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Submission No.214

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

By Email: Bushfires.Reps@aph.gov.au

9 May 2003

Dear Committee Members

Submission to the Select Committee Inquiry into the Recent Australian Bushfires

Environment Victoria is passionate about the need to protect our urban, rural and natural environments. We advocate for the protection of intact natural ecosystems, threatened species habitat and other high conservation value forests, and promote responsible, ecosystem-based and regionally appropriate forest management practice.

EV staff, members and affiliate organisations recognise that the primary purpose of national parks is the conservation of biodiversity, and genuinely appreciate the contribution national parks make to the conservation reserve system. We therefore reject the simplistic suggestion recently made by some members of the logging industry and the Federal Government that logging in national parks would help prevent bushfires. Comments of this nature have unfortunately created the perception in some circles that the Senate Inquiry is being established as a mechanism for the Federal Government to criticize forest management policy with a view to revising the conservation status of reserved areas.

On the other hand, EV does consider that many improvements must be made for forest management in Victoria to be ecologically, socially or economically sustainable. The Department of Sustainability and Environment¹ currently fails drastically in its task to manage state forests for the benefit of the Victorian community. Some of the deficiencies are related to pre-bushfire planning and post-bushfire forest management, and include fire prevention, fire-fighting, salvage logging and the use of clearfelling as the predominant industrial logging regime.

¹ Victorian Department responsible for forest management planning

Accordingly, EV believes the proposed terms of reference should be expanded to include the following:

*The Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires seeks to identify measures that can be implemented by governments, industry and the community to minimise the incidence of, and impact of bushfires on, life, property and the environment with specific regard to the following:*²

- (k) the adequacy of the existing fire-fighting and human resource allocation policy to ensure protection of threatened species and communities endangered by wildfire.
- (l) adequacy of existing fire management practices for protecting threatened flora and fauna species and communities from bushfire;
- (m) the ecological impacts of post-fire state forest management regimes (including salvage logging) on threatened species and communities, soils, water yield, quality and aquatic life;
- (m) the legality of salvage logging practices in state forests in respect to sustainable yields;
- (o) the impacts of silvicultural regimes (eg clear-felling) on fire frequency and severity on forested land and in plantations;
- (p) the adequacy of existing fire-fighting policy to ensure the equitable allocation of human resources to assist regional communities defending their properties;

The Select Committee has an opportunity through its Inquiry to instigate positive and constructive change to state forest management practices and to help governments, industry and communities better prepare for fire seasons in the future. Environment Victoria urges the Federal Government to incorporate the above suggestions in the proposed terms of reference, and looks forward to the commencement of the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



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Submission authorised by:

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