

“The forestry industry has funded its own specialist brigades which have already been actively working with DEECA and the CFA to conduct prescribed burns and preparative activities that will help protect the local community, as well as these vital community assets,” Mr White said.

VFPA is the peak industry body representing the forest products value chain in Victoria, from those producing our sustainable wood to those processing wood fibre into an extensive range of value-added products used by Victorians every day. Victoria is the home of plantation forestry, with more timber plantations than any other state.

“Last season, the AI-powered fire cameras operated by the Green Triangle Fire Alliance detected 40 unplanned fires- 21 on private land, 11 on public, and 8 in plantations.”

“The cameras were the first point of detection in various scenarios, detecting fire in some cases up to six minutes before another source,” Mr White said.

ENDS

Andrew White - VFPA Chief Executive Officer

(m) 0409 989 575 (e) andrew.white@vfpa.com.au

INDUSTRY RESOURCES

The forestry industry funds and deploys its own specialist Forestry Industry Brigades (FIBs) which work collaboratively with local authorities, DEECA and via the CFA to protect vital community assets and support local communities.

Industry-led Activities:

- Provision of heavy plant such as bulldozers for fire suppression.
- Maintaining a network of hundreds of water points.
- A network of thousands of kilometres of firebreaks and fire access tracks.
- People and appliances working on planned burns each year.
- Funding, equipping, and staffing Forest Industry Brigades across Victoria.

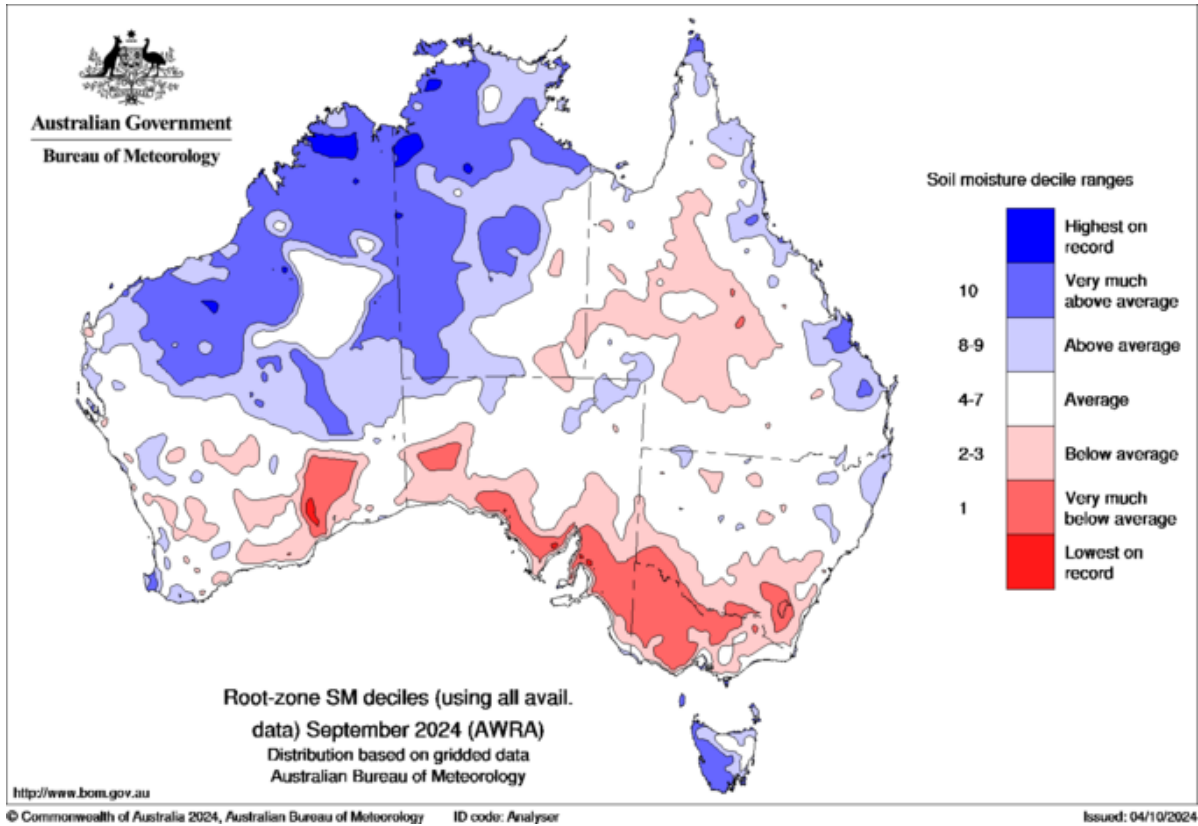
Forestry Industry funded assets in the 'Green Triangle' region include:

- 300 fire fighters, 100 appliances, floating collar tanks to supply water in areas with limited supply and an industry-funded helicopter.
- Lightning is the most common cause of fire. Over 90 per cent of historic bushfires start outside the plantation estate.
- The GTFA PANO AI camera network provides coverage of 1.2 million hectares of landscape. Non-plantation land uses make up 70% of the area covered.

HVP's firefighting assets include:

- Ground appliances: 21 tankers, 68 slip-on units, 3 fire towers.
- Personnel: over 200 trained firefighters.
- Contracting Suppression Aircraft – two aircraft located in Gippsland and Northeast over summer, and the GTFA aircraft at Casterton.

Below average soil moisture in the southern mainland



Rainfall deficiencies for the 8 months since February 2024

