

131. Qualtrics\_Wildlife Highways Pty Ltd\_29Apr2020

In essence I am concerned that logging, in particular clearfell logging over the past 40 years has resulted in large swathes of even-aged dense-stemmed regrowth, which magnifies the intensity and spread of fires. I refer you to the work by Dr David Lindenmayer (Australian National University) which recently demonstrated the direct link.

I urge you to consult with Dr Lindenmayer directly on the science rather than the rhetoric and spin of vested interests and well-meaning opinions that are not evidence-based.

The best way to increase Forest Community Preparedness is to listen to scientists such as Dr Lindenmayer, who have researched this extensively, and to then incorporate their recommendations on reducing fire fuel build-up and soil moisture decline.

I understand there is a political imperative to continue this destructive practice for another decade. However you may have some positive influence on reducing its ability to carry and grow the intensity of forest fires.

For example I suggest you discuss with Dr Lindenmayer and other experts the potential benefits of the following to reduce (not eliminate):

- a) double the width of buffers along all watercourses to maintain a greater moist forest barrier which will assist in mitigating the spread and intensity of forest fires;
- b) protection of gullies and order 1 watercourses, which often appear to be clearfelled despite harbouring moister species, including rainforest species and tree ferns which are largely a retardant to fire progression. Note in disturbed forests rainforest species may not have spread back into their natural ecotones, so a buffer beyond observed rainforest is required;
- c) maintain fire breaks around regenerating clearfelled coupes for 30 years to help contain fires in these areas, and to allow cool season burns of patches of these forests as they regenerate to reduce fire hazard in the interim, without creating what happened in the 2009 fires - where the combination of seedlings germinated by the fires and ecocomic growth on the trunks of the burnt trees for a number of years generates a more flammable situation than that which previously existed;
- d) noting that clearfelling is scheduled to be ended within ten years, immediately cease the current regeneration regime for clearfelled coupes that involves reseeding with a singel preferred forest species. Instead regenerate with the original per-exisitng forest and understorey species mix. this shoudl reduce the period that regenerating forests represent a higher fire risk; and
- e) engage with Victor Steffensen and other experts in indigenous cool season fire techniques. Undertake trials and refine a better cool season burning regime that reduces fuel loads safely and maintains and enhances biodiversity values.

In summary, I don't think you can appropriately address the Terms of Reference, without engaging closely with Dr Lindenmayer and his team. I hope to see many references to his work and advice in your final report.

More broadly Global Warming is also a driver of hotter, drier fire seasons. I have been hoping for coordinated global action on this for most of my conscious life. I assume this is outside the ambit of your enquiry based on the Terms of Reference.

Finally, I understand there is some difficulty in giving adequate weight to the opinions of people who claim to "Know it All" or are so frightened by bushfires that they wish to remove extensive areas of forest. We need to protect the forests from hot fires firstly for the wildlife that depends on them, and if we get this right and maintain firebreaks around properties, this should achieve most aims.

Note I own 3,850 acres of high conservation bushland in northern NSW adjacent to Torrington State Conservation Area. We lost around 850 acres to the unprecedented Gulf Creek fires in November 2019. Our firebreaks and some limited patches of cool season burns to limit undergrowth fuel loads effectively stopped the fire spreading further, despite being a very hot fire (turned granite into china). Whilst a different forest type, it does appear possible to at least take some of the sting out of even very hot fires. The cool season low intensity burns came from observations I made of indigenous practices when I lived in the Top End thirty years ago. That Victor Steffenson is now available to teach us all the techniques he learned on Cape York is an opportunity that should not be missed, In fact I have been in discussions with the local Moombahlene Aboriginal Land council about them undertaking his training and practicing on my property, and subject to confirming it works, over time taking on the responsibility for the cool burns (they also have significant land holdings nearby so this makes very good sense).

### **Recovery activities**

Please don't sacrifice the environment in the recovery. Victoria has an amazing array of forest dependent species that need all the surviving habitat to be protected whilst they recover. Of course take care of the affected property owners and businesses, but not by accelerating logging of what remains, or clearing large areas along roadsides unnecessarily. This will create a barrier to some fauna movement, dry out the verges (where fires can often start from lit cigarettes and the like) and draw fauna to the roadsides creating an increased potential for vehicle - wildlife strikes. They can also be a vector for weeds and feral animal spread.