

Submission to

# **Inquiry into Bushfires in Australia**

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**The Secretary**

**Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries**

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## About the authors:

**This submission is prepared from the input of many farmers, business people and other residents from regional Victoria.**

**Michael McCormick** has a background in farming which led to forestry where he was employed as a Technical Officer and Research Officer in the former Forest Commission of Victoria, now the Department of Sustainability and Environment. He was in that department from 1970 to 2004 working throughout Victoria. He completed an Associate Diploma of Applied Science (Natural Resource Management), which included fire control, fire management and fire behaviour. He has attended many fires in a variety of positions as fire fighter, sector boss and air base manager, giving him hands on experience in fire management and fire control. He has also attended fires in NSW. He has participated in several fire effects studies on soils, hydrology, vegetation and invertebrates. In 2003 he was actively involved in the Alpine fires for several weeks. His association with community groups has given him further understanding as to their concerns about the organizations like the CFA and Land Care.

Currently, he operates his own business as a forest consultant and has been conducting surveys for the DSE on survival and regeneration of eucalypt species in high rainfall areas around the Melbourne water catchments.

**Patrick Byrne** is Vice President of the National Civic Council. He has worked with farmers and business people in rural and regional areas for many years. He has travelled through fire affected areas and documented some of the issues regarding bushfires in northern and eastern Victoria.

**The National Civic Council** is an independent, non-partisan research and lobby organisation. It has regional groups across Victoria, including in areas affected by the recent fires.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. A NEW MANDATE FOR FUEL REDUCTION AND FIRE MANAGEMENT**

Either the DSE must be given a clear legislative mandate for fuel management and fire fighting over its other roles, or if this is not possible, then a new department needs to be created solely to take on these responsibilities.

### **2. FUEL REDUCTION**

The highest priority of all relevant levels of state and local agencies must be to increase fuel reduction burning on all crown land at the rate of about 7% per year, with emphasis on areas near towns.

### **3. HIGHWAYS AND ROADS AS FIRE BREAKS**

- a) Reduction of roadside fuel loads are needed to transform roads and highways from "fire corridors" into "fire breaks". This could be achieved in several ways:
- Fuel reduction burning of roadside reserves on a two-year rotation.
  - Slashing of roadside reserves where possible annually.
  - The removal of dead vegetation from roadside reserves.

If vegetation is planted along roadside reserves, volatile eucalypts should be replaced by species that are slow to ignite and that have been shown to act as fire retardants by absorbing radiant heat and embers to slow and stop fires.

Cleared dead tress and branches should be made available for fire wood.

- b) Consideration should be given to the implementation of wild life corridors along natural drainage lines rather than the unnatural roadside reserves.

### **4. HUMAN INDUCED FIRE IGNITION:**

- a) The failure of mechanical structures like power lines must be reduced through the state enforcing proper maintenance programs.
- b) Direct human ignition by fire lighting could be greatly reduced if legislation was enacted to reduce the movement of suspected individuals on high and extreme fire danger days.

Confinement of these people to safe houses should be seriously considered.

## **5. FIRE COMMUNICATIONS**

- a) The fire communications systems must be upgraded so all fire prone areas have adequate two-way radio coverage.
- b) The state and federal governments must require that Telstra fire proof their junction boxes in fire prone areas to a level capable of resisting the maximum temperatures of a major bushfire.

## **6. FIRE WARNING SYSTEM**

- a) The State set up a comprehensive fire warning system using radio, mobile phone and most importantly a robust fire resistant landline phone system.
- b) The current fire siren system must be replaced with a new up to date system.

## **7. PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE**

- a) Local and state governments and their agencies must urgently review their planning rules to insist on a program for the clearing of fire breaks and the management of vegetation along vital country roads and around towns, villages, homes and other buildings and property.
- b) Priority should be given to properly constructed, fire safe community buildings to provide safe retreats for people living in high fire danger areas. These should include underground, fire safe bunkers.
- c) Regarding the use of aircraft, resources should be focused on using the more effective fixed wing aircraft for fire control, rather than the large, expensive helicopters.
- d) Consideration should be given to a new forward command system using G8 Air Vans equipped with state of the art fire photography reconnaissance and observation technology and a full communication system directed to supplying live time fire data to:
  - fire control centres; and
  - forward command vehicles (4x4 twin cab or their equivalent) equipped with full communication system and a crew of four people who between them: have good local knowledge; are experienced in fire fighting; are experienced in fire behaviour; and have an experienced driver.

- e) A much greater emphasis should be given to aggressively fighting to stop the spread of fires by using trained personnel with local knowledge. The failure to quickly set up control lines lets fires spread that could otherwise be contained.

## **8. PROTECTION OF PROPERTY**

All property owners should have the right to protect their properties against fire without the threat of prosecution by local and state governments.

## **9. PRESENT DISASTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The present disaster management system needs to be remodelled in order to be relevant to local conditions and less bureaucratic to make it actually function. The new system should embrace the resources that local governments can assemble at very short notice because they are more closely linked to the local people and have the best understanding of local conditions

## **10. EMERGENCY SUPPORT SYSTEM**

The present emergency support system needs modifying to be more attuned to local needs and conditions.

## **THE HISTORY BEHIND THE FAILURE OF THE FIRE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

In 1983, shortly after the Ash Wednesday fires, the Forest Commission and other government land management departments were amalgamated to form The Department of Conservation Forests and Lands, now known as the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). At this time most of the earlier fire systems were still in place, but today much of that expertise has been lost as experienced staff have left in large numbers.

Over the following years, there was confusion and conflict about the roles of the various divisions of the new department, resulting in restructure after restructure of divisions. This created ongoing staff instability. Experienced people retired or left. In the process, the culture of the department changed. Over the next 26 years, its fire prevention and fire fighting priorities suffered as the DSE became more aligned with the rapidly expanding department of National Parks and its conservation, and increasingly green, agenda.

A further major change occurred in 1993 with the privatisation of the Pine Plantation division of DSE, which was taken over by Hancock Victorian Plantations (HVP). Fire control of these plantations shifted from the DSE to become the joint responsibility of HVP and the CFA. The CFA had to develop new plantation fire fighting skills. Further, purpose built, heavy duty equipment for fuel load reduction, infrastructure maintenance and fire management was lost. A significant amount of equipment that went to HVP was sold off. New equipment did not have the same capacity to do the work to former standards. Splitting fire fighting roles between HVP, which this year contracted out some of their fire fighting, and CFA made fire management more difficult.

In recent times, Vic Forests, which is responsible for managing native timber resources for the timber industry, has been in the process of privatisation. This has removed further fire prevention and fire fighting skills from the DSE and added to the already fragmented fuel reduction and fire management decision making.

Responsibility for fighting fires is now split between the DSE, National Parks, CFA, HVP and Vic Forests. Consequently, the DSE capacity to control fuel loads on all crown land and to fight fires has been severely weakened. At the same time, the DSE has built a huge administrative bureaucracy that appears to be as big as the divisions directly responsible for

fighting fires. This has further unbalanced the department's activities.

This long history has seen the DSE's emphasis on controlling fuel loads and fighting fires downgraded and compromised by other objectives.

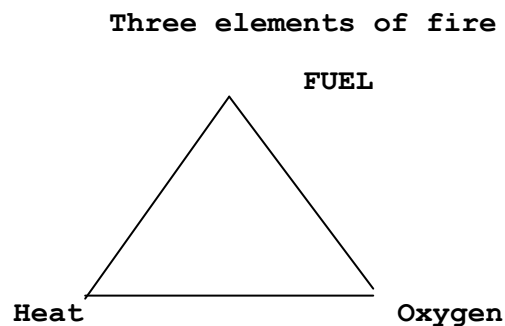
This appears to be a major reason for a loss of confidence in decision making by senior officers responsible for this important work. Senior officers appear to be no longer guaranteed the support of Departmental Secretary and the Minister when making vital decisions.

A similar change of culture appears to be affecting the CFA.

Consequently, we recommend either the DSE be given a clear legislative mandate for fuel management and fire fighting over its other roles, or if this is not possible, then a new department needs to be created solely to take on these responsibilities.

## **FUEL REDUCTION**

Three factors make a fire: fuel, heat and oxygen. The only factor that humans can control to stop a fire happening, or mitigate a fire before it starts, is fuel levels. Fuel reduction should be the highest priority of fire agencies in order to prevent fires and to mitigate fires when they do occur.



The heavy build up of fuel loads can effectively be reduced by fuel reduction burning of forests, grazing of livestock, and the removal of vegetation along roadways, around towns and homes. By the removal of fuel loads, the ferocity, the heat intensity of a fire is reduced.

**Photo 1**



**This photo is looking westwards from the Goonan property towards the ranges between Mudgegonga and Mt Stanley. The area to the right (north) had been fuel reduced about two years ago. The region to the left (south) had not been fuel reduced in recent times. The fire came from the west and went around the fuel area. (CFA Map 298 Region 23 Ref 845 655).**

**Photo 2 .**





**This photo is looking to the eastern rim of the Murrumbidgee Basin. The green, darker areas had been fuel reduced Autumn 2008. Consequently, the recent fires burnt lightly through these areas, while the brown areas that were not fuel reduced burned with much greater intensity. (CFA Map 298 Region 23 Ref 750 650).**

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These photos indicates the effectiveness of fuel reduction burning in protecting farm properties

Mick McCormick also examined the Stanley-Barwidgee Creek Road area (CFA Map 298 Region 23 Ref 786 648). In the national park areas below the road, where there had been no fuel reduction for many years, the fire was of extreme intensity. However above road is a Reserve Forest that had been fuel reduced in recent years. Here the forest was only lightly burned.

## **HIGHWAYS AND ROADS AS FIRE BREAKS**

During bushfires, heavily tree lined roads, highways, country roads and farm access roads become fire corridors and are so dangerous that fire fighters are prevented from traveling down such roads when a fire is imminent. There are many examples of where fire fighters have traveled such dangerous roads to fight a fire, only to then

find themselves isolated as the fire sweeps along such corridors behind them.

**Photo 3**



**Going north, Hume Highway, Victoria. Much of the Hume Highway in Victorian is tree lined, as shown in this photo. Note that both the roadside reserve, to the left, and the median strip, to the right, are heavily wooded. The reserve on the south-bound lane (not shown) is also heavily tree lined. This makes the highway a “fire corridor”, whereas it should be a “fire break”.**

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In the recent Victorian bushfires near Kilmore north of Melbourne, the fire approached the main north-south Hume Highway through farm land and forests to the west of the highway. Then, because the highway was heavily wooded on both sides and down the median strip, it easily burned across the highway then burned north and south along the wooded eastern side of the highway. Instead of the highway being a useful fire break, its tree lined perimeter helped widen the fire front. It should be noted that VicRoads (the Victorian government roads department) reduced the contract for roadside slashing prior to the 2008-09 fire season to a limit of six meters of roadside reserve.

Therefore, if roadside fuel loads are reduced fire intensity will also be reduced, helping to transform highways and roads from “fire corridors” into “fire breaks”. This could be achieved in several ways:

1. Fuel reduction burning of roadside reserves on a two-year rotation.
2. Slashing of roadside reserves where possible annually.
3. The removal of dead vegetation from roadside reserves.

Cleared dead tress and branches should be made available for fire wood.

If vegetation is planted along roadside reserves, volatile eucalypts should be replaced by species that are slow to ignite and that have been shown to act as fire retardants by absorbing radiant heat and embers to slow and stop fires.

**Photo 4**



**Two views of a burned, tree lined farm access road near Mudgegonga. Had fire fighters come down this road to protect the local farmhouse, they would have been trapped as the fire cut off this access road. In the photo (right) one the of the authors of this report, Mick McCormick, stands next to large, burned trees that were cleared away from the road in the week after the Black Saturday bushfires.**

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Consideration should be given to the implementation of wild life corridors along natural drainage lines rather than the unnatural roadside reserves.

The benefits of wild life corridors along natural drainage lines would include:

- Fewer animals would suffer from roadside injuries and death.
- The number of human injuries and deaths from collisions with wild life would be reduced.

This would be a net gain for wildlife, the environment and humans.

If properly established, wild life corridors along natural drainage lines would greatly improved water quality as these type of corridors would act as filter strips also reducing soil erosion.

In normal seasonal conditions these drainage lines would generally retain more moisture than the surrounding farm land and would act as natural control lines.

## **HUMAN INDUCED FIRE IGNITION**

Ignition of bushfires from mechanical structures - such as power lines that fall and spark into bush - can be reduced with regular and dedicated maintenance.

The Royal Commission should document all the cases over the past 15 years where of the electricity infrastructures has failed and ignited fires. These events have been occurring regularly over a long time, with preventive maintenance a low priority. No wonder there have been electricity infrastructure failures when extreme events occur.

The direct lighting of fires by human fire-bugs on days of high-to-extreme fire danger needs the serious consideration. People identified as suspects for lighting fires should have their movements monitored on such days, as happens in other states with high fire risks, or be held in confinement on such days. New legislation may be needed to enact such procedures to protect lives and property.

## **FIRE COMMUNICATIONS**

On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 the only organisation that was up to speed with the location and progress of the devastating bushfires was the Victorian Police Force. They must be commended for their efforts. The police had two huge advantages:

- local knowledge of the landscape; and
- their two-way radio communications system allowed them to communicate the most accurate information on the fires.

In contrast, both the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Country Fire Authority (CFA) were equipped with only limited capacity two-way radio communication equipment. Both this system and the CFA pager system failed on Black Saturday.

How could the CFA and DSE, the two departments responsible for fire management under Victorian legislation, function effectively without an adequate communications system?

On a day of such severe fire danger, how could the delegated Officers (including the Chief Fire Officer) in the State

Control Rooms understand and interpret the nature of the fires across the state without an effective reporting system?

The existing communications system went into overload causing a breakdown in the fire management system.

Even if they had an effective communications system, did they have enough local knowledge to be able to interpret information coming from the fire areas?

Further, it was clear to experienced observers that there was a rapidly approaching disaster that could not be managed in the usual way by the CFA and DSE. Their ability to handle the Beechworth fire was questionable, even on the night of February 7, 2009. Responsibility for this fire should have been delegated to other authorities.

## **FIRE WARNING SYSTEM**

The general public were kept informed by ABC radio updates. ABC radio relayed to the public the best information at their disposal.

Mobile phones were effective in some areas, but in many fire areas mobile phone reception was poor and in others there was no reception. Mobile phone towers are vulnerable to fires.

The landline phone system can be the most reliable communications system. Even if power lines are burned down and the power system fails, underground phone lines can still work as they operate on their own power. However, as Photo 3 shows, land lines all across rural and regional Victoria are vulnerable because Telstra junction boxes are above ground, in heavy fuel areas and are made of plastic. They melt in a fire causing the landline telephone systems to fail. Telstra junction boxes should be fire proofed and placed underground, as happens in cities.

### **Photo 5**



**Telstra junction boxes in the roadside reserve on the Myrtleford-Yackandandah Road, between Barwidgee Creek and the Mudgegonga area. When this photo was taken, these boxes had just been replaced after the fire. The photo indicates the closeness of these plastic boxes to the heavy fuel loaded creek area that had been reduced to cinders by the fire. They stand ready waiting to melt again as soon as the next fire approaches, cutting land communications through the area once again. (CFA Map 298 Region 23 Ref 810 607).**

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CFA communications in the Kancoona area of the same fire were extremely poor, with several CFA members having to operate a relay system - from one member, to another, and another - to communicate important messages into this valley, because of the failure of the communications systems on which they were relying.

In town areas such as Myrtleford, there is no fire siren or alarm to notify the public of approaching fire danger. A siren should have been used to alert local people of the impending danger that was approaching the north and west of the town.

## **LOCAL KNOWLEDGE**

It is absolutely vital that fire authorities, councils and state government departments come to respect the valuable knowledge of local people. It is their understanding of their

local areas that should be used for reducing fuel loads and clearing areas to create buffer zones needed to protect homes, businesses, properties and access roads. They are the ones that also know the age, particular health needs of other people in the area, local road condition, water reserves, topography, land status (cleared or forested), communication failure points and other natural resources vital to preventing, mitigating and fighting fires.

## **PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE**

This is the most important part of managing a fire after it has started.

State and local governments have an obligation to provide roads of a standard suitable for the public to safely escape a serious a fire. In all cases there should be more than one exit from and town or area.

Safe areas must be established where people can take refuge and be protected from fires. House hold bunkers, dugouts and old mines could be used, but they must be maintained to be effective.

A procedure needs to be established whereby mandatory evacuation is implemented when the fire index exceeds a certain level. Such procedures should be planned for each town/area according to local environmental conditions. Once determined, it must be made clear to local residents that evacuation will be mandatory on days when fire behaviour is expected to be extreme and erratic.

Fire authorities and the state government have placed unrealistic expectations on the ability of aircraft and fire trucks to control fires on days of extreme fire danger. This is misguided and is giving the public a false sense of security.

Aircraft are ineffective in extreme fire conditions. In such conditions, they have limited visibility and operational capability in high winds and high temperature. They also have very limited carrying capacity to attack extreme fires. Under less extreme conditions, fixed wing air tractors are probably the most efficient as they are able to carry both retardant for forest fires or foam for grass fire. Fixed wing aircraft are both fast and are backed by airport maintenance and support services.

The large helicopters are just water bombers using limited amounts of water while consuming huge amounts of fuel.

Ground attack by fire fighters is the most important and sustainable means of fighting fires. However, it must assume a more aggressive roll. Since the year 2000 fires have burned very large areas of land causing maximum environmental damage to our soils and catchments. There has been a widespread failure to attack fires early so as to stop their spread. For example, several hours elapsed before fire crews were sent in to establish control lines for the North East fire edge at Mudgegonga during the recent fires. A more aggressive ground fire fighting role is needed to contain these fires.

Night time fire fighting must be reconsidered, especially when using fire fighters who are not familiar with the local terrain. Using fire fighters who are not locals and who are not led by locals means that they are frequently ineffective in fighting fires. Further, their lack of knowledge of the local terrain can put them at serious risk. Local knowledge in fighting fires on the ground is vitally important.

A retrograde step in fire fighting of recent years has been the attempt to fight fires that are too dangerous to attack. This exacerbates the risk to fire fighters who are from outside the area and lack local knowledge.

Fire trucks are unable to attack fire in extreme conditions like Black Saturday and puts fire fighters in direct and serious danger.

## **PROTECTION OF PROPERTY**

The refusal of state and local government authorities to allow local property owners/tenants to remove vegetation that could impact their safety is putting many lives and property at risk. People should be allowed to take appropriate measures to reduce the fuel load around their property without the threat of prosecution by government authorities.

Indeed, there should be strong enforcement measures to ensure the removal of vegetation, old buildings and rubbish that may reduce fire suppression on all private property and crown land. Cleared buffer zones of between 500 m to 1 km are particularly needed between towns and forests.

## **PRESENT DISASTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

This system appears to lack the necessary vision needed to control major wild fires, and to suffer from a breakdown of the fire control command system. Delays in responding to a



fire crisis appears to be directly related to the number of officers transmitting information up the chain of command and then back down to the front line. This combined with the seriously inadequate radio communications systems, patchy mobile phone reception, the breakdown of land line telephones because of above ground plastic Telstra phone junction boxes, and working communications systems that became overloaded - all seriously contributed to the fire management system becoming dysfunctional in this catastrophic major fire.

The incident management system failed on Black Saturday because communications failed across Victoria.

### **EMERGENCY SUPPORT SYSTEM**

This emergency support system did not appear to function smoothly because there were so many organisations involved. Some lacked any knowledge of local areas due to the fact they operate out of larger regional centres like Wangaratta. This resulted in local charities being left to pick up the pieces, for example in Myrtleford.

### **INFORMATION WITHOUT OWNERSHIP**

It is most concerning that, as Appendix 1 shows, some fire recovery information from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) was published without a contact person or authorisation.

### **POLITICAL IMPEDIMENTS**

The severity of the fires would have been mitigated and Victoria would not have suffered the unprecedented loss of life if major fuel reduction burning and clearing of fire buffer zones around towns, villages and homes had been done in the years leading up to Black Saturday.

Of concern is the political resistance to this happening by what is broadly termed, the green lobby. In so far as they are represented by the Greens Party, the policy of this party typifies the resistance of the green lobby to fuel reduction in these fire prone areas.

The Greens Party policy is that it does "NOT oppose controlled back-burning". (See <http://jimreiher.com/index.php?q=node/28> ).

To start with, even their terminology demonstrates ignorance of fires. Back burning is when a firebreak is created to stop

an advancing bushfire. Fuel reduction is when a region has fuel loads reduced by a controlled burn when the weather is cool and the air is still. Back burning can be far more destructive because it is carried out in extreme fire weather producing an intense and destructive fire, while fuel reduction burns are slow, much less intense fires in cooler weather.

The Greens Party submission to the 2003 Victorian bushfire inquiry says:

"An effective strategic fuel-reduction burning strategy is required on scientific fire ecology behaviour information. It is critical that any revised approach to fuel-reduction burning is scientifically based, drawing on the expertise and *further research* of fire ecologists and fire behaviour scientists." (our emphasis)

The question needs to be raised, how much "further research" is needed? Descendants of the first white settlers have had over two centuries of experience with bush fires, while Australia's indigenous people have 60,000 years experience of using fire for reducing fuel loads in forests. Captain Cook, as he sailed up the east coast of the continent in 1770, documented the mosaic burning patterns of the original Australians.

But the Greens will only support fuel-reduction after "further" critical research.

In other words, no amount of science will see them support major fuel-reduction burning. They would rather bamboozle with endless scientific studies the policy advisors, the state departments responsible for fires, local councils and federal and state politicians.

They insist on more and more studies, on inquiry after inquiry, one committee review after review, and prefer to cite studies that are ambiguous in their findings or that show animals might die in controlled burns; and they go on doing this repeatedly to ensure that science does not lead to action but to inaction.

This appears to be a stalling tactic, similar to that used by the tobacco companies for decades to stop anti-smoking campaigns by governments. The tobacco companies argued that more and more studies were needed before there was enough evidence to warrant action to protect the health of the population from the yet-to-be-proved harmful effects of tobacco smoking.

It's time to expose such tactics and scale up regional fuel reduction burns.

## **Conclusion**

A number of factors have come together over a long period to create the circumstances that allowed the extreme weather conditions of Black Saturday to destroy many lives and a considerable number of homes and property.

Continual departmental changes, the splitting of fire responsibilities between public and private institutions and confusion with priorities because of a greater emphasis on a more "green agenda" have led to an overall loss of fire prevention and fire fighting capacities.

The individual recommendations of this submission will only help to improve the safety of people, homes and property in fire prone areas if there is a change in the culture of fire prevention and control, if the fragmentation of responsibilities is overcome and if clear lines of management and responsibility are set in place.

## Appendix 1



### What assistance will government provide for damage to fences from bushfires or fire suppression activity?

Contact the **Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL)** on 1800 240 667 for advice and access to any of the help and services detailed below.

#### Damage to fences caused by fire suppression agencies

Government will repair or pay 100% restoration costs of fences destroyed or damaged on private land as a result of machinery used in the control of bushfires by fire suppression agencies (this includes damage to fences to enable access by emergency vehicles). Government will also repair or replace crown land boundary fences burnt by the fire agencies undertaking backburning during a bushfire emergency.

The fire agency will pay for repair to or replacement of fences upon agreement with the landholder before works begin (excludes emergency repair to contain stock in which case the fire agency may inspect the repairs after the emergency works).

Damage caused by individuals or corporations to their own or other's property as part of their own fire suppression activities (for example construction of their own fire control lines) will not be paid for by the fire agency.

Call the (VBIL) on 1800 240 667 or visit these websites:

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)  
[www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)  
[www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)

#### Other damage caused by the creation of fire control lines

Government will fully fund the repair of fire control lines created as part of bushfire suppression activities, regardless of the origin of the bushfire. This includes the re-establishment of top soil and undertaking of erosion control measures so that the landholder can replant pasture or trees. Government will also provide pasture seed for the re-sowing of pasture by the landholder where the control line was established.

Call the (VBIL) on 1800 240 667 or visit these websites:

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)  
[www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)  
[www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)

#### Damage to private fences by bushfire

Primary producers – whose income from farming accounts for greater than 51% of their total income – are eligible to seek assistance in the form of grants and/or concessional loans including the Commonwealth and State Government's Cleanup and Restoration Grants, which can be used to assist with restoration of fences destroyed or damaged as a result of bushfire.

All landholders are expected to have insurance cover for boundary and internal fences, in the same way any business venture or private householder should protect and insure their assets.

Call Rural Finance on 1800 255 925 or visit [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au)

The Victorian Government has provided direct financial support to the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) to employ coordinators in each of the fire affected areas and to support the volunteers who are helping rural landholders in restoring boundary fencing.

#### Damage to fences adjoining Crown land by bushfire

The Government will reimburse insurance excess to a maximum of four hundred dollars (\$400) for all insured Crown land boundary fences destroyed or damaged by bushfires regardless of where that fire originates. If you have a 'no excess' policy you will also be eligible for reimbursement.

Call the VBIL on 1800 240 667 or visit [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)

#### How do I volunteer to help or donate materials?

The VFF is registering details of volunteers willing to help with fencing activities and donations of fencing materials. To register call the VBIL on 1800 240 667 or VFF on 1300 882 833 or go to [www.vff.org.au](http://www.vff.org.au)

