



Inspector General for Emergency Management
GPO Box 4356
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Dear Inspector General for Emergency Management

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. would like to make a submission into the 2019/2020 fire season in Victoria.

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. is a not-for-profit environment organisation constituted to encourage people to participate in activities designed to:

- a. Increase public awareness of the Critically endangered status of Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*);
- b. Improve the conservation status of Leadbeater's Possum in the wild;
- c. Assist with the conservation of Leadbeater's Possum and their habitat

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum pursues these aims through a range of activities including having stalls at various community events, organises revegetation events in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area, providing information to schools and community groups, responding to VicForests proposals to amend its Timber Release Plans, making submissions to relevant government panels and inquiries and by challenging logging of critical habitat in the Federal Court.

The fire season in Victoria is becoming longer and more severe as a result of global heating. The climate is becoming hotter and drier causing vegetation to be drier and so more flammable, which when combined with increased frequency of Code Red days leads to an increase in catastrophic fires. To address this, we need to immediately manage the problems of both our carbon dioxide and methane emissions. We must transition to renewable energy as soon as possible and transition our coal workers to other jobs. We must leave all remaining fossil fuels safely underground.

We should encourage the population to eat less red meat which will save on both methane emissions and water. We need to plant more trees including in urban areas and look after our soil to encourage carbon drawdown.

After the recent fires, all unburnt refugia must be protected, as these will provide the beginnings for recovery of the surrounding areas. Once a forest area has been



burned it should not be salvage logged as this further disturbs the area's natural recovery. Also, before potentially hazardous roadside trees, are removed they need to be assessed by at least two independent arborists.

We need more secure state and federal funding and more fire fighting aircraft so that any new fires starting in any land tenures can be quickly and effectively targeted with the aim of extinguishing them quickly while they are still small. This needs to happen regardless of whether the fire is close to towns or in remote areas. Being able to extinguish fires quickly will protect both property and wildlife. The ignition point will then need to be monitored for some time after to make sure the embers do not reignite.

Planned burns and slashing can be useful in areas close to towns where it is easily monitored, and able to be re-slashed if necessary. Care needs to be taken as to the areas which are slashed or burned as some vegetation types can generate new growth which is more flammable than the original vegetation. In many types of forest, the old growth with mature understorey is less flammable than younger stages of growth. Therefore, it is important to allow these types of forests to continue to grow without disturbance. Hence the 1939 cohort of montane forest in Victoria's Central Highlands should not be harvested. It is important for wildlife that planned burns are only conducted close to towns so that prime habitat, including hollow-bearing trees, is not damaged.

Planned burns should only be of moderate intensity because if the fire is too hot the fungi and invertebrates in the soil and leaf litter will be destroyed. Most of the native vegetation requires its own mycorrhizal fungal species to be able to grow as healthy plants. The invertebrates are required both as a food source for other animals, and as decomposers of leaf litter which would otherwise be left to accumulate as extra fuel load on the ground. If these burns are to take place they should be done as cool mosaic burns in the manner of the Traditional Owners.

Logging should be discontinued in native forests as the slash left behind after the useable timber has been removed creates an enormous fuel load, up to 500 tonnes /ha. and often is not burned until the following Autumn, creating a large fire risk. Additionally, the smoke from these post logging regeneration burns causes significant health risks to humans over large areas.

Effective fox and feral cat baiting need to be done in native habitats so that small mammals have a chance of survival and locally extinct species can be re-introduced. Many of these small mammals, act as soil engineers who effectively turn the soil, reducing the leaf litter and enhancing recruitment.



Weed management should also be incorporated into the fire prevention strategy as many of the weeds provide a higher, more fire prone fuel load than the native vegetation. Weeds that form dense ground covers often prevent the wildlife that turn the soil such as lyrebirds from doing so, meaning the wildlife is less able to decrease the quantity of leaf litter. Feral herbivores also need to be controlled to prevent browsing of seedlings and to give the new growth after fires a chance of survival.

Funding should also be made available for pre and post fire monitoring of fuel loads and pre and post fire monitoring of flora and fauna. This way informed risk management can be used to determine where planned burning needs to be done.

It is important that fire management strategies have good outcomes for human health, assets, wildlife and native flora.

Thank you for giving Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. the opportunity to make a submission regarding Victoria's fire season inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Sue Bendel

Secretary, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc.