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### **SUBMISSION: Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events**

We believe the public is becoming increasingly despairing of the government's lack of action on climate impacts, preferring to pander to the major corporates which benefit from continuing to profit from ... that increase climate chaos. 'Climate change' is not an appropriate term for what is happening.

The latest science is showing that the impacts of global climate heating are **happening faster than expected and with more intensity.**

We are pleased to see some attempt by the Commonwealth to take this issue seriously but it also needs to focus as much on mitigation of the causes, as adaptation.

**Reducing emissions is critical.**

**Protection of the natural carbon sinks is critical.**

EEG wishes to comment specifically on the follow points within the terms of reference.

#### **Recent trends on the frequency of extreme weather events**

Living in one of the most fire prone areas in the world, we are intensely aware of the threat that each summer brings.

To date it appears that every three years there is a serious wildfire in Gippsland.

From observations, we have noticed that fires are acting in ways that are unpredictable.

Agencies are relatively helpless to control fires now and act more as a show of doing something, than being able to stop or slow down these fires.

It is worth noting that forest fires are most intense when burning through altered forests such as those that have been logged, mined, grazed and otherwise manipulated. Dr Chris Taylor detailed these observations in the report

<http://vnpa.org.au/admin/library/attachments/PDFs/Reports/2009fires/Fire%20Report%20Lo%20Res%20140909%20lo.pdf>



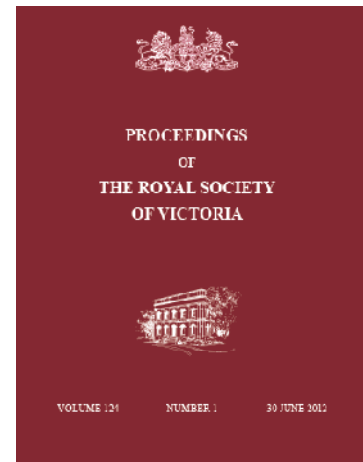
Forests that are opened up and dried out while being converted into dense single aged tree farms for industrial exploitation are a tinder box.

Acknowledging the increased frequency and intensity of fires and floods is a start. To stop all clearfelling of existing natural mature and old growth forests must be considered as a response to these new patterns. It will be considered politically extreme by a small sector, but what is at stake is vastly more important for fire suppression.<sup>1</sup>

### Impacts on natural ecosystems

The following points summarise our concerns regarding both government prescribed burns and bushfires.

- loss of hollow bearing trees, from fires, containment lines, prescribed burns (contentious as to whether it 'reduced fuel') and so called fire breaks along ridge tops. Just about every ridge top from the Dandenongs to Bairnsdale was scraped clear of these large old trees during the '06 and '09 fires.
- loss of soil humus layer. This layer is the bottom of the food chain in forests and woodlands. It provides the necessary habitat for hundreds of micro-organisms including fungi, which is the forests' composting mechanism for leaf litter. It is essential for forest soil nutrient recycling. It also converts the leaf litter into soil humus, keeping the soil damp. This was discussed in



<sup>1</sup> **Effects of logging on fire regimes in moist forests**

David B. Lindenmayer<sup>1</sup>, Malcolm L. Hunter<sup>2</sup>, Philip J. Burton<sup>3</sup>, & Philip Gibbons<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Department of Wildlife Ecology, University of Maine, Orono, ME, USA

<sup>3</sup>Canadian Forest Service and University of Northern British Columbia, 3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, V2N 4Z9, Canada

great detail at The Royal Society in Victoria June 2012.<sup>2</sup>

- regional extinctions of species as fires envelope larger areas more frequently.
- Overuse of prescribed burns are also seriously threatening already rare species in a careless management regime that is politically, not scientifically based. The Mallee Fowl and the smaller ground dwelling mammals – already susceptible to predation by feral animals are more vulnerable after ‘cool’ burns, even if they survive.<sup>3</sup>
- Clearfelled logged forests are more flammable and helping to create the infernos we have seen. Unlogged forest is less flammable with moist microclimates in the enclosed understorey. Tara Bulga National Park in Sth Gippsland did not burn when the fire hit its edges due to its intact species and age diverse nature that prevented the wind and flames from damaging the area.<sup>4</sup> Regeneration with one age class and normally one or two tree species only with no attempt to help understorey return is creating plantations over public forests. Plantations are extremely flammable. These forests are being clearfelled right up to private land in settlements and towns.
- Landscape transformation – forests are replaced by scrub after multiple fires which we are starting to witness in Victoria. The latest fires have burnt over the top of the 2003 and 2007 bushfire impacted areas. This severely alters the ecosystem in the long term, encouraging drier flammable vegetation and creating a fire-feedback loop.
- The threat from extreme weather events is now more threatening to wildlife – rare or not.
- In light of climate impacts it is essential there be a review of threat assessment criteria to evaluate current threats to ecological communities and species.
- Must be more funding for this biological work. Government agencies are operating blindly – and probably deliberately. There is an ecological crisis that is so great it requires vast resources, funding and good will from governments.
- Establish national fauna /biodiversity survey teams in each state, funded by the Commonwealth and working in conjunction with state agencies.
- Results from monitoring/surveys must be used to quickly draw up action plans for preventing extinctions and further ecosystem degradation.
- EPBC needs to investigate the severe ecological impacts that state burning regimes are having. These are not based on science but used as a means to placate the public and provide a false sense of security. They have not moderated fires except in the lower rated fires that are normally more easily contained anyway.
- A first step to taking the impact of the environment seriously would be to provide funding to document unpublished baseline data by contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> [http://vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/biodiversity/fire-and-biodiversity-\\_-notes-from-the-symposium](http://vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/biodiversity/fire-and-biodiversity-_-notes-from-the-symposium)

<sup>3</sup> Habitat or fuel? Implications of long-term, post-fire dynamics for the development of key resources for fauna and fire

Angie Haslem<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Luke T. Kelly<sup>2</sup>, Dale G. Nimmo<sup>2</sup>, Simon J. Watson<sup>2</sup>, Sally A. Kenny<sup>3</sup>, Rick S. Taylor<sup>1</sup>, Sarah C. Avitabile<sup>1</sup>, Kate E. Callister<sup>1</sup>, Lisa M. Spence-Bailey<sup>1</sup>, Michael F. Clarke<sup>1</sup> and Andrew F. Bennett<sup>2</sup>

<sup>4</sup>

<http://vnpa.org.au/admin/library/attachments/PDFs/Reports/2009fires/Fire%20Report%20Lo%20Res%20140909%20lo.pdf>

biologists/ecologists on ecosystems over the last two decades. Tapping into the vast unpublished experiences of biologists over the 70s 80s and early 90s would be a major first step in protecting what was, in this age of climate extremes.

### **The preparedness and the adequacy of emergency services sector to prevent and respond to extreme weather events**

The agencies in charge of 'preventing' and responding to extreme weather events are underfunded and using those funds in the most counterproductive ways. One example from the recent Victorian Aberfeldy fires shows that the \$250 million fire breaks pushed through (illegal under the EPBC Act) actually caused those fires to flume along the breaks 20 times faster than they had been travelling. The state government was warned of this wind tunnel effect at the time and chose to ignore it. The fire was travelling at 400mts an hour, hit the break on the top of the Aberfeldy range and travelled 3km in 20 minutes along the break.

The boys club mentality must be reined in and managers with understanding of fire behaviour replace old foresters. The politics of fire must not override public safety. The ecology must not pay the price of maintaining an empire based on politically motivated fire management.



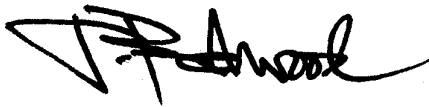
The logging slash piled along a fire break. It aids the wind tunnelling effect.



The Aberfeldy range where the fire raced along the firebreak with extreme heat intensity and speed. This fire was burning in burnt forest from the 2007 fires.

This submission only touches on the tip of the iceberg. There has never been a more critical time in history to act on these points than right now. We are already 30 years behind on this essential work.

Sincerely



Jill Redwood  
Coordinator